

The price of NO

It is during tough times when you realise who your real friends are. It was in 1984 when Gibraltar extended European Community rights to Spanish citizens working on the Rock, two years ahead of Spain, which joined the European Economic Community in 1986. At what price? The full opening of the border between Spain and Gibraltar that dictator Francisco Franco had closed in 1969.

Today, when Gibraltar is facing the exit from the European Union (EU) following the Brexit referendum – which 96% of Gibraltarians opposed – Spain, through its acting Foreign Minister, José Manuel García-Margallo, is offering us the chance to remain part of the EU. He offers this as if it were a coveted prize: unblocking of the European legislation which is not being applied at present in Gibraltar, guarantees as to the functioning of our financial centre – regulating it as it is today – offering Spanish citizenship to any British citizens who may want it, etc.

But at what price? Mr. Margallo's price is that the Gibraltarians accept joint Spanish-British sovereignty over Gibraltar, something that was rejected by the people of Gibraltar in 2002 when it was proposed by a previous PP Government.

Anybody familiar with the so-called "*contencioso*", knows that requesting the people of Gibraltar, whom I represent, to give up being exclusively British, is to ask that we surrender. And what would the consequences be of rejecting this offer? Mr. Margallo's script – following a full term in office replete with affronts, insults and attempts at institutional and economic strangulation, not to mention the border – is now free of threats and more amiable. But thanks to his previous statements, we know what the real price of rejecting his offer would be. Among others, he has warned us that "Not accepting co-sovereignty is bad for business ... it's very cold outside the EU" or that they could close the border as it "is an external border, so there are no restrictions...there is no free movement, you can close the *verja*", according to Margallo's own words.

On knowing what the real consequences of our rejection would be, we, the Gibraltarians, believe that we are faced with a genuine case of coercion. Either we give up our almost unanimous desire to remain exclusively British, or we along with the thousands of Spanish workers, the whole of Gibraltar and the whole of the Campo de Gibraltar leave ourselves open to the consequences of the blackmail Mr. Margallo has laid before us.

If we didn't want to be Spanish before, imagine what we feel now, when instead of a friend we face someone who is rubbing their hands, looming over our little nation and our small area of land.

That's why, and now more so than ever, the Spanish flag is even further away from flying over the Rock. In the meantime, we will not respond to threats, veiled or explicit, but will remain firmly committed to good neighbourliness, coexistence and to jointly harnessing the huge opportunities of all types of cooperation between Gibraltar and the Campo de Gibraltar, as evidenced at the Tripartite Forum for Dialogue and as desired by the people of Gibraltar and the Campo de Gibraltar themselves.

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