

CUSTOMS UNION AND VAT

It would be a sensible starting point for Jack Straw to discuss with the Gibraltar Government their views on these two topics. It appears that there is a strong case for resolving these tax anomalies, which they clearly are. But the final decision must lie with the Government of Gibraltar.

JOINT SOVEREIGNTY

Whilst in Madrid I raised with the Spanish Minister for Europe the question of how independent would the Gibraltarians be following agreement on a form of For joint sovereignty. The Spanish regions all have different levels of autonomy with some having a little, others a lot. The reply was that Gibraltar would be more independent than any other region within Spain.

I would not like to see any reduction in Gibraltar's current level of independence and the level of self-determination that they currently enjoy. By that I mean the self-determination that exists on a day to day running of Gibraltar.

We will have to see the small print of the eventual Agreement of Principles. Today sovereignty within the European Union is largely symbolic and so joint sovereignty will hardly make any difference at all

FINANCE CENTRE

I have no problem with Gibraltar's role as a Finance Centre; such havens are not anathema to New Labour. The MOD expenditure had to be replaced and what better than a strong, healthy, transparent, well regulated Finance Centre. I was impressed by Peter Caruana's answers when he gave evidence before the Foreign Affairs Select Committee.

SINGLE SKIES

The fact that the EU land frontier starts at Europa Point but the air frontier begins at the border is ridiculous and is just another example of the unreasonableness of the Spanish Government. The Spanish Government's position held up for a considerable time the implementation of a safer skies within the EU.

This also illustrates why it is in the best interests of the three governments to resolve the Gibraltar problem. I wish Jack Straw and Peter Hain well in the future rounds of talks and hope that the matter can be resolved and that normalisation can return to all outstanding issues. Alas the airport problems seems insurmountable unless they can be resolved within the Brussels Process.

AIR AND SEA RESTRICTIONS

This course of action is clearly not in the best interests of Spain. It is not the behaviour expected of a EU partner and NATO ally and clearly does nothing to win the hearts and minds of the Gibraltarians.

THE BASE

As Spain is a fellow member of NATO, I have no problem with their forces using the military facilities on the Rock. But the United Kingdom cannot share military intelligence gathered from Gibraltar. The United Kingdom does not share its intelligence with any country other than the United States. Perhaps the American Government will help to resolve some of the outstanding defence issues.

RESTRICTIONS

I think that one of the most effective ways to move forward over the Gibraltar problem is for the Spanish Government to completely change its attitude towards the Gibraltarians. They must start to woo and be nice to them instead of just using the stick. I think that the Spanish Government knows all too well that the Gibraltarians, as of today, are not going to sign up to anything that is agreed at the Brussels Process talks. But that is not to say that the United Kingdom Government should not try to reach an Agreement of Principles. In the end such an Agreement will have to be put to the people of Gibraltar. I was pleased that Peter Hain, when he came before the Foreign Affairs Committee was most explicit on this. It is now up to the Spanish Government, even at this late stage, to start to be pleasant to the Gibraltarians.

THE FUTURE

If there is an agreement on joint sovereignty then it will require amendment to the Treaty of Utrecht. I hope that the Treaty cannot be amended or abolished without the agreement of both the United Kingdom and Spanish Parliaments. This is one of the prizes of the current talks; a modernisation or amendment of the Treaty of Utrecht.

FINAL THOUGHTS

I wish your readers and the Gibraltarians well. I want to assure them that politicians like myself wish to see the Gibraltar problem resolved. There is a wish for the United Kingdom and Spanish Governments to reach an agreement over the Gibraltar problem with the consent of the Gibraltarians. The current talks are not about betraying the Gibraltarians. I would never vote in the House of Commons for a bill handing over the sovereignty of Gibraltar to the Spanish Government.