

STATEMENT BY THE GSLP/LIBERAL OPPOSITION

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The Spanish authorities across the border are claiming that an oil slick in their waters earlier this week comes from the Panamanian cargo ship "Zein I" which is located in Gibraltar waters. This has been reported both in the Spanish media and in the specialist shipping press.

The reports say that the oil slick, which was detected on Sunday, has affected approximately 800 metres of the shoreline at La Linea's "playa de poniente". They claim that this came from the "Zein I" which was anchored at the entrance to Gibraltar's harbour at the time.

The Spanish "Salvamento Marítimo" is quoted as saying that the vessel is being held by the Gibraltar authorities and that on Sunday a supply barge "Mikonos" was moored next to it as well as another vessel which was engaged in cleaning operations. The Spanish authorities have also said that the ship in question is surrounded by a protective barrier in order to contain any further loss of fuel.

The Opposition note that the Captain of the Port has commented on the issue to some of the media and has said that the slick was contained and that "very, very little" oil entered the sea. This seems to contradict what the Mayor of La Linea has said. It would not be the first time that accusations made against Gibraltar in Spain are found to be exaggerated or inaccurate. Moreover, it is a matter of concern that Gibraltar should be getting a bad name in the media for something which may have been blown out of all proportion by politicians across the border.

The Opposition understands, for example, that there were a total of about 120 vessels in the vicinity of Gibraltar at one point yesterday morning. This included the "Zein I" which appeared to be moored or at anchor. There were fifteen tankers, six cargo vessels and four unspecified ships on the Gibraltar side of the Bay. At the same time there were six passenger vessels, two tankers, twelve cargo ships and two high speed craft on the Spanish side of the Bay. Given the high level of shipping movements in the Bay of Gibraltar, it is quite obvious that there is no way of knowing exactly what amount was leaked or exactly where all of it came from, but in any event whatever the quantity or the source our neighbours in Spain are guaranteed to put the blame on us.

Commenting on the matter, Shadow Minister responsible for Shipping and the Port Dr Joseph Garcia said:

"The Mayor of La Linea has said that he will send the bill for the clean-up operation to the Gibraltar Government. This absurd proposition is on the assumption that the fuel leak polluted about 800m of shoreline in La Linea. Given

that the Mayor fully supports the Partido Popular theory that Gibraltar has no territorial waters, other than those in the Port, he should pay for the clean-up himself or ask the Junta de Andalucia to do so!"

ENDS