

**STATEMENT BY THE GSLP/LIBERAL OPPOSITION
90/2010**

28 June 2010

It is important to remember that the industrial action by Seville air traffic controllers which delayed the departure of two aircraft from Gibraltar airport on Sunday stems directly from the political position of the Spanish Government that Gibraltar has no sovereign airspace. It is therefore misleading to suggest that that this was simply the result of an industrial dispute since the political problem with Spain lies at the heart of the issue.

It will be recalled that Spanish air traffic controllers highlighted a number of problems last month which showed the extent to which Madrid's sovereignty claim is interfering with normal air communications in the region. They claimed that air safety and security were being compromised in the skies around Gibraltar because of the Spanish position that Gibraltar does not have any sovereign airspace.

The lack of recognition by Madrid of our territorial waters and our sovereign airspace is the fundamental reason why there continue to be serious incidents both in the air and at sea. Therefore the industrial action taken by the air traffic controllers in Seville stems precisely from this political problem which centres on the sovereignty of the air above the Rock and our waters. In other words, the air traffic controllers may indeed be using Gibraltar as leverage against their employer AENA, but their actions have drawn attention to the matter and exposed the serious sovereignty undertones surrounding this issue which remain anyway whether there is an industrial dispute or not.

It is well known that AENA has itself complained in the past about the absence of standardised procedures and agreements with Gibraltar. Indeed, when the Director of AENA floated the possibility of establishing Air Traffic Flow Management (ATM) coordination with Gibraltar last year, he was told that the matter had to be channeled through the Spanish Foreign Ministry first. The Spanish air traffic controllers have been calling for a formal letter of agreement between Gibraltar and Seville in order to standardise procedures for flights in and out of Gibraltar airport, and for Gibraltar to be assigned airspace. However, because of the position of the Spanish Government in Madrid that we have no airspace, none of this has happened. It is obvious that even matters of a technical nature are being subjected to political considerations.

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

“Against this highly charged political background which has sovereignty at the core, it is quite extraordinary that the Gibraltar Government should choose to be critical of the UK through the office of the Governor instead of being critical of the Spanish Government in Madrid. What they should have done is secure normality in air communications between Gibraltar and Spain through Spanish recognition of Gibraltar’s airspace. Instead we are spending millions of pounds of taxpayer’s money building an air terminal located next to the frontier fence for political reasons which is far in excess of Gibraltar’s requirements. The Gibraltar Government seems more concerned in acting as an apologist for Spain than in standing up for our rights.”