



PRESS RELEASE

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Opposition's view on Gibraltar Brexit deal confirms their lack of basic understanding or knowledge

The latest statement from the GSD Opposition on the Gibraltar aspects of the Withdrawal Agreement is a reflection of their lack of substance and basic knowledge about key policy areas. Their only option is to resort to a nit-picking approach in order to hide the weakness of their pathetic arguments.

Indeed, they have failed to address the single most important question. This is that the stark choice open to Gibraltar was either to form a part of the Withdrawal Agreement and its transitional period and leave the EU in an orderly manner, or instead to crash out of the European Union alone in March before the United Kingdom. The reality is that the GSLP/Liberal Government has negotiated wisely and in the best interests of Gibraltar throughout this process in order to secure the application of the Withdrawal Agreement and of its transitional provisions. It is not clear whether the Opposition would have done the same. Indeed their suggestion that Gibraltar could have chosen not to apply the Withdrawal Agreement shows just how little they understand the issues and it betrays the magnitude of the dangers that Gibraltar would have faced had the GSD been in office at this challenging time.

Moreover, the Opposition Members of the Brexit Select Committee were briefed in confidence over fifteen times in great detail as the negotiations have progressed. They were given the opportunity to ask questions and to make suggestions at every briefing. Some of them adopted a very positive approach because they understood the wider picture. Therefore the position taken by Mr Feetham, for example, who is on the Committee, and Mr Clinton, who is not, is remarkably at odds with the public statements made by the Leader of their own party. Indeed, other senior members of the GSD Executive are on record as saying different things including that they are Brexiteers! The GSD should therefore get their own house in order before pontificating to everyone else.

The Opposition does not seem to grasp that the provisions on Citizen's Rights in the Withdrawal Agreement cover ALL UK and EU nationals living or working in the United Kingdom or in the European Union. This includes Gibraltar. It covers UK and EU nationals who cross every relevant border to work. This includes commuters using the Channel tunnel in either direction, persons crossing from Northern Ireland into the Irish Republic or vice versa, persons crossing into Spain or into Gibraltar to work or crossing any other UK-EU land, air or sea border regularly for that purpose.



The GSD should have realised by now that the Withdrawal Agreement was precisely about the immediate procedure of withdrawing from the European Union. It was never about the future. Those discussions have not even started. The United Kingdom itself does not know what the detail of the future will be. This is part of the controversy now raging at Westminster. The suggestion that Gibraltar could have somehow gone further is absurd.

It is extremely dangerous to draw simplistic and superficial analogies between Gibraltar, Northern Ireland or indeed the Sovereign Base Areas in Cyprus. They are all very different. While the Irish Protocol contains elements of the future, the reason for this is because there are international treaties in place that already regulate the relationship between Northern Ireland and the Republic. Furthermore, it truly beggars belief that the Opposition should be referring to the Irish Protocol and the backstop as the model to have been followed by Gibraltar. It is sufficient to remind ourselves of the difficulties that this question is causing to the entire withdrawal negotiations which at the very moment that Mr Azopardi was writing his statement is causing the greatest political crisis that the United Kingdom has experienced in its modern history. In any case, the Opposition do not appear to understand that this is simply a backstop. It is neither the EU's or the UK's intention that it should apply to the future. More than that, Recital 4 of the Irish Protocol itself says that it "does not aim at establishing a permanent future relationship between the Union and the United Kingdom." Recital 5 confirms that the EU's and the UK's intention is to "replace the backstop solution on Northern Ireland" and Article 1(4) of the Protocol further confirms that its provisions are "intended to apply only temporarily". There is therefore nothing permanent about this, contrary to what the Opposition claims.

The governing mechanism of the entire Withdrawal Agreement itself is through UK-EU Committees, this is not specific to its Gibraltar aspects only. If there is no agreement through the Committee structure then there is recourse to arbitration. There is therefore no handing over of control to Spain in any way, but a continuing of EU jurisdiction for the limited period of application of the MoUs. Indeed, by Mr Azopardi's amateurish analysis, we have handed control to Spain already by relying on the Court of Justice of the EU to resolve disputes that might arise between Gibraltar and Spain in the context of remaining in the EU.

It is becoming increasingly obvious to everyone that Mr Azopardi feels it necessary to say something about Brexit. Sadly, he simply does not know what he is talking about.

The Chief Minister of Her Majesty's Government of Gibraltar, the Hon Fabian Picardo QC MP, said: "We have ensured that Gibraltar is safe and secure in any potential eventuality in the Brexit process. We support a revocation of the Article 50 Notice, which would mean we remain in the EU. In the event of a People's Vote, we will campaign to remain as that is the safest situation for Gibraltar. We have contingency plans for a no deal scenario. And importantly, we have put in place a safety net in the event of their being a Withdrawal Agreement which protects Gibraltar's interests in the way we have been able to carve out for ourselves. We have conceded nothing in doing so and any suggestion to the contrary is no more than a shallow misunderstanding of the reality of the complex structure of the Agreement and the MoUs. That is the way to have properly protected Gibraltar's interests in every potential eventuality. I doubt Mr Azopardi has done the full analysis required. He should stop demonstrating his lack of depth or of understanding on this sensitive subject."