



## PRESS RELEASE

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### **Over twenty meetings in less than two days in Brussels**

This morning the Chief Minister Fabian Picardo QC and the Deputy Chief Minister Dr Joseph Garcia returned to Gibraltar from an intense round of meetings and engagements in Brussels.

The Chief Minister has reflected on the visit to the European Union Institutions and on the commencement of the short campaign for the Referendum which will take place on the 23rd June.

Mr Picardo said: "I think it is fair to say that our meetings in Brussels this week have been hugely beneficial for Gibraltar. Joseph and I have held twenty two meetings in two days which has been exhausting but exactly what the taxpayer expects from us. Indeed, many times we had to split up and attend different meetings in different buildings given the intense schedule that had been prepared for us by Gibraltar House in Brussels.

It has in my view been a very successful in opportunity to get the Gibraltar message across and to get our MEPs, other MEPs who are influential in relevant committees and relevant Commissioners and Directors General to understand our concerns on a whole range of issues. After its first full year of operations we can start to see the great inroads that the Gibraltar Office in Brussels is making on our collective behalf in the EU Capital.

"Clearly the overwhelmingly dominant topic of discussion was the EU Referendum for reasons which are obvious. The British decision can be felt to be one which is almost as important and seminal for the whole of Europe as it is for the United Kingdom and Gibraltar, whichever way the final result goes on the morning of the 24th June.

"Now that the official 'purdah' period commences, and we are in the final run up to the vote, it is important that whatever side any individual supports everyone uses the last few days left to register to vote or for one of the mechanisms to vote in absentia if necessary. For all sides in the debate and whatever the spread between the choices put to the registered voters, every vote counts in a democracy and a Referendum is no less important in this respect than a General Election. I therefore urge everyone who is eligible to do so to register to vote and to express their views on the question on the ballot paper on the 23rd of June.

"I also want to take this opportunity to apologise to people who want or need to see me as the work required in respect of the Referendum has been, and will no doubt until the 23rd continue to be, unprecedented in my professional and political experience and has not allowed me to see the people I want and need to see. People have personal issues they need



to discuss with me and companies have business issues they need to consider with me and my offices' response time has suffered as a result of the need to make Gibraltar's case and secure our position in the 'pre-purdah' period. It has also not been possible for me to meet Union leaders and members as often as I am usually able to in discharge of my responsibilities as Minister for Industrial Relations. I do not believe that is going to get any easier in the coming weeks before the Referendum and in the immediate aftermath which will immediately lead to a meeting of Parliament for questions and then a slightly delayed Budget Session. I know that most people have understood this, given the extraordinary circumstances of the Referendum and the relevant timetable. Some people will have been disappointed because matters which are personal are hugely important and have not had the attention they would usually have had from me, in particular when they affect issues related to housing or employment where Ministers have been unable to assist beforehand and where my discretion is required to unblock a situation. I understand that and will be ensuring that long overdue meetings are fixed as soon as possible after this period of unprecedented international and national engagements is over. I of course have to thank my office and all my ministers for their support in this period which has as usual never been found wanting and which has enabled me to do the work I have to do for Gibraltar at this important moment in our history.

"I now look forward to entering into the short campaign before the 23rd June in my capacity as leader of the Gibraltar Socialist Labour Party."