



PRESS RELEASE

No: 306/2017

Date: 16th May 2016

GSD IRRESPONSIBLE & WRONG

The public will, once again, have been astounded by the ignorance of the GSD Opposition's opportunistic and amateurish attempts to seek to undermine the Government's position and hard work on the Brexit negotiations.

Mr Feetham does this at the same time as he says he is prepared to work in support of the Government when he thinks that is convenient to him. Another instance of him saying one thing and then doing another.

The GSD has now sought to attack a comment made last week by James Tipping, the Finance Centre Director, in his excellent evidence for Gibraltar before the European Parliament's PANA Committee to the effect that the Gibraltar Government is preparing for a hard Brexit. Mr Feetham, incredibly, describes this as an "about turn" in Government policy. In fact, nothing could be further from the truth.

First of all, Mr Tipping was appearing before an EU Parliament Committee dealing with tax matters, not Brexit. Mr Tipping was there to speak about tax and not to announce any Government policy on any other issue, not least Brexit. The Government has already congratulated Mr Tipping for his brilliant performance before a difficult Committee and the professional way he handled provocative accusations made by the Spanish members of that Committee. Typically, Mr Feetham and the GSD have instead sought to undermine a public officer for their own ends.

Secondly, all that Mr Tipping said was that Government is "planning" for a hard Brexit. Mr Tipping did not say, as Mr Feetham seeks to impute to him, that we are "choosing" or "pursuing" a hard Brexit. In fact, as we have said repeatedly, the Gibraltar Government is obviously carefully planning for all types of Brexit, hard, soft or anything in between, and all the relevant contingencies that could arise as a result. This is nothing new. Indeed, how could it be otherwise? It is the duty of any responsible and prudent Government to prepare for any eventuality, particularly in a matter which is as politically volatile as the Brexit negotiations. The Government has said this on innumerable occasions already. This Government will not assume that Brexit will have one outcome and if that is what the GSD or Mr Feetham think, then they really live in a world of political delusion and fantasy.

In the aftermath of the referendum result, the Gibraltar Government looked at and examined various options as, indeed, the UK Government was doing for the United Kingdom itself. That is



normal and proper in an event of the magnitude of Brexit. Some options have been maintained and others discarded as the debate in London and Brussels has progressed and is progressing, and it would be wrong for the Government not to have acted in this responsible and intellectually rigorous manner.

The Chief Minister, the Hon Fabian Picardo QC MP, said: "The Government has made very clear for a long time now what we seek from the Brexit negotiations. Our strategy was developed in the summer and autumn of 2016 on the basis of a detailed examination of the potential effect of Brexit across the entire Gibraltar economy. The Gibraltar Government's position has been put to the UK Government, has been explained publicly by me in the Gibraltar Parliament, before the European Parliament's influential Committee on Constitutional Affairs, in the evidence provided to both the House of Commons and House of Lords and which I have repeatedly put across to UK Government Ministers. It has also been explained by the Deputy Chief Minister to the Opposition in a private meeting and in the first meeting of the Gibraltar Parliament's Select Committee on Brexit. In that context, I have spoken already of our planning for contingencies and hard Brexit.

"To describe Mr Tipping's comment as an "about turn" is therefore an act of the grossest political recklessness which causes unnecessary and unwelcome uncertainty for business and individuals. Everything that Jimmy Tipping eloquently told the PANA Committee of the European Parliament I have already said publically. Of course we are planning for a hard Brexit, although it is not what we want. We would be attacked by the GSD if we did not "plan for the worst and hope for the best", as we have repeatedly said we are doing. I specifically said that to the Select Committee last week, emphasising what I have said in numerous other fora in Gibraltar and internationally. If Mr Feetham was so concerned by an imagined "about turn", he should have picked up the phone and discussed it with me rather than go on a public frolic of discord and misinformation which does nothing for business confidence in Gibraltar. It is almost as if he is willing Gibraltar to fail so that he can try to take personal political advantage. Brexit is far too important for such playground antics. Gibraltar deserves better from the GSD. It was once a proud Party that has been brought to its intellectual and political knees by Mr Feetham's inability to see beyond his own ambition. The Opposition needs to rise up to the challenge in a mature way, if it can. Unfortunately, since Mr Feetham took over the leadership of the GSD, they issue statements which render them a redundant political joke and not a force for good in our Community."