

STATEMENT BY THE GSLP/LIBERAL OPPOSITION

158/2009

16 November 2009

The Opposition is concerned at the fact that, according to the Spanish Guardia Civil, their patrol boats are now challenging British sovereignty and jurisdiction in the territorial waters of Gibraltar practically on a daily basis. It is obvious that despite the professions of friendship and cooperation that we continue to hear so much about, the Spanish Government continues to increase the tension in the waters that surround Gibraltar.

A Spanish Civil Guard has told the newspaper "El Mundo" that one of these days something very serious is going to happen in the waters around Gibraltar. They have also revealed that incidents between the Civil Guard and the Royal Navy or the Royal Gibraltar Police are now happening "on a daily basis". The Civil Guard claim that since the summer they have been harassed by British patrol boats within the three-mile limit around the Rock which "they consider to be their area of influence". The Civil Guard have repeated the well-known position of the Spanish Government that Gibraltar has no waters on the basis that none were explicitly ceded by the Treaty of Utrecht except those inside the Port.

The Opposition consider that it is the height of hypocrisy for the Civil Guard to claim that they are being the victims of harassment when everyone knows that it is they who have been harassing and intimidating local boat owners in waters which are outside Spain's jurisdiction. The Civil Guard have in the past stopped, questioned and requested papers from the occupants of Gibraltar registered boats barely a few metres from the Rock and well inside the three-mile limit. In fact, this harassment on their part led the Gibraltar Government at the time to call on boat owners to set off a flare gun or call the Royal Gibraltar Police when they were challenged in this manner.

It is clear that there is an orchestrated campaign on the part of the Spanish Government and its agencies to undermine the sovereignty of British Gibraltar Territorial Waters. This was seen last year when the Spanish proposed a designation of our waters as if they belonged to Spain in an EU directive. The acceptance of this by the EU then had an immediate, practical effect in the waters around the Rock. It was followed by an incursion by a Spanish navy fisheries protection vessel in May this year and by frequent incursions by Civil Guard patrol boats who continue to behave as if our waters belonged to them.

The Opposition fully support and endorse the actions of the Royal Navy and of the Royal Gibraltar Police in expelling the Civil Guard from Gibraltar's territorial waters. It is of paramount importance that we do not allow Spain to make inroads into our sovereignty by deploying their maritime resources in such a provocative and hostile manner. Madrid must be made to understand that we will not be intimidated by the Civil Guard and that their bullying tactics do not work.

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