

**STATEMENT BY THE GSLP/LIBERAL OPPOSITION  
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The Opposition reject the claim by Spanish politicians that a security protocol should be agreed between the UK and Spain, which makes it clear that the airspace over Gibraltar is Spanish. It shows that there are people in posts of responsibility in Spain whose views in this respect are more extreme even than those of General Franco.

This follows a call made by Spanish PP MP Jose Ignacio Landaluce and another colleague that the matter should be resolved through a security protocol which enshrines the Spanish claim to Gibraltar's airspace. The irony is that even in the days of the dictatorship there was recognition that the Bay was divided into two parts when marker buoys were placed at the centre. The clear implication is that the airspace above it was also divided which is why aircraft approaching or taking-off from the Bay side have to perform a sharp turn in order to avoid the Spanish side. That Spanish politicians should seek to use this issue to advance their claim to Gibraltar in this day and age is unbelievable.

The on-going dispute between Spanish air traffic controllers and their employers has placed in the public domain a number of aviation issues which were not publicly known before. These centre on the way in which Gibraltar airport communicates with Seville. The air traffic controllers have complained that there is no formal letter of understanding between the two airports and have called for such an agreement to be concluded and for the airspace of Gibraltar to be recognised. They have claimed that the present situation has serious repercussions of a safety and security nature for air traffic in the area.

Indeed, the head of supervision for the southern Iberian peninsula in a recent internal document which was leaked to the media declared that in May there were five such incidents, when the monthly average was one or two. According to the leaked document, on 20<sup>th</sup> May a British Airways aircraft came head to head at a distance of only two miles with an air ambulance helicopter just before the former proceeded to land at Gibraltar airport. The memo adds that the BA plane accelerated and ascended in order to avoid a collision.

The document also explains that the landing approach manoeuvres into Gibraltar pass very close to the path of the new heliport in Algeciras. Although some of this has been played down locally, it is important to note that the employer of the air traffic controllers, AENA, itself has acknowledged that communication between Seville and Gibraltar forces air traffic controllers to operate in a different way and that in some cases this implies that the security of air operations are difficult to guarantee.

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

“Spain’s national air security agency AESA is on record as having said in April that the present position is difficult to correct because of the political situation surrounding the airport at Gibraltar. This means that, in the final analysis, the position surrounding communications between Seville and Gibraltar and air communications between Gibraltar and Spain in general are far from normal because of the Spanish sovereignty claim.

It will be recalled that two civilian aircraft bound for London were delayed recently as a result of the industrial action taken by air traffic controllers. Nobody has claimed that this action affected Gibraltar airport only, however, it is undeniable that the air traffic controllers would not have picked this issue to try and advance their grievances if the matter had been addressed years ago before any agreement on air travel to and from Spain was entered into. There must surely be recognition that at one point an aircraft is leaving Spanish airspace and entering British Gibraltar airspace in order to make an agreement possible.”