

STATEMENT BY THE GSLP/LIBERAL OPPOSITION 114/2005
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Spain's representative in the "trilateral" forum has made statements to Campo journalists which shed further light on what is taking place.

He is reported as saying that real negotiations require concessions to be made by all three parties.

It is obvious that the distinction drawn in the past in Gibraltar by some, describing the process as "talks", "dialogue" or "discussions" as if something other than negotiations were under way is no more than playing with words.

There are negotiations on the joint-use of the airport with the objective of signing an agreement. This and other agreements will not be announced piecemeal and will be made public eventually as a package of measures.

It has been clear from the announcement made a year ago at the launch of this negotiating forum that Spain expects an agreement on the joint-use of the airport and on the revaluation of Spanish pensions. As regards the airport, it is far from clear what concessions Spain or the United Kingdom will be making.

Given that Spain has never played any previous role in our airport's use, one can only presume that what Spain interprets as concessions on its part is getting less this time that they tried to obtain under the 1987 airport agreement.

On the basis of the limited information in the public domain, provided by Spanish sources, the so-called Spanish concessions appear to be that the agreement will be tripartite and not bilateral. That is to say that instead of being signed by the UK and Spain alone, it would also be signed by the Gibraltar Government.

Mr Pons recently identified this as the reason for the failure of the 1987 agreement and argued that this was why it was necessary to involve the Gibraltar Government in drawing up the agreement. The same point has been made subsequently by Mr Estrella,

Presumably this is seen by the Spanish Government as a concession. However it needs to be recalled that in 1987 Mr Ordonez, the then Spanish Foreign Minister, publicly accepted in a GBC interview that the agreement done with UK would not be given effect to if the Gibraltar Government was not willing to implement it, as indeed has been the case. The other concession appears to be the giving up of a Spanish terminal at La Linea for passengers traveling to and from Spain after arrival at Gibraltar. The initial position of Mr Pons on this issue published locally was that there had to be a Spanish presence in the Gibraltar terminal and that it was unreasonable not to accept this demand. Subsequently, a Spanish PSOE MP stated that an alternative acceptable to Spain might be to require Gibraltar to move its terminal next to the frontier fence.

The “concessions” from Spain therefore amount to demanding less rather than giving anything.

It is not obvious what concessions, if any, the United Kingdom would be making on the joint-use of the airport, however, there has been some indication that it could relate to the volume of civilian use permitted without affecting the primary role of what is after all an MOD airfield.

As regards the revaluation of Spanish pensions, the only parties that can make a concession are Spain and the United Kingdom since either one or both have to meet the cost. It will be recalled that it was the UK that agreed under the Brussels process in December 1985 to pay revalued pensions and that decided subsequently that these should be frozen in 1988 to limit the cost to the UK.

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