



PRESS RELEASE

No:176/2018

Date: 21st March 2018

Azopardi not Briefed by GSD Colleagues?

The Chief Minister, the Hon Fabian Picardo QC MP, has reacted to the statements by the current leader of the GSD, Keith Azopardi, in relation to Brexit. Mr Picardo said:

“I am surprised at the things that Mr Azopardi has said. They have no grounding in reality.

First, we have given the GSD – in the Brexit Select Committee briefings – a blow by blow account of what is happening and of what the Government is doing. They are fully aware of everything that is happening. I am left to wonder if the breakdown of the GSD is such that he is not being briefed by the GSD MPs that attend the Select Committee meetings. I call on him to clarify that. If Mr Azopardi is being briefed by his colleagues, then he would know that most of what he said yesterday is untrue. Additionally, in the course of these briefings, we routinely ask GSD and independent colleagues to tell us if they think we should do anything differently or do anything additionally. They have not told us to do so at any one of our meetings, making Mr Azopardi’s statement yesterday all the more misleading.

Secondly, Mr Azopardi will know that I have not agreed to the UK holding bilateral meetings with Spain in relation to Gibraltar. I will never agree to that. The UK is meeting bilaterally with ALL 27 member states. Spain raises the issue of Gibraltar as it has done always at those meetings even when the GSD was in Government. He will know that we have insisted on actual trilateral contact or indeed on direct contact with us. And he will know that the GSLP that I lead and the Liberal Party that Joseph Garcia leads will NEVER agree to any concession on any aspect of sovereignty, jurisdiction or control in any respect. It was only the GSD that in its history agreed at one stage to Brussels talks and indeed, the last meeting of the Brussels process happened when they were in power.

Thirdly, the reality is that this is a complex international issue. We are working closely with the UK but also at the same time putting maximum pressure on the UK Government. Mr Azopardi knows we have lobbied every party in the UK and EU parliaments repeatedly and that we have used all possible mechanisms to up the pressure on the UK. It is disingenious for him to pretend to advise us to do what we are already doing. In fact, it is downright misleading and add this to the many reasons why they will not trust him as a political leader. Just today, Spain has again insisted on the 27 repeating for her once again the chorus that the agreements will not apply to Gibraltar unless Spain agrees they should. The UK position, however, is unwavering and has not changed. We



should expect nothing else from Spain other than the usual blinkered belligerence and an attempt to use Brexit for its own advantage. Surely Mr Azopardi is not so naïve as to think that he would be able to persuade Spain to take a different attitude? If he does believe that, he has a higher estimation of his own ability than anyone else in Gibraltar does.

Fourthly, on the airport, Mr Azopardi knows it was the GSD that entered into the Cordoba Arrangements and he is now defending those. Interestingly, this is a complete volte face and u-turn for him as he sternly criticized the GSD for entering into those agreements when he was the leader of the PDP. It is not clear what position he takes now.

Fifthly, Mr Azopardi seems to have completely misunderstood the draft text. The agreed inclusion of Gibraltar in Article 3 means that all parts of the agreement relate to Gibraltar and our nuanced reality. We are still working for a differentiated solution, and he should be fully aware of that from the briefings we have given his colleagues. Whether we can achieve that or not will be a matter that can only be determined at the end of this fraught process that we did not wish upon ourselves.

Frankly, if Mr Azopardi thinks he knows better than the government on these issues, why didn't he stand for election in 2015? The fact is he has been elected by no one and he thinks he can speak for everyone. In fact, he speaks for no one but for the few hundred people who allegedly supported him in the GSD internal election. The Government needs to get on with dealing with the complex issues that Brexit raises on a daily basis. We will continue to brief the GSD as part of the Select Committee, but we will not be derailed in looking after our future and protecting our sovereignty by Mr Azopardi who seems more intent on giving vent to his ego and dealing with his lack of parliamentary representation, than he does with understanding the serious issues before us today."