



Deputy Chief Minister

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Self-Determination is Paramount Garcia tells Liberal Democrats

The Deputy Chief Minister Dr Joseph Garcia has told a packed reception during the Liberal Democrat conference in Bournemouth that the future of Gibraltar can only be freely and democratically decided by the people of Gibraltar in exercise of their right to self-determination. Brexit would not be a pretext for a sovereignty deal through the back door, he declared.

He told delegates that in 1967, fifty years ago, the people of Gibraltar had voted overwhelmingly to remain British, and in 2016 they had voted overwhelmingly to remain in the European Union. "There is no conflict between being British and being European," he said.

Dr Garcia was addressing Members of the House of Commons, the House of Lords, councillors and politicians in the traditional Gibraltar Government reception. In response, the Deputy Leader of the Liberal Democrats Jo Swinson MP noted the presence of MPs, Peers and delegates from all over the country and pledged her party's continuing support for Gibraltar going forward.

Earlier, Dr Garcia and Minister Linares had received the same assurances from the Leader of the party Sir Vince Cable MP and from other senior members both in the House of Commons and in the House of Lords in a series of face to face meetings. This included meetings with Brexit Spokesman Tom Brake MP, Home Affairs spokesman Ed Davey MP, Leader in the Lords (where over 100 Lib Dem Peers sit) Lord Newby, Defence spokesperson Baroness Jolly and European Liberal Vice President Baroness Scott.

The conference provided an opportunity to catch up with friends of Gibraltar like Lord Chidgey, Lord Beith and Sir Simon Hughes as well as briefly with former leaders Lord Campbell, Lord Ashdown and Tim Farron MP.

The question of Brexit and the Gibraltar-Spain border was also raised during an international briefing for diplomats and international guests.



The Deputy Chief Minister told those present in the reception that he was aware that Europe was an emotive issue for the Liberal Democrats with passionately held views in favour of remaining in the European Union. He explained to loud applause that 96% of Gibraltar had voted to remain in the European Union so the Brexit option was not one that we had supported.

He reminded those present that the Liberal Democrat manifesto for the last UK general election pledged to protect the rights of the people of Gibraltar.

Dr Garcia pointed out the issues with Clause 24 of the Council's negotiating guidelines which purport to give Spain a veto on the application of any future UK-EU deal to Gibraltar. He called on delegates to be vigilant on this point.

Dr Garcia explained that the UK Government was negotiating for a diverse range of different territories in the British family of nations which were scattered all over the world. The priorities of these territories must be taken into account.