

STATEMENT BY THE GSLP/LIBERAL OPPOSITION 98/2007
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The Opposition notes the decision by GB Airways to sell its operation to Easyjet.

“ While it is true to say that this is entirely a commercial decision, the fact is that this is the latest in a number of incidents which have served to cast doubt and uncertainty over the commercial use of Gibraltar airport,” said Shadow Minister for Tourism with responsibility for civil aviation Dr Joseph Garcia.

It will be recalled that GB Airways itself recently announced that it would no longer fly the Gibraltar-Madrid route, at the same time as Iberia made it clear that the route was not living up to expectations. Indeed, there were reports in the Spanish press suggesting that they too would cutback their operation. Last year the Monarch route to Manchester and GB Airways route to Heathrow also came to an end. This means that Gibraltar airport now serves less routes than it did in 1996.

Although Easyjet have said that they will initially maintain the GB Airways flight to Gatwick, they have also made clear that for how long this will continue will depend on the profitability of the route. It is difficult to see what kind of market assessment has been made to arrive at the conclusion that having flights to the same destination next March by both Easyjet and British Airways will mean that there will be more flights by two airlines than there were with just one. In other words, if there is unsatisfied demand for more flights, it is incomprehensible why these are not already being provided by GB Airways.

The Opposition considers that it is in Gibraltar’s interests that there should be more air links with the United Kingdom so that people do not have to go to Malaga in order to fly to the UK. However, if this can only be produced by lowering landing fees, what is not clear is whether the Government expects this to be offset by revenue generated by the use of the airport, or whether the intention is to subsidise the cost of landing in Gibraltar in order to encourage more flights.

“It is also a matter for regret that the long and historic links between Gibraltar and the airline that was born here in the 1930s,

and indeed initially was known as Gibraltar Airways and that only changed its name to avoid problems when flying from UK to Spanish airports, now comes to an end in this way,” said Dr Garcia.

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