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Government Thanks MEPs who Supported Gibraltar

The plenary of the European Parliament today approved the Regulation to provide visa free access for British Citizens into the European Union in the case of a no deal Brexit. This measure includes British Citizens from Gibraltar.

A proposal, brought by a group of over 38 MEPs including South West and Gibraltar MEPs, Julie Girling, Clare Moody, Molly Scott Cato and Julia Reid, to be able to amend the Regulation was supported by 230 MEPs, rejected by 354 and 25 abstained. Although it is not necessarily the case that 230 MEPs would have voted in favour of the Gibraltar amendment had the motion been carried, it can be assumed that all those who wanted to amend the proposal wanted to do so to remove the Gibraltar footnote. This was the only amendment that would have been voted on.

It is important to underline that, during this first vote, 230 MEPs of different nationalities and different political colours voted to reject the language on Gibraltar and re-examine the text of the proposal. This in itself reflects the level of dismay amongst MEPs both with respect to the content of the offending footnote and the manner in which Spain has forcefully hijacked discussions both in Council and the European Parliament. In supporting Gibraltar, it also needs to be said that MEPs defied party lines set by political groups which are heavily influenced by the PP, PSOE and Ciudadanos. The result needs to be seen in this context.

A further proposal from Gibraltar and South West Conservative MEP Ashley Fox to postpone the matter to a future plenary session for a full debate was defeated by 392 to 161 with 28 abstentions.

The Government is very grateful to the 230 MEPs and the 161 MEPs from different political groups and nationalities who voted in this way.

With the first vote having failed, the second vote was not about endorsing the Gibraltar footnote or about defining Gibraltar as a “colony of the British Crown”. Instead, the second vote was a choice. A stark choice between having legislation in place for exit day allowing for visa-free travel or not. Were the proposal to have been rejected the consequences would have been severe as there would have been no parliamentary time to have legislation in place by 12 April. Faced with this choice, and having been bullied into a corner, it would have been difficult for MEPs not to approve the legislation.

The full measure was then adopted without amendments by 502 to 81 against on the basis of its urgency given that the exit of the UK and Gibraltar from the EU would come on 12 April if there is no deal. Even in these circumstances, it is significant to note that 81 MEPs rejected the proposal



because of the Gibraltar footnote. Therefore the large number of MEPs who voted in favour of the final proposal did not vote to endorse or reject the Gibraltar footnote. The vote then became a choice between having a regime allowing for visa-free travel post-Brexit or not.

The plenary vote today follows the approval of the same Regulation in the LIBE Committee of the European Parliament yesterday. The voting lists from the actual Committee vote gives a clearer picture of the shenanigans that took place there. The LIBE Committee usually has one PP MEP and one PSOE MEP. The public record of yesterday's vote shows that six PP MEPs voted and three PSOE MEPs voted. This excludes many other Spanish MEPs who are not on the Committee who were there lined up to vote and actually attempted to have their votes counted. Separately, there were some senior MEPs in the European People's Party who defied the party line during the vote by abstaining from the vote to challenge Chairman Claude Moraes.

Obviously, Spanish media are focusing on today's final vote to adopt the whole proposal and not on the earlier vote to open the proposal to remove the Gibraltar footnote.

The Chief Minister of Her Majesty's Government of Gibraltar Fabian Picardo MP said: "Whilst the result of today's vote is of course disappointing, the Government takes the view that the Spanish Government has lost more during this process than it has won. The underhand tactics deployed by the Spanish Government have infuriated EU policy makers and further exposed Spain's anachronistic obsession with Gibraltar. On the other hand, Gibraltar's modern constitutional relationship with the UK, based on freewill, the democratically expressed wishes of the Gibraltarians and the right to self-determination, remains intact. This will continue to be the case no matter what an EU document may state."