

STATEMENT BY THE GSLP/LIBERAL OPPOSITION

126/2009

29 September 2009

The Opposition condemn the fact that the Spanish Civil Guard continues to operate in Gibraltar waters as if these belonged to Spain. This follows another incident last week where the Civil Guard requested documentation from persons on a boat off Europa Point. In this case, the Guardia Civil were expelled from the area by the RGP and the Royal Navy.

This latest incident confirms that Spain has moved from a position where they were content to claim that our waters were Spanish to a more aggressive position where they now continue to act and behave as if the waters belong to them.

It will be recalled that on a proposal from Madrid, the European Commission designated Gibraltar's territorial waters and adjacent international sea as if they were Spanish in an environmental directive at the end of last year. A few months later Spain proceeded to exercise powers in the area with the arrival of the corvette "Tarifa", a fisheries protection vessel. The vessel lowered a RIB which proceeded to question fishing boats going about their business. The RIB refused to leave when asked to do so by the Royal Navy.

More recently, there have also been several reports of over-flights by an aircraft belonging to Spain's environmental agency. This aircraft has not answered to calls from Gibraltar air traffic control even when civil aircraft have been approaching the area.

At the same time as this, the Spanish Civil Guard have been reported increasingly close to Gibraltar, including in Catalan Bay and Eastern Beach, questioning fishermen and others on boats and requesting their documentation. It will be recalled that the Gibraltar Government at the time advised anyone who was stopped in this way inside Gibraltar waters to let off a flare gun or call the RGP.

In the context of this continuing harassment by Spain and the constant challenges to our waters and our airspace, the call by Partido Popular MP Jose Ignacio Landaluce for Madrid to take action against Gibraltar following the expulsion of the Civil Guard patrol boat last week only serves to add insult to injury. The PP has described the expulsion as an act of provocation which Spain cannot tolerate any longer.

The Opposition considers that the only act of provocation that exists in the first place is the continuing presence of the Spanish authorities inside the waters of Gibraltar, where they have no jurisdiction. The pertinent Gibraltar authorities

must ensure that the sovereignty and integrity of British Gibraltar territorial waters is adequately upheld and defended at all times in the face of the aggressive campaign which Spain has embarked upon over the last few months.

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