

STATEMENT BY THE GSLP/LIBERAL OPPOSITION 46/2007

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Tomorrow, the Argentine Senate is expected to approve the naming of a new Ambassador to the United Nations, Sr Arguello, who is the head of the country's Foreign Affairs Committee who will replace the current Ambassador Cesar Mayoral.

The new Ambassador-designate is expected to be taking a tougher line at the UN on the Argentinian claim to the Falkland Islands. Argentine political sources indicate that he has the intention of taking the dispute to the UN General Assembly instead of limiting the debate, as at present, to the Committee of 24 and the 4th Committee.

A General Assembly resolution on the Argentine claim would involve lobbying the 192 Member countries and sources close to Sr Arguello believe that they will be successful in getting clear support for the Argentinian claim, after which they will be able to argue that world opinion is on their side.

It is against this background that the newly appointed Spanish Ambassador to Argentina Rafael Estrella has given Spain's unconditional support to Argentina's claim over the Falklands and drawn parallels between the Falklands and Gibraltar.

Rafael Estrella is believed to have played a big role in the tripartite forum behind the scenes and to have made the links between the results of the forum and the results of the constitutional discussions between Gibraltar and the United Kingdom.

It will be recalled that the second constitutional meeting held at the Caleta Hotel in September 2005 coincided with the date that a GB airways flights was diverted from Malaga to Gibraltar. Mr Estrella at the time pointed out that this was a one-off event and not the lifting of a restriction. The Gibraltar Government, on the other hand, said that Mr Estrella did not know what he was talking about, was not speaking for the Spanish Government and that the flight diversion was the implementation of what had been agreed in the forum. Subsequent events proved that Mr Estrella did know what he was talking about and was proved right.

On the eve of the final round of talks in London, Mr Estrella came out with a public statement indicating that the new constitution could not be accepted by Spain as changing Gibraltar's international status and bringing about its decolonisation. Again it was subsequently confirmed that this was the Spanish position through the exchange of correspondence between Mr Moratinos and Jack Straw.

It is therefore expected that Mr Estrella will be actively canvassing for the Spanish Government to give their unconditional support to Argentina on the

issue of the Falklands. At the same time, Mr Estrella is trying to convince the Argentinians that they should pin down the British Foreign Office in a tripartite formula to increase exchanges between Buenos Aires and the Falkland Islands. This would be on the basis that this was the methodology adopted in the case of Gibraltar and the way ahead to achieve success on the respective sovereignty claims of the two countries.

In recent statements in Buenos Aires, Mr Estrella has said that the position of Spain over Gibraltar is better than that of Argentina over the Falklands because there are closer relationships with over 3000, presumably Gibraltarians, choosing to live in Spain and commute to work in Gibraltar. This is in fact the same figure recently quoted by Mr Pons when he addressed the Chamber of Commerce.

It is significant to note that the parallels drawn by Mr Estrella between the Spanish claim to Gibraltar and the Argentinian claim to the Falklands makes no mention whatsoever of the supposed validity of Article X of the Treaty of Utrecht.

This exposes the reality of the situation. It is clear that like Argentina in relation to the Falklands, Spain would be claiming Gibraltar with or without the Treaty of Utrecht, and it shows that the Treaty has been little more than a convenient smokescreen used both the Foreign Office and the Spanish Government to seek to insert some legitimacy into the denial or curtailment of the exercise of our right to self-determination.

Mr Estrella in Buenos Aires has no difficulty in telling the Argentines that the Falkland Islands are equally denied the exercise of their right to self-determination even though there is no treaty that provides for any reversionary clause to Argentina.

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