

STATEMENT BY THE GSLP/LIBERAL OPPOSITION 70/2007

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The Opposition condemn the Spanish Government for continuing to block a number of international conventions because of the manner in which they apply to Gibraltar. EU Commissioner Franco Frattini has given a list of such conventions in the European Parliament this week.

Mr Frattini was answering questions by Gibraltar and South West Liberal Democrat Euro-MP Graham Watson who wanted to know whether the Commission was aware that Gibraltar children could not benefit from the protection afforded by The Hague Convention because Spain did not allow its application here. Mr Watson also wanted to know what the Commission was going to do about it.

In reply, Commissioner Frattini said the Commission had written to the United Kingdom and Spain several times and would continue to press the two countries for a solution.

The Opposition considers that the European Commission cannot wash their hands of this issue and pretend that it has nothing to do with them. They are the guardians of the European treaties and of the rights that those treaties bestow on the citizens of Europe. To invite the United Kingdom and Spain to resolve the issue smacks too much of a compromise solution where the people of Gibraltar are sacrificed on the altar of Anglo-Spanish political expediency. This is what has happened many times in the past.

The information given by Mr Frattini points to the fact that Spain refuses to recognise competent authorities in Gibraltar and the way in which these would communicate with those of other signatories. It would be very odd indeed if the United Kingdom were to take on a role for issues which are the domain of the Government of Gibraltar under the new Constitution. This would be at odds with the statement that the UK administers absolutely nothing in Gibraltar.

Gibraltar has been a part of the European Union since 1973, which is for thirteen years before Spain joined, and started undermining our position in Europe. Madrid has actively engaged ever since they joined, and continues to engage, on a policy of actively trying to use the European Union as a means to advance their outdated sovereignty claim.

This was seen very clearly in 1987 over the airport, where Spain held the whole of Europe to ransom unless Gibraltar was excluded from the air liberalization measures that were then being discussed. The position has not changed in the twenty years that have elapsed since 1987.

The Spanish Government have shown that they have absolutely no hesitation in blocking the application of measures which would benefit the whole of the EU, because of their obsession with Gibraltar. Their strategy is to block such

measures so that other Member States will put pressure on the United Kingdom to make concessions in order to unblock the issue. Effectively Spain blackmails the EU, the EU blackmails UK and UK blackmails Gibraltar.

The Opposition considers that it is about time that the Spanish Government was put in their place. They have to accept that the institutions of Gibraltar exist, that these are independent of the United Kingdom, and that the manner in which they communicate with other signatories of international conventions has to be in the same way as everybody else.

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