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GIBRALTAR'S LEGAL STATUS IS A MATTER OF FACT NOT OPINION

In its proposal for post-Brexit, 'visa-free travel' the European Council has today described Gibraltar as a "colony of the British Crown."

HM Government of Gibraltar is grateful to the Prime Minister for her comment that such a description is "completely unacceptable."

The international legal status of Gibraltar is not a matter of argument, it is a matter of fact. Gibraltar is listed on the list of non-self-governing territories maintained by the United Nations. The Government of Gibraltar and the United Kingdom Government are both on record as having said that Gibraltar should be removed from this list through the exercise of the right to self-determination of the people of Gibraltar. The irony is that it is Spain itself that is keeping Gibraltar on the UN list and then using our presence there to label Gibraltar as a "colony". This demonstrates the importance of annual attendance at the sessions of the C-24 in New York each June, which the GSLP Liberal Government is committed to and which the GSD administration had abandoned.

The use of such language, were it to materialise in the final documents, does not assist the creation a climate of understanding and trust between Gibraltar and Spain as we prepare to leave the EU. In fact, it would achieve the very opposite and serve to engender more conflict as opposed to more cooperation. It is, in any case, totally irrelevant to our departure from the European Union and says more about Spain's anachronistic obsession with Gibraltar than it does about anything else. This is totally out of place in the modern Europe of today.

The Chief Minister, the Hon Fabian Picardo QC said, "No one will be surprised to hear the Spanish government making provocative statements in respect of Gibraltar. The 32,000 people of Gibraltar are used to the constant attempts by successive Spanish governments to bully us in every possible way. This is no different to the sort of abuse we have had from former Spanish administrations. We will continue to welcome over 10,000 Spanish workers who are unable to find employment in Spain into Gibraltar every day. We will continue to work toward demonstrating to Spain that we will not be forced to accept Spanish sovereignty. We will deepen and strengthen our relationship with the United Kingdom, which is a mature relationship of partnership and is no longer colonial in nature, despite Spain's continued insistence that we should remain on the UN list of non-self-governing territories. But what is most important in all this is that we supported the UK's continued membership of the EU by 96% in the referendum and the EU has not supported us at all in the face of Spanish dreams of territorial expansionism."