



PRESS RELEASE

No: 251/2016

Date: 24th May 2016

Garcia tells Commonwealth Forum that there is no conflict between being British and being European

The Deputy Chief Minister Dr Joseph Garcia has declared that there is no conflict between being patriotic and British and being European at the same time. He warned that the United Kingdom and Gibraltar risk a period of economic and political limbo if the result of the Referendum on 23 June is to leave the European Union. Dr Garcia was addressing the Commonwealth Forum of the National Liberal Club in London last night while en route to Brussels.

The meeting was chaired by Lord David Chidgey. The distinguished multi-national audience included politicians, diplomats, academics and other interested parties. Long standing friends of Gibraltar like Sir Simon Hughes and Andrew Mackinlay were also present. Interest in the topic from a Gibraltar perspective proved to be considerable with the Lloyd George Room full. This was also reflected in a lively question and answer session at the end.

The Deputy Chief Minister explained the historical background of Gibraltar's accession to the European Economic Community on 1 January 1973 at the same time as the United Kingdom. He stressed the point that the terms of membership that were negotiated in the lead-up to 1973 were agreed at a time when Spain was still ruled by General Franco and outside Europe. "For Gibraltar, the European Economic Community started at the Pyrenees," he said. The situation today would be very different. Spain is already keeping a close watch on the EU Referendum with a view to taking advantage of the situation in order to advance its claim to Gibraltar. If we exit the EU and then wish to come back in to participate in certain areas only, then Madrid will be ready to pounce.

He reminded those present that the Spanish Foreign Minister had already floated the idea of shared sovereignty in the event of Gibraltar wanting to remain in the European Union with the United Kingdom voting to leave. "We rejected shared sovereignty in 2002, we reject it today and we will not give in to blackmail," he declared. Dr Garcia also pointed to the plan to charge a frontier toll which had been floated by the Spanish Foreign Minister in 2013 and which had been scuppered by the European Commission. "European Union law provides a safety net and a degree of protection against the excesses of Madrid," he said.



Dr Garcia explained how a vote in favour of leaving the EU would generate considerable uncertainty until the new relationship between the United Kingdom and the European Union had been negotiated. This process could take many years and it was one where Gibraltar expected that its interests and wishes would be taken into account by the UK Government in the renegotiation. Gibraltar had faced such challenges in the past with the closure of the border and the Ministry of Defence run-down. He said that he was confident that this was a challenge we would overcome but he would rather it did not happen and that the result on 23 June was a vote to remain.

"The people of Gibraltar have voted two times in overwhelming numbers to retain their links with the United Kingdom. We are proudly British and intensely loyal to the Crown. There is no conflict between that and being European at the same time," he concluded, "that message needs to be disseminated more widely in the UK."