



PRESS RELEASE

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Chief Minister Addresses Brussels Think Tank

Immediately after his arrival in Brussels on Wednesday morning, the Chief Minister addressed a think tank comprising politicians, EU officials, lawyers, journalists and representatives of major European institutions. In his address, Mr Picardo looked back over Gibraltar's changing relationship with, first, the EEC and later the EU. He also described the way in which Gibraltarians began to feel 'part of the Brussels family' when the European Commission began to show its support for Gibraltar over the issue of the frontier queues.

He later went on to describe the strength of support on the Rock for the 'Remain' campaign. 'Whilst we are still passionate Europeans, we will respect the outcome of the Referendum,' he said. 'However, our relationship with Britain goes back over 300 years whilst our relationship with the EU goes back just 40.'

Following the Chief Minister's address, James Nicholson MEP described how the Brexit decision would affect his constituents in Northern Ireland. Mr Nicholson stressed that, following Brexit, Northern Ireland's border with the Republic of Ireland would be a border between UK and Europe in exactly the same way that Gibraltar's frontier would be a border between Britain and Europe. The two speakers then answered a range of probing questions from the audience.

Mr Picardo spent the afternoon in one-to-one meetings with senior officials and with representatives of various EU countries. One of these meetings was with Werner Langen, an influential German MEP and another meeting was with Guy Verhofstadt MEP who is the European Parliament's Brexit negotiator and who was the Belgian Prime Minister for three terms.

'Around Brussels I have found a great deal of interest in Gibraltar's post-Brexit position,' said Mr Picardo. 'People seem to be aware of our position, more so perhaps than of Britain's other Crown Territories and Overseas Territories. The needs of Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales also need to be factored in so the Brexit negotiators must approach the problem with an open mind. They must be prepared to consider new solutions and not just be hidebound by old ideas. I think that Gibraltar's issues are very well understood in London so we need have no worries on that score.'

On Thursday, the Chief Minister will take part in a major conference entitled, 'The State of Europe: Disruption, Disorder and Division - Crunch time for Europe.'