

STATEMENT BY THE GSLP/LIBERAL OPPOSITION

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It is totally unacceptable that the vessels of the Spanish Guardia Civil continue to come in and out of Gibraltar waters with impunity as if these waters belonged to Spain. This follows yet another serious incursion last week which has been brought to the notice of the Opposition by an eyewitness.

Earlier this month, a local man was fishing in a small boat off Western Beach. A Civil Guard patrol boat entered the area unchallenged and approached the boat. It then proceeded to circle the boat and placed the front of their vessel next to its side in order to be able to look inside it. The Civil Guard stayed in the area for a few minutes and then left Western Beach and made out to sea. This time the Spanish launch was unchallenged when it approached Western Beach, during the time that it spent in the area and then when it left.

Yet another incursion by a Guardia Civil patrol boat took place last week. In this instance the launch was proceeding across the north entrance of the harbour and North Mole at a distance of only about 100-150 metres out to sea. A much smaller RGP launch which was heading in the opposite direction, turned round and followed the Civil Guard. The Spanish vessel proceeded to cut across the northern end of the Western Arm of the North Mole in a manner that could have endangered shipping. It then headed for the Western end of the runway, and then out to sea where it turned back again and started to head towards La Linea. In an obvious act of defiance to the RGP, the Civil Guard proceeded to zig zag in front of the RGP launch before making their way into La Linea.

These latest incursions coincide with the tabling of questions to the Spanish Government on the issue by Partido Popular MP Jose Ignacio Landaluce. The Spanish MP has complained at the continuous number of incidents involving Spanish patrol boats in the waters around Gibraltar. He has claimed that there have been a total of 17 incidents recently, adding that the Royal Navy and Gibraltar Police interfere with the route taken by the Spanish patrol boats and record their activities on tape.

The Opposition consider that it is quite incredible that the simple solution to this problem has not yet struck Mr Landaluce. If the Guardia Civil do not want to be interfered with, as he says, then all that they have to do is stick to the Spanish side of the Bay and keep outside British Gibraltar Territorial Waters. It is the continuous incursions by the agencies of the Spanish state that is causing this problem and not the actions of the Royal Navy, the RGP and the GDP who are simply doing their duty.

It will be recalled that the Gibraltar Government has not yet increased the capability of its maritime resources despite indicating that this would happen at the time of the budget last year. The situation has worsened considerably since the Government gave that commitment and to date no indication has been given that larger or faster vessels have

been purchased. In the meantime, the Guardia Civil and other Spanish agencies continue to show a complete lack of respect for the territorial waters of Gibraltar, no doubt bolstered by the view of the Spanish Government in Madrid that Gibraltar has no waters other than those inside the Port. The sooner that the Gibraltar Government takes the action it has promised, the clearer will be the message that this kind of behaviour will not be tolerated any longer.