

STATEMENT BY THE GSLP/LIBERAL OPPOSITION

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The Spanish Government has been able to secure the re-routing of an international telecommunications cable on the basis that it could interfere with the Site of Community Importance that it designated in waters which it claims to be Spanish. The site in question includes Gibraltar's territorial waters and the international waters around them.

The Europe-India Gateway is a 15,000 km long cable linking India to the United Kingdom and allowing for connection points in ten other countries. Gibraltar is one of the connection points. There is no connection point in Spain and there is no Spanish company among those who are taking part in the project. The cable will enter the Mediterranean at the Red Sea, cross the Alboran sea, the Straits of Gibraltar, the coast of Portugal and then enter Spanish waters off Galicia before reaching the United Kingdom.

In 2009 Spain's oceanographic institute warned the Spanish Government that the underwater cable could destroy marine habitats in Galicia and in the Straits of Gibraltar and act as a barrier on the sea bed which they claimed could affect some species in the deep. They also feared damage to shipwrecks. This led the Spanish Government to contact the American company "Verizon" which leads the project to secure a re-routing of the cable. Spain was notified last month that that their concerns would be taken into account.

It will be recalled that the Spanish proposal for the designation of Estrecho Oriental overlapped and included British Gibraltar Territorial Waters as well as international waters. This was approved by the European Commission in December 2008. The Gibraltar (UK) site called Southern Waters of Gibraltar has an area of 5486,5 hectares and this was consumed into the larger Spanish site Estrecho Oriental which has an area of 23,641.82 hectares. This is mainly made up of Gibraltar's territorial waters and the international sea which surrounds them. The international communications cable has a connecting point in Gibraltar, so it is logical to assume that as some point there is a junction off the main cable to a new underwater cable that leads directly to Gibraltar itself.

The Opposition considers that it is incomprehensible that no information on this aspect of the project has been made public in Gibraltar given that we are taking the European Commission to Court for designating our waters as if they were Spanish and that there is Gibraltar participation in the actual cable link itself. It is not clear why the United Kingdom, which designated the site "Southern Waters of Gibraltar" in 2006, has not said whether the necessary steps have been taken to determine the impact of the cable on the marine environment of our territorial waters and on our own Site of Community Importance. This matter should not have been left to Spain for obvious reasons.

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