



HM GOVERNMENT OF GIBRALTAR

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Garcia tells EPC in Brussels that Spain cannot hold Europe to ransom

In an address to the European Policy Centre (EPC) in Brussels this evening the Deputy Chief Minister Dr Joseph Garcia has declared that Spain cannot be allowed to hold the whole of Europe to ransom in pursuit of her narrow political interests over Gibraltar.

He argued that it does not make any sense that EU nationals travelling through Gibraltar Airport should have less rights than their counterparts travelling through other airports of the European Union.

Dr Garcia added: "The Spanish position therefore seeks to create a regime which is discriminatory in nature, which would deprive Europeans from their legitimate rights in Gibraltar and which purports to disapply the law of the Union from a territory where EU law on civil aviation should apply automatically." He accused Spain of dishonouring the agreement entered into in 2006 not to seek the exclusion of Gibraltar Airport from EU civil aviation measures.

He went on to describe the campaign of hostility the present Spanish Government has embarked upon against Gibraltar by land, air and sea.

The Deputy Chief Minister was speaking on the subject of "Gibraltar and the EU - Challenges and Perspectives". He stressed the point that many of the issues which now affect Gibraltar in Europe materialised only after Spain joined in 1986 and maintained that Spain was using the EU as a means to advance their claim to Gibraltar through the back door.

Dr Garcia traced the historical position of Gibraltar in Europe and explained the constitutional relationship between Gibraltar, the United Kingdom and the European Union. He made the point that this was a relationship which in many respects was truly unique.

On the border delays, he accused Spain of seeking to create a new Berlin Wall in a Southern Region of Europe. "There is no argument that Spain is entitled to conduct light

immigration and customs checks at the border," he said, "it is the intensive and deliberately disproportionate manner in which the checks are carried out that is the problem." Dr Garcia went on to say that it was up to the European Commission, as the guardian of the Treaties, to protect the right to freedom of movement of EU nationals through an EU border.

The Deputy Chief Minister expressed the view that a UK exit from the EU would make matters worse for Gibraltar. It would also have the potential to create a political and constitutional issue for the Gibraltar-UK-EU relationship if the UK opted to leave and Gibraltar opted to stay. This was all hypothetical at present.

Dr Garcia concluded that there were hundreds of millions of people in Europe and 30,000 Europeans in Gibraltar "the legal rights of a small country cannot be any less important because of our small size. The Government and people of Gibraltar would certainly welcome any support in securing those rights for the future."