



HM GOVERNMENT OF GIBRALTAR
PRESS OFFICE
No.6 Convent Place
Gibraltar
Tel:20070071; Fax: 20043057

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Opposition's Viewpoint tantrum is scandalous

The latest statement issued by the Opposition regarding Thursday night's Viewpoint programme shows that once again they do not know what they are talking about.

Under current rules, GBC is bound to implement the Gibraltar Regulatory Authority's Code on due accuracy, due impartiality and due prominence when assembling a panel for debate that includes political representation. It is incredible that the GSD should behave as if they were not aware of this when the GRA invited comments on that same Code from all political parties which closed earlier this month. The Code says that when assembling a panel for a debate involving politicians, there are two ways in which GBC can proceed. The first type of debate is between the elected Government and the elected Opposition. In such a discussion, if the Opposition is represented by one elected member, the Government must be represented by one elected member or by one official. The port of call for GBC in seeking Government participation in such a debate is the press office of the Government.

The second type of debate is between political parties. In such cases, all political parties who have contested an election in Gibraltar are entitled to send a representative if they so wish. This means that the GSLP, the Liberal Party and the GSD would each be entitled to send a non-elected representative to such a debate. The reason for this is because non-elected representatives can speak for the parties in question but not for the Government. In other words, a non-elected member cannot speak for the Government.

The differences between the two types of debate are therefore clear.

Once GBC had invited Marlene Nahon to appear on Viewpoint, the Code would not permit the Government to put forward a Minister on the same discussion programme. The Code would then dictate that representatives of the political parties in Government ought to be invited first. This happens in the UK in programmes like Question-Time where Conservatives and Liberal Democrats are often invited on the same panel even though they are both in Government together.

The same would have been true if GBC had invited the Opposition to put forward one of their Shadow Ministers, in which case the Government parties would not have been permitted to put forward non-elected party members.

Therefore the issue surrounding Thursday's Viewpoint is that the Leader of the Opposition wanted GBC to break the rules in order to accommodate his party. This kind of underhand behaviour is totally unacceptable given that Mr Feetham is perfectly aware of what those rules are. Mr Feetham once again has shown scant regard for the processes and procedures which are in place.

Mr Feetham's outrage is even more scandalous given that the Gibraltar Regulatory Authority was created by the GSD when they were in Government and the Regulator was appointed by them.

For sixteen years while the GSD was in office, they constantly interfered in the composition of panels in political debates of this kind. There were many occasions when politicians who were invited to a debate then had that invitation withdrawn following objections from the then Government or the then Chief Minister. The reason why this Code was drawn up was presumably to put an end to the political interference that had existed in the past when the GSD was in Government.

The reality is that Mr Feetham has had yet another tantrum as a result of ignorance of the rules or, even worse, he has chosen to pretend he does not know them in order to cause political mischief and hide his own shortcomings. This is outrageous.