

STATEMENT BY THE GSLP/LIBERAL OPPOSITION
91/2009

20 July 2009

EMBARGOED UNTIL MONDAY 20 JULY

The Opposition considers that it is totally unacceptable for the Spanish Foreign Minister to visit Gibraltar without there having been a resolution of the latest dispute over the designation of our territorial waters. This runs contrary to the impression that the Chief Minister had given early last week. The fact is that it is now Mr Caruana who has changed the goalposts by giving way in the negotiations in his over-riding eagerness to facilitate the visit by Mr Moratinos.

Mr Caruana has said that the talks will go ahead on the basis that Spain cannot gain from the contested demarcation of Gibraltar waters as a Spanish marine habitat. The fact is that Spain has already gained politically from this and continues to do so. The territorial waters of Gibraltar are now listed as a Spanish "Site of Community Interest" in the EU measure, the designation was accepted by the European Commission and the Spanish navy and law enforcement agencies continue to behave as if our waters belong to them. The fact that legal action has been instituted does not alter the present situation and the context in which this visit will now take place.

Therefore, for Mr Moratinos to come to Gibraltar on this basis is to allow the Spanish Foreign Minister a provocative platform from which to brazenly rub our noses in Spain's aggressive and deceitful usurpation of our sovereign waters.

Moreover, it is completely misleading for Mr Caruana to claim that he is seeking to neutralise the issue. As far as most people are concerned, the only way to neutralise the issue is for Spain to withdraw their hypocritical, two-faced designation in the EU and to halt the incursions into our waters of their navy and Civil Guard patrol boats. That is the only way to bring about the "status quo ante".

Mr Caruana has the right to continue with the tripartite talks or to end them; he has the right to invite the Spanish Foreign Minister to Gibraltar or not to issue an invitation. What Mr Caruana has no right to do is to manipulate the feelings and emotions of the people of Gibraltar to suit his own partisan political ends. It will be recalled, in this context, that Mr Caruana has placed ordinary

citizens in the front line of the diplomatic dispute by going as far as calling on them to discharge a flare gun when confronted by armed Spanish Civil Guard; and yet he now is preparing to welcome Mr Moratinos to Gibraltar!

There is no way for Government to spin this issue. Mr Caruana was intent - at any price - to welcome Mr Moratinos to Gibraltar and he has clearly bent over backwards to ensure that the visit goes ahead even while Spain seeks to aggressively advance its sovereignty claim.

The Opposition understand the strength of feeling that exists on this issue among ordinary Gibraltarians. There are many people in Gibraltar who will feel let down by the actions of Mr Caruana. The Gibraltar Government has rewarded the aggressor by allowing Mr Moratinos' visit to take place while the waters issue remains unresolved.

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