

STATEMENT BY THE GSLP/LIBERAL OPPOSITION 79/2006
21 June 2006

The Opposition welcome the fact that the European Parliament has removed the now standard Gibraltar exclusion clause from a draft regulation on civil aviation. In principle this is an important political act and the first time that the European Parliament has stood in the way of the agreed policy of the United Kingdom and Spain on the application of EU Civil Aviation measures to Gibraltar airport.

The removal of the exclusion clause followed coordinated action at the end of last year between the Leader of the European Liberal Democrats (ALDE) Graham Watson MEP and the Leader of the Liberal Party of Gibraltar Dr Joseph Garcia. This contact came after the exclusion of Gibraltar from EU measures on the blacklisting of unsafe airlines and also on arrangements for passengers with reduced mobility or disability.

The removal of the exclusion clause was carried out with the support of Gibraltar MEPs from other political groups like Glyn Ford MEP from Labour, Conservative Neil Parish and UKIP Roger Knapman.

It was possible to remove the Gibraltar exclusion clause from the Report of Transport Committee of the European Parliament before it was presented to the plenary session last week. The Chairman of the Transport Committee is an Italian Liberal MEP.

Spanish PSOE and PP MEPs introduced an amendment in the plenary again suspending the application of the regulation to Gibraltar until the 1987 airport agreement came into force. This amendment was rejected by an overwhelming majority of the European Parliament. In fact it was so overwhelming that there was no need for an electronic vote.

A second amendment was then moved through the PSOE by the Party of European Socialists (PES). The PSOE managed to get the support of others to move an amendment to reinstate the exclusion clause. This was rejected by 348 votes against to 207 in favour. Glyn Ford did not vote with the Socialist Group and therefore instead voted to reject the Socialist Group proposal which had been engineered by the PSOE. The European Liberals, the European People's Party (which includes Spanish PP members), the UEN, the Greens and some IND/DEM all voted against.

A third amendment from the Committee applying the regulation without prejudice to the respective legal positions of the United Kingdom and Spain was approved by an overwhelming majority of the Parliament. This particular clause is not detrimental to Gibraltar

as it simply places on record that UK defends the position that the isthmus is British and that Spain maintains that it is Spanish. It makes no reference to the 1987 airport deal or the exclusion of Gibraltar.

The Opposition understands that it is now up to the Council to adopt its Common Position, which could take some months, and confirm whether or not the regulation applies to Gibraltar Airport. The European Parliament would have the right, at a second reading, to reintroduce the issue.

Commenting on the matter, Dr Joseph Garcia, the Opposition's spokesman on civil aviation said:

“The action taken by the European Parliament shows how important it is to maintain a sustained lobbying campaign for the position of Gibraltar and how that lobbying can lead to concrete results. The position of Graham Watson as Leader of the European Liberal Group (ALDE) in the Parliament has been fundamental to the outcome. He has promised me today that if the UK and Spanish Governments reintroduce the Gibraltar exclusion clause in the Council then the Parliament will put up a fight.

It also shows the value of the international links of the Liberal Party as the only Gibraltar party to achieve international recognition. It is also of interest to note that Catalan and Basque MEPs are part of the Liberal Group in the European Parliament, and that they have visited Gibraltar in the past.”

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