

STATEMENT BY THE GSLP/LIBERAL OPPOSITION

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The Opposition condemn the fact that Gibraltar was unable to participate in the opening ceremony of the European Athletics Championships taking place in Barcelona because of political objections raised by Spain. This shows that Madrid continues to have no hesitation in mixing politics and sport as they have done for many years.

Gibraltar is a full member of the International Amateur Athletics Federation as a country in our own right. This means that we are perfectly entitled to participate in international or European sporting events in the same way as any other member and with no obstacles or restrictions placed upon us. The news that Gibraltar was not allowed to participate in the opening ceremony following an objection raised by Spain is absolutely scandalous. The opening ceremony is one of the main events of the tournament where athletes parade past the audience carrying a banner with the name of their country and bearing the national flag. It is obvious that Spain did not want this to happen and Gibraltar was not allowed to take part.

It will be recalled that Spain's Consejo Superior de Deportes, which is an organ of the Spanish Government, issued an edit many years ago calling on all Spanish sporting federations to object whenever they were faced with an application for membership from an association from Gibraltar. They have also made life difficult for Gibraltar in a number of sporting tournaments over the years, particularly when an international event in which Gibraltar is entitled to participate takes place in Spain.

The most prominent case of this political discrimination against Gibraltar is the continued exclusion of the Gibraltar Football Association from membership of UEFA. It is well known that under pressure from the Spanish football federation, the rules of the organisation were changed after Gibraltar applied to join. This has been the subject of a number of court cases where the tribunals have consistently found in favour of the GFA but despite this Gibraltar is still not a member.

The continuing objection by Spain to the participation of Gibraltar in sporting events and to our membership of international associations runs counter to the propaganda that we continue to be fed about the new climate that exists in relations between Gibraltar and Madrid. It is absolutely disgraceful that Gibraltar's sportsmen should continue to be discriminated against for political reasons at the behest of the Spanish Government.