

STATEMENT BY THE GSLP/LIBERAL OPPOSITION

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The news that Andalus airlines has suspended its flights to Gibraltar and reports that it is having difficulty in meeting its payments is not something that has caught the Opposition by surprise. However, it may explain the reluctance of the Government to supply information on the sums of money owed to it by the airline at the last meeting of Parliament and confirm that the Government did indeed have something to hide after all. It is totally unacceptable that the Government should have refused to supply this information to the Parliament and the people of Gibraltar given that there is public money indirectly involved in the venture.

The truth is that in refusing to supply this factual information the Government has simply been protecting its own political interests following the decision to spend millions and millions of pounds on a new air terminal building as a result of the Cordoba agreement. They have been propping up the Andalus operation in Gibraltar by allowing the airline to delay its payments to them precisely because it suits the Government in the context of the new air terminal that there should continue to be flights between Gibraltar and Spain.

The Government cannot now simply wash its hands of the problem by saying that this is a commercial decision. The Chief Minister boasted at the time that the Cordoba agreement was signed that it would lead to a huge influx of airlines and new air routes as a consequence of its signature. This does not seem very likely now.

It is obvious that the Government have a huge political responsibility for this latest development. Andalus had been encouraged to recommence flights between Gibraltar and Spain in order to salvage the GSD Government from the disaster of Iberia pulling out. A huge subsidy was given to the airline in terms of delayed payments to help the operation continue. It is obvious that this was never about greater transport facilities for the Campo or for Gibraltar. This was simply about hiding the incompetence of the Government in going ahead with a multi-million pound air terminal building without having made any assessment beforehand as to whether there was any demand for the flights.

Commenting on the matter, Shadow Minister for Civil Aviation Dr Joseph Garcia said:

“The visions of this Chief Minister and this Government have proved to be very expensive for the taxpayers of Gibraltar. There was the Theatre Royal which was supposed to rival “La Scala di Milano” and now the new air terminal building which was predicted to pave the way for aviation to become one of the largest

industries in Gibraltar, employing more people than the gambling industry. Millions and millions of pounds have been thrown away in these fantasies and delusions of grandeur. The doubts expressed by the Opposition in relation to the commercial viability of flights between Gibraltar and Spain continue to be fully vindicated.”

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