

STATEMENT BY THE GSLP/LIBERAL OPPOSITION

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The Opposition has received representations from people who have wanted to use their Gibraltar identity card as proof of identity abroad and who have been told that the card cannot be used because it has too many digits. In one case a person who wrote to the Government outlining the problem being experienced has complained at not even having had the decency of a reply.

There have been instances of identity card holders presenting the document to hotels and banks outside Gibraltar and the card has been rejected because of the number of digits that it contains. In other cases, persons using the identity card to make a booking with certain airlines have also found themselves unable to do so because the space in which to insert the digits on the travel document is too small for the large number of digits on the card. The card is normally handed back to the holder with the comment that it has too many characters on it.

The present Gibraltar identity card emerged as a result of the agreement reached with Spain in April 2000. It will be recalled that Spain refused to recognise the previous Gibraltar identity card because the issuing authority was the "Government of Gibraltar", even though the European Commission had declared its validity as a travel document within the EU. The Gibraltar card was then changed as a result and the changes accommodated Spain's views.

However, the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) subsequently issued a recommendation that there should be nine digit serial numbers on ID documents. This led a number of countries to make changes to their existing cards. The United Kingdom does not have identity cards, but Germany for example, complied with this recommendation by ensuring that German passports and identity cards comprised nine digits instead of ten as of January 2004.

The ICAO is a UN specialized agency and the global forum for civil aviation. It has made clear that an increasing number of countries are changing their identity cards into ICAO compliant formats. Some of these also include a contact less chip in the identity card and according to ICAO in the EU 16 countries already issue such a compliant card. They add that the inclusion of this contact less chip is also a recommendation of the European Union.

The Government has confirmed in Parliament following a question by Shadow Minister for Civil Aviation Dr Joseph Garcia that the latest EU and ICAO recommendations are being studied in order to determine the extent to which the Gibraltar card may need to be changed.

Commenting on the matter, Dr Garcia said:

"There are a number of issues which arise from all this. Given that these ICAO recommendations have been in place since at least 2004, it is not clear why the Government has not acted earlier to address the matter. It has had to take public complaints followed by a question in Parliament for the Government to confirm that all Gibraltar identity cards may have to be withdrawn and new ones re-issued.

For many months and even years people have had to put up with the considerable inconvenience of having had their cards rejected at different usage points and have been kept in the dark as to the reason why, even when written representations have been made to the Government.

It is totally unacceptable for identity card holders to have been treated with such a lack of respect when Government were aware of the situation all along.”

ENDS