



Deputy Chief Minister

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Government files new border complaint with European Commission

A full report on the state of the land frontier during the month of July has now been sent by the Government to the European Commission.

The report, which runs to nearly 70 pages, has been compiled by the Office of the Deputy Chief Minister, which has been responsible for preparing and forwarding this information to Brussels.

In a covering letter addressed to the Commissioner for Migration and Border Management Dimitris Avramopoulos, the Deputy Chief Minister Dr Joseph Garcia has outlined the serious difficulties that have faced persons crossing the border, particularly since the Spanish authorities started to operate the Automated Border Control system for pedestrians. Dr Garcia makes the point that these e-gates are supposed to reduce the processing time for travellers and instead they have had the very opposite effect and led to increased waiting times. He was also critical of the manner in which the automated system was introduced, without warning and without a public information campaign in order to assist those persons who would have to use it.

The Government understands that the e-gates are no longer being used during peak times. On some of the days in question, like Thursday 23 July when the gates started operating, over 11,000 persons crossed on foot into Gibraltar from Spain, about half of whom did so between 7.00am and 11.00am.

The report includes nearly 30 photographs of the delays to pedestrians to exit Spain in the period 23-31 July as well as photographs of the pedestrian delays to enter Spain in the same period. There are also pictures of the long queues of commercial vehicles that also occurred at that time.

Commenting on the matter, the Deputy Chief Minister Dr Joseph Garcia said:

“When I met the Commissioner in April this year I expressed concern at the manner in which Spain was implementing the recommendations made by the Commission, which seemed to be designed to cause as much disruption as possible to those crossing the border in either direction. This was evident throughout the duration of the infrastructure works at the border and has now been exposed further by the fiasco surrounding the introduction of the e-gates reflected in the

subsequent chaos at the border. It is also important to recall that the Commission's original recommendations were first made in November 2013, with a six months deadline.

It will have escaped nobody that this disruption has once again coincided with the height of the tourist season in July and August.

Gibraltar is a part of the European Union, and the frontier between Gibraltar and Spain is an internal border of the European Union. We generate employment for thousands of EU citizens of many different nationalities who have the right to free movement across an internal border. That same right applies to residents on both sides of the frontier and to people coming here on business or for tourism related activities. Spain has been obstructing free movement ever since they had to open the frontier in order to join Europe decades ago."