



Deputy Chief Minister

PRESS RELEASE

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New Year Message for 2019 from The Hon Dr Joseph Garcia MP Deputy Chief Minister and Leader of the Liberal Party

Brexit is the challenge of this generation.

In less than three months' time, barring a major surprise, the United Kingdom and Gibraltar will leave the European Union. So far, Gibraltar has already overcome a number of challenges in this our collective journey forward. No doubt, there will be more. However, we are confident at the same time that Brexit will bring new opportunities and that Gibraltar is ideally placed to capitalise on them.

The strength of our people, our resilience, our determination and our resourcefulness will see us through whatever obstacles may be thrown into our path. That is the story of Gibraltar and of the Gibraltarians.

SUCCESSFUL PAST

We have endured countless military, political and economic sieges over the last three hundred years. We went through the trauma of the wartime Evacuation of our civilian population. We lived through the harassment and economic sanctions of General Franco's failed campaign to bring us to our knees. We endured a closed, or partly closed, border for over sixteen years. We survived the closure of the Naval Dockyard and, more recently, we successfully saw off the pressure to share our sovereignty with Spain.

Brexit is now the challenge of this generation.

Castiella, Pique, Matutes and Margallo are a small number in a long list of Spanish Foreign Ministers who wanted to get their hands of Gibraltar and who failed to do so. Indeed, 19 Foreign Ministers in all from the days of Castiella. More will fail too.



The more recent hostile and negative campaign against Gibraltar waged by Margallo served as a timely reminder to those who had seen it all before. It was also an important learning experience for a new generation of Gibraltarians, who have now understood that we must never lower our guard.

MARGALLO

Margallo had confidently predicted that Brexit would see the Spanish flag raised in Gibraltar in a short period of time. He said shared sovereignty was the only way forward if we wanted a relationship with the EU. He threatened that, in a Brexit context, all the options were open to Spain, including closing the border completely.

In addition to this, the infamous Clause 24 pointed to the potential exclusion of Gibraltar from the UK-EU Withdrawal Agreement and from its transitional provisions.

These were the challenges that we faced and Gibraltar overcame them all.

We do not know at this stage whether the Withdrawal Agreement will survive the vote in the UK Parliament. We do know, however, that if there is to be a Withdrawal Agreement then Gibraltar will be a part of it.

ACHIEVEMENT

This was a considerable achievement against the odds that I described earlier. The Brexit team, the Chief Minister, the Attorney General, the Financial Secretary and I, successfully navigated the choppy waters that we faced. As we move into 2019, our pledge is to show that same determination to protect our country and to promote our interests.

Leaving no stone unturned has meant making preparations for different outcomes of Brexit. We started planning in this way straight after the 2016 referendum.

If there is a deal, then Gibraltar will be in it.

However, your Government have also given added impetus to preparations for a no deal outcome. This work has continued throughout the Christmas break. A number of technical notes to inform the public about the consequences of no deal in the context of specific topic areas have already been published. These areas include passports, pet passports, driving licences, data protection and data flows.

NO DEAL

Yet every cloud has a silver lining. A no deal Brexit in March, for example, may very well mean that Gibraltar remains the only territory in Europe with guaranteed access into the United Kingdom market. This was one of the first areas that we secured by working closely with the UK Government and such access applies whether we leave the EU with the Withdrawal Agreement or whether we exit without it.



While we await the outcome, work moves forward on all fronts. This includes legislative and logistical workstreams for a deal or for no deal, which continue to run in parallel.

The negotiations on our future relationship with the European Union, and indeed that of the United Kingdom itself, will commence when and if the Withdrawal Agreement has been finally ratified by the UK and the EU Parliaments.

COMMONWEALTH

At the same time, Gibraltar is already shifting its focus to the wider world outside the EU, and to Commonwealth countries in particular.

On Monday 11 March we will commemorate Commonwealth Day. Last year, the EU flag was lowered at different locations around Gibraltar and replaced with the flag of the Commonwealth. This was an important symbolic gesture at the time. At the end March, this act will assume even greater significance when it happens for real.

The Government has been working closely with the Royal Commonwealth Society in order to organise a conference in March about exactly what all this will mean. Indeed, last year, Gibraltar joined the Commonwealth Enterprise and Investment Council, as we intensify our links with the different Commonwealth bodies.

The truth is that we value our long and historic relationship with the Commonwealth. In 2018, for instance, Gibraltar was represented at the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, the Commonwealth Telecommunications Union, the Commonwealth Local Government Forum and at the Commonwealth Games.

We also sent representatives to the events organised in London around the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting. These covered Youth, Women, Business and Civic matters. Young people from Gibraltar were able to speak to the Prime Ministers of Canada, Jamaica and the United Kingdom among others. It was an invaluable opportunity. Separately, our young people also attended the Commonwealth Youth Parliament for the first time.

The Government has already met with a number of Commonwealth Governments who wanted to discuss post-Brexit relations including trade. Some have visited Gibraltar. There continues to be considerable interest.

We will continue to develop our links with the Commonwealth further throughout 2019.

50th ANNIVERSARY

2019 will be the anniversary year of a number of important landmarks in our political and constitutional development. In May, the 1969 Constitution would have been 50 years old. It contained, for the first time, a Preamble which declared that the people of Gibraltar would never pass under the sovereignty of another state against their freely and democratically expressed wishes. That pledge was repeated in the 2006 Constitution.



FRONTIER EXHIBITION

In June, it will also be 50 years since the closure of the land frontier. This was an important moment for our people which reinforced our determination not to give in to the anachronistic Spanish claim to our country. A major exhibition will be held in June, around the anniversary of the closure.

This will serve as a pertinent reminder of the sacrifices made by that generation of Gibraltarians. When faced with the choice between British sovereignty, hardship and isolation, on the one hand, and becoming part of Spain, on the other, the people of Gibraltar defended their birthright and opted for the former. The National Archives have been busy compiling material for the exhibition.

In September, eighty years ago, Britain declared war on Hitler's Germany after the invasion of Poland. Gibraltar played its part in that conflict and for some time was the only part of mainland Europe fighting in Allied hands. We must never forget that.

ELECTION

2019 will be an election year in Gibraltar. The GSLP/Liberal Government, despite Brexit, continues its work to deliver on a whole raft of projects as we promised we would do. New schools, new sporting facilities, new housing and a new Primary Care Centre are all on their way. This is a genuine team effort under the leadership of the Chief Minister. On the EU and the international front, we will ask for your support so that we can continue to protect our country as we move forward. We have the experience, the determination and the conviction to finish what we started.

And so, as another year opens, we look forward once again to surmounting the challenges that 2019 will bring. That is who we are. That is what we have done for more than three hundred years. New doors will open and we must take advantage of this. You can rest secure in the knowledge that our sovereignty and Gibraltar itself is in safe hands whatever may happen - Brexit or no Brexit, deal or no deal.

I take this opportunity to wish you all the very best for 2019. May the New Year bring peace, happiness and prosperity to all.