

STATEMENT BY THE GSLP/LIBERAL OPPOSITION 45/2007

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The Opposition find it surprising that the Government has chosen to comment on a report in a Spanish newspaper which suggested that the Instituto Cervantes in Gibraltar might be headed by a diplomat and not by an academic.

We find it surprising because when others react to Spanish press stories the position of the Government has been to attack them for giving credence to such reports and tell them to pay no attention to what the Spanish press has to say.

The view of the Opposition on the Instituto is well known. We have no objection to Spain setting up such a centre if they want to, what we are against is the Government providing a public building. The same would apply if it was for a Consulate instead of an Institute or indeed if it were for any other Government than that of Spain.

The fact that the Spanish Foreign Ministry should be looking for a diplomat who is an expert in the Gibraltar question to man the Instituto is consistent with what Mr Moratinos has said is the purpose of the exercise. What concerns the Spanish Foreign Ministry is not the Llanito accent in spoken Spanish but the Llanito attitude in resisting any advance on the Spanish claim.

Indeed, it will be recalled that the Spanish Foreign Minister Miguel Angel Moratinos himself suggested that the role of the institute would be to reduce British influence in Gibraltar and in its place increase the influence of Spain. It appears that this cultural revolution that Spain hopes will flow from the presence of the Institute would aim to encourage our schoolleavers to go to Spain for their higher education at university level instead of to UK.

Clearly Spain believes that our sense of identity as a people within the British family is what prevents us from wanting to be a part of the Spanish family and that the increasing hispanisation of Gibraltar would make Gibraltarians more receptive to Spanish overtures.

Whilst the Opposition does not believe that the Instituto will deliver to Spain any of these results, what is clear is that, for them, this is the object of the exercise and therefore we cannot understand why anyone in Gibraltar who is not committed to achieving that objective should feel the need to welcome the Instituto.

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