

STATEMENT BY THE GSLP/LIBERAL OPPOSITION

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The Opposition is not surprised at the incursion into Gibraltar's Port and territory by the Spanish Guardia Civil yesterday because only a few weeks ago the Civil Guard had threatened that such a serious incident would take place. This latest incursion reveals a complete lack of respect for our sovereignty, jurisdiction and control over our territorial waters, the waters inside the Port and actual land territory of Gibraltar itself on the part of an agency of the Spanish Government. It would be unacceptable to now minimise the seriousness of what has happened simply because there is a wider political agenda at stake.

Therefore the Opposition considers that an apology is the very least that could have been expected from the Spanish Government given the serious nature of the incident. Having said that, it is difficult to believe that four Civil Guards, no matter how inexperienced we are told they were, did not know that they cannot exercise the jurisdiction of the Spanish state inside the Port and inside a residential area of Gibraltar. Moreover, it will be recalled that the over-enthusiasm of junior officers is an excuse that Spain has often used in the past in order to cover up similarly unacceptable behaviour like the delays at the border.

It had been said only this week, in relation to the enforcement of Gibraltar law in British waters, that the law applied equally to everyone including local citizens. It raises a new issue in law whether if someone now says sorry after committing a criminal offence they can then be set free on the basis of an apology. In this context, it is known that the Civil Guard were armed, may have fired shots, chased a RIB into the Port, landed at Harbour Views and proceeded to chase the persons they were following into a private underground garage. All this must be properly and fully investigated, including interviewing of witnesses, before a full and real picture of what has happened can actually emerge.

Quite apart from its serious political implications, the incident has also raised a number of safety and security issues which are in themselves also a matter for concern. The fact that two RIB launches and their occupants, some of whom were armed, have been able to get into Gibraltar unchallenged begs the question as to what would have happened if they had been terrorists instead. Moreover, in the past terrorists have used speedboats to target shipping in other parts of the world. It is logical to assume, in this context, that if there had been an American naval vessel in Port at the time of the incident the chances are that both the Civil Guard and the suspected smugglers would have been blown out of the water.

The Opposition have warned over many months that the Spanish Government had intensified its claim to Gibraltar's territorial waters, something which was reflected in the EU designation and in the increased number of incursions which were taking place locally. This latest incident goes well beyond the dispute over the waters. The law enforcement agencies of the Spanish state have violated our sovereignty, displayed a dangerous and cavalier attitude and have risked a

serious accident taking place inside the Port or on land. The serious nature of this latest incursion cannot be masked by a simple apology.

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