



HM Government
of Gibraltar

THE CHIEF MINISTER'S ADDRESS
AT
GIBRALTAR DAY IN LONDON
EVENING RECEPTION
2024
30, ST MARY AXE

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The Office of the Chief Minister
6, Convent Place
Gibraltar
GX11 1AA
t: +350 200 76122 / e: cm@gibraltar.gov.gi

My Lords, Your Excellencies, Ministers, Members of Parliament and our many beloved former Governors,

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and gentlemen,

What a pleasure it is to welcome you to this glittering event at what is properly known as 30, St Mary Axe.

The place which the world has come to know, more colloquially, as The Gherkin.

This is a place that represents modern Britain.

And our home, Gibraltar, is also a place that proudly represents modern Britain and that modern Britain can be proud of.

For we are not a place of colonialism, despite our status in international law.

We are not a place of a fading empire and a waning influence.

Far from it.

We are the foremost hub for digital business in the online gaming space.

The foremost location of choice for all types of insurance sold into the United Kingdom.

And not just vehicle insurance but also travel and pet insurance too.

A place that contributes to British consumers by creating more choice and keeping their prices down

But not a place of tax leakage for the Chancellor

Because all taxes due on business done in the UK is paid in the UK by all our operators.

We are not a place of tax evasion or tax avoidance.

And that myth should be put to bed.

So, Gibraltar's first woman Minister for Business has a good story to tell the United Kingdom's first woman Chancellor of the Exchequer.

And we are at the forefront of so much more.

We are a place of strategic military significance, now as we always have been.

Many of you will know that Gibraltar is now also a place that is avante guard socially also.

We are no back water when it comes to equality.

Far from it, when it comes to sexual and reproductive rights we are in the vanguard.

And with more socially progressive measures to be debated soon.

Why, because we are a place as modern as the rest of Britain, with all that entails.

Indeed, whether it is in the field of business or social progress the United Kingdom has many reasons to be proud of how Gibraltar has developed in the last decades.

With equality at the top of our social agenda.

With transparency, accountability and social responsibility at the top of our commercial agenda.

And with commitment and loyalty at the top of our agenda when it comes to supporting His Majesty's military facilities on the Rock.

But tonight I want to tell you also about how proud you can be of the political position of Gibraltar in the European equation.

From 2016 we have maintained that we want to retain close links with the EU.

It is trite to remind you that 96% of us voted to remain in the European Union.

We have successfully negotiated our role in the Withdrawal Agreement so we have not suffered a hard Brexit.

We have successfully negotiated ongoing interim arrangements at Gibraltar frontier for Gibraltar residents to be exempted from stamping since the UK's departure from the EU, despite the odd blip here and there.

And maturely, in the closest partnership with Britain, and with open hearts and minds, we have made balanced and reasonable offers to resolve the final issues in dispute in our ongoing negotiation with the EU.

We have made generous proposals that avoid any concession on sovereignty by us or any other party to the negotiation.

Today I spoke at length again to Foreign Secretary Lammy before he caught up with the Spanish Foreign Minister in Luxembourg.

We have designed proposals that guarantee the safety and security of the Schengen Area and the integrity of the single market.

And all the while, not requiring us or any of our negotiating partners to cede on any of our historic fundamentals

It has not been easy.

But Kennedy said it best when he explained that the United States chose to go to the moon in the 1960s, not because it was easy but because it was hard.

Because the easy thing would have been to succumb to the despair that Brexit engenders in so many in Gibraltar and the Campo.

To blame others.

To blame Cameron, Johnson, Farage and even Junker and Merkel if we wanted to.

In Gibraltar, we can just as easily also make it all Rajoy's fault, Margallo's fault, Sanchez's fault or even Albares' fault.

But this is a time for serious people.

For serious thinking and for the serious grown ups to take the serious decisions we have to take in order to prevent conflict and not stoke it.

Of course, we may yet fail.

But we must not fail for a lack of trying.

For lack of imagination.

Or for lack of determination.

Because the world is a less safe place now than it was in 2016.

In fact, my role now as the socialist Chief Minister of the most precious real estate in the Mediterranean is to emulate the thinking of the most conservative of Prime Ministers of the United Kingdom.

As Mrs Thatcher said on her election, quoting St Francis of Assisi:

“Where there is discord, may we bring harmony.

...

And where there is despair, may we bring hope.”

If we can do all of any of that, without requiring concessions, we must.

And I think we can.

Although we are ready if we can't.

But continue to try we must.

And that is why we are going the extra mile.

That is why the brilliant official team led by Michael Llamas and Daniel D'Amato for Gibraltar and Lindsay Appleby and Robbie Bulloch for the UK is going beyond what we might have thought was a marathon when we started.

My dear friends, this negotiation for a UK / EU Treaty has turned from a marathon into a double iron man apparently aiming for the peak of Mount Everest.

But none of us is going to stop until we get it right

Last week's incident when the spectre of wet stamping became a momentary reality at our frontier is but a distasteful aperitif of what No Deal would look like.

We are ready for it.

Of course we are.

As we proved by reciprocating, more in sorrow than in anger, within hours.

Because we know cannot achieve a successful negotiating outcome without steeling ourselves and being ready for No Negotiated Outcome

But my duty,

My obligation,

And my commitment to my people is to ensure that we achieve an agreement if one is possible.

And not just an agreement that works for one of us around the table.

It must work for ALL of us around the table.

AND, more importantly, the agreement that emerges must also enjoy democratic consent amongst the people of Gibraltar.

My dear friends,

I came into politics 30 years ago to say NO to certain things if they were ever asked of us.

But I did not come into politics to say NO to everything.

I also came into politics to say yes to the things that do not require concessions and can finally unleash the massive potential Gibraltar and the region around us can release to our mutual benefit.

And if we can harness that potential and grow it exponentially in modern, viable arrangements with the EU and our neighbours then we will not be talking just of joint prosperity.

We will have built a new and better tomorrow.

We will have been architects of a future to be proud of.

Better even than the hopes of our forefathers and the dreams of the most ambitious of our children.

Because moments of apparent crisis also create chances to seize opportunities that might never come again.

AND if we are equal to the task,

THEN we will have made a success of the Brexit that so many nay sayers hoped would be the end of us.

So the ball is now firmly in Spain's Court.

Our proposals to resolve the final issues in dispute are fair, balanced and respectful of the Schengen and Single Market acquis.

I hope they will not delay in accepting them or proposing acceptable derivatives.

I say to our Spanish negotiating counterparts:

Let us go the extra mile and cast the die of the future in the shape our children deserve

AND NOT as it was so unfairly cast for our parents and grandparents and both sides of Franco's cruel frontier.

Let US be the generation of politicians that break the mould of confrontation and delivered the future that inspires the rest of the fractured world in which we live.

To Jose Manuel Albares and Pedro Sanchez, progressive politicians who I admire as fellow socialists, I offer Gibraltar's hand of friendship, cooperation and mutual socio-economic success for our people.

I offer solutions that will enable us to progress and improve the lives of hundreds of thousands of people.

I offer solutions that will banish discord and despair and replace them with harmony and hope for a future filled with opportunities in Gibraltar and the Campo that can be – that will be - the envy of world.

So that, together, we make Gibraltar and the region of the Campo the pre-eminent digital hub of the southern flank of Europe.

So that young people in the area will never again think of any illicit trade as the only route to success.

And so that the little part of Britain that I represent can stand proudly as a geo strategic lynchpin that UNITES and does not divide.

My dear friends, generations of conflict can give way to generations of cooperation.

But all this hinges on this moment.

History has conspired to present us with a fork on the road.

A choice we will have no choice but to make.

One route points to the continued confrontation we know so well and we will navigate so successfully if we have to.

The other, however, points towards a new cooperation, a new understanding and a new level of success of which our ancestors and our successors can be equally and justly proud.

And all without concession by any of the negotiating parties on any of our fundamental positions.

All securing our respective positions on sovereignty, jurisdiction and control and not challenging anyone else's.

But the time for decision is coming.

And none of us should fall short when that time comes.

None of us should think of ourselves.

All of us should think of our people first and foremost.

Our children, in particular.

As Britain seeks to reset its relationship with Europe, we can be the pioneers of that post Brexit cooperation.

I will remain optimistic that we can be.

Although, if we are not, I know Britain will be there to support us.

And I know that all of you in this room will be the backbone of that support.

But, for now, I am delighted to leave you with a man with a bigger challenge than me.

Whilst I only need to get Spain, the European Commission and the Foreign Secretary in the right place to do a deal, he is trying to do that twenty seven times over.

A doddle, no doubt, for the Rt Hon Nick Thomas Symonds...

ENDS