

STATEMENT BY THE GSLP/LIBERAL OPPOSITION

150/2008

10 December 2008

The Spanish Government has blocked a European Union measure in the field of civil aviation yesterday because of the way in which it applied to Gibraltar. The aim of the legislative initiative was to unify European Union airspace and improve the management and handling of air traffic in the skies over the EU.

The Spanish Transport Minister Magdalena Alvarez is quoted as having told the media that this was an issue which affected Spain's vital national interest and the question of sovereignty. The position of the United Kingdom, as put by Geoff Hoon, is that the legislation has been properly drafted and that the UK is committed by a previous ministerial declaration to integrate Gibraltar into the single European sky.

The little information that has been made public about this latest Spanish attempt to undermine the position of Gibraltar in Europe points to the fact that Madrid's position today remains the same as it was in 1987. They are questioning the jurisdiction that Gibraltar exercises over the airspace around the Rock and over the actual isthmus itself where the air terminal is sited.

It will be recalled that in 1987 Spain argued that the isthmus had joined Europe in 1986, when they joined, and not in 1973 when Gibraltar became a part of the then EEC. The objections raised by Spain in 1987 were in furtherance of its sovereignty claim, which is exactly what the Spanish Transport Minister said that she was doing yesterday when she blocked this latest measure.

The Spanish argument is totally absurd and devoid of any logical basis. The isthmus is part of Gibraltar for EU purposes and has been since 1973. The fact that Spain chooses to claim it in no way creates a dispute which puts in doubt whether it is covered by the laws of the Member State Spain or by the laws of the territory of Gibraltar that does its own transposition of EU law.

Seven million people a year cross the international frontier between Spain and Gibraltar and Spain recognises in each and every case that the moment they set foot in the isthmus they are subject to the laws of Gibraltar and cease to be subject to the laws of Spain. So much for the so-called disputed sovereignty!

What Spain is really up to is the same tactic of blackmail that it successfully deployed in 1987 to get Gibraltar excluded from the application to the airport of EU legislation from that date on by blocking the

measures to put pressure on everyone else to accept their distorted version of reality.

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