



## PRESS RELEASE

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### **UNELECTED LEADER OF THE GSD IS SO WRONG, IT'S WORRYING**

The tedious statements of the GSD that the Government has not obtained anything enduring for the people of Gibraltar in the Withdrawal Agreement are totally misconceived and based on a deep misunderstanding of the process of negotiation that the United Kingdom has undergone with the EU.

There was nothing enduring to be achieved in the Withdrawal Agreement, which is only concerned with the divorce between the EU and the UK and not an enduring future between them.

The UK has obtained nothing enduring for itself.

Indeed, in the words of Sir Peter Caruana: *"It is really unrealistic for Gibraltar to think that we could be in a better position than the UK and have some negotiated certainty about that for ourselves, when the UK doesn't have it for itself"*.

That is precisely what the unelected Mr Azopardi is being, "unrealistic" and wrong.

Furthermore, in its latest tirade against the Government, the GSD is confusing what is a good or bad deal for the UK and what is good or bad deal for Gibraltar.

These are two entirely separate things.

The failure of the May deal in the Commons last Tuesday is largely for reasons which are uniquely relevant to the UK and which are entirely irrelevant to Gibraltar, notably, the Irish backstop and the consequent potential inability for the UK to get out of a customs union with the EU.

These matters are irrelevant to the people of Gibraltar. The only issue that was relevant to Gibraltar was to be included in any Withdrawal Agreement which the United Kingdom might have the benefit of, together with any transition period agreed; and that these should extend to Gibraltar without conceding on any of our red lines.



**That is what the Government achieved.**

**When the unelected Mr Azopardi saw the text of what was to be agreed, he took issue with none of it and wanted only to change three words.**

It would have been catastrophic for Gibraltar to have been left out of any withdrawal agreement and transitional period. Yet, that is where we started the negotiations with Clause 24 and that is what the Government reversed.

The Government's job was to ensure that it got a good deal for Gibraltar irrespective of whether that deal was good or bad for the UK. Gibraltar's inclusion in the transition period was not just good, it was vital to Gibraltar.

The unelected Mr Azopardi stands alone in thinking otherwise and even elected members of his party have said the opposite.

The Chief Minister has therefore not dug himself (or Gibraltar) in any hole by supporting the Prime Minister's deal. It is the UK that has dug itself in the gravest political and constitutional crisis that it has known in its modern history.

The Government has negotiated long and hard on the only thing that has been on the negotiating table for the last two and half years, the Withdrawal Agreement, and it has obtained a vital success for Gibraltar by being included in that agreement.

To have achieved enduring rights, as the unelected Mr Azopardi suggests, is a fantasy of his distorted and confused mind.

Having supported a second vote or remain (as the majority in Gibraltar, including the Government, wish) during the withdrawal negotiations would have alienated Gibraltar from the UK and would have been bad for Gibraltar. If that is what the unelected Mr Azopardi would have done, it would have kept away from the negotiations for the last two and half years, sitting sulking in a corner, hoping for a second vote or for remain. Let's be serious!

The Government's success in the negotiations is recognised by all, except by the unelected Mr Azopardi. That success is not affected by the current non-acceptance by the Commons of Mrs May's deal. This is recognised and respected by UK Parliamentarians on all sides of the Brexit debate.

In fact, contrary to the latest foolish accusations made by the unelected Mr Azopardi, the Government has not alienated any UK Parliamentarians by siding with May's deal. All have understood that the Chief Minister did so in order to protect Gibraltar's vital interests notwithstanding what his own preferences might have been. All have understood why it was so vital



for Gibraltar to be in the transition period. That has not lead to alienation. Far from it. For over the last two years the Chief Minister and Deputy Chief Minister have travelled incessantly to London, to Brussels and elsewhere in Europe, to lobby the whole political spectrum on the Brexit debate. The Government has held meetings with, and gained the support of, people as diverse as the following UK Parliamentarians that the unelected Mr Azopardi foolishly thinks we have alienated:

- Dominic Grieve MP, a Conservative Rebel and a leading voice of the Remain and Second Vote Campaign against his own Prime Minister;
- Boris Johnson MP, John Redwood MP, Sir David Amess MP, Sir Graham Brady MP, Sir Michael Fallon MP, Sir Bernard Jenkin MP, Sir Hugo Swire MP, Andrew Bigden MP, Maria Caulfield MP, Tracey Crouch MP, Richard Drax MP, James Duddridge MP, Nigel Evans MP, Andrea Jenkyns MP, Craig Mackinlay MP, Stephen Metcalfe MP, Owen Paterson MP, Andrew Rosindell MP, Bob Stewart MP, John Whittingdale MP, all Conservative Parliamentarians and Rebels;
- Sir Keir Starmer MP, the Brexit Spokesman for the Labour Party;
- Emily Thornberry MP, Hilary Benn MP, Tom Watson MP, Jenny Chapman MP, Yvette Cooper MP, Mike Gapes MP, Andrew Gwynne MP, Fabian Hamilton MP, Stephen Hepburn MP, Kevan Jones MP, Clive Lewis MP, Khalid Mahmood MP, Christian Matheson MP, Liz McInnes MP, all Labour UK Parliamentarians;
- Sir Vince Cable MP (Leader of the Liberal Democratic Party), Sir Edward Davey MP, Tom Brake MP, Tim Farron MP, Norman Lamb MP, Jo Swinson MP, all Liberal Democrat UK Parliamentarians;
- Nigel Dodds MP (Deputy Leader of the DUP), Sir Jeffrey Donaldson MP, Emma Little Pengelly MP, Ian Paisley MP, Jim Shannon MP, Sammy Wilson MP, all DUP UK Parliamentarians;
- Ian Blackford MP, Lisa Cameron MP, Joanna Cherry MP, Stephen Gethins MP, Peter Grant MP, Drew Hendry MP, Angus Brendan MacNeil MP, all SNP UK Parliamentarians.

And there are more. All of them voted against the Prime Minister's deal in the Commons last Tuesday. All of them have understood the Chief Minister's strategy. None of them have been alienated. What does the unelected Mr Azopardi think? That this is a playground game?

And the contacts have also been maintained with the Scottish, Welsh and Northern Irish Governments, with Ms Arlene Foster being present here in Gibraltar in our National Day in 2018.



The Chief Minister, Mr Fabian Picardo QC MP stated: “Once again the unelected Mr Azopardi has launched vicious, vacuous and empty accusations at the Government on the Brexit matter. It is disconcerting to see how little he understands about the negotiations, how little he understands what has been achieved, how little analytical skill he possesses. This is politics at its cheapest level. I have said that we have left no stone unturned. ELECTED members of the GSD have recognised this, but not him. Perhaps he has entered the political fray too late and is still in catch up mode. But it is time he did his homework once and for all. Gibraltar deserves better. Gibraltar deserves more responsible opposition. I remain engaged and committed to take Gibraltar to the next phase of the Brexit negotiations, with the benefit of the experience of having led Gibraltar through the first phase. I have achieved what was achievable at this stage of the negotiations and, in doing so, I have alienated nobody. My Government have lobbied incessantly the entire Brexit spectrum in the last two years including many of those who voted against the Prime Minister’s deal last Tuesday. The unelected Mr Azopardi’s position, however, would have alienated him and Gibraltar from many members of the UK parliament, in all political parties and on all sides of the House. That is the reality. Both I and my Government are ready to embrace the next phases of this complex constitutional crisis in the UK. Needless to say, it is not the unelected Mr Azopardi’s fatuous comments that will deter me”.