

## MEPs representing Gibraltar have slammed Spanish 'last minute political posturing' over the Brexit withdrawal agreement

Written by Martin Banks on 23 November 2018 in News  
News

Attack comes as UK Prime Minister Theresa May is due to sign off on the deal at a special summit in Brussels on Sunday.



**Gibraltar** | Photo credit: Fotolia

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The row over Gibraltar and its post-Brexit role has partly overshadowed the run up to Sunday's summit where May and leaders of the other 27 member states aim to finally sign off on the withdrawal agreement and associated political declaration.

Spain has demanded last-minute changes to the agreement, unless it gets assurances over the British Overseas Territory, although no one country can block the withdrawal agreement on its own at this

stage.

Spanish prime minister Pedro Sanchez struck a combative note in a tweet, saying: "After my conversation with Theresa May, our positions remain far away.... If there are no changes, we will veto Brexit."

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Spain does not have a veto on the Brexit deal, but it is thought unlikely that the 26 other EU member states would want to adopt the withdrawal agreement and political declaration, published on Thursday, without Madrid's support.

On Friday, Molly Scott Cato, a Greens MEP for South West England and Gibraltar, entered the fray, telling this site: 'It has been clear since the referendum that the decision to leave the European Union has left the people I represent in Gibraltar especially vulnerable. Spain asserted its power at the beginning of the negotiations and has now made another aggressive move again towards their end.'

She added, "With so little detail about the future relationship between the UK and EU - and none of it legally enforceable - I am not reassured that Gibraltarians have the security they deserve. The best path for the people of Gibraltar - and, I believe, all the people of the UK - is to hold a People's Vote and to reverse the destructive decision to leave the EU."

Further comment came from Conservative MEP Ashley Fox, who also represents Gibraltar and told the Parliament Magazine, "I suspect this last minute political posturing from Madrid is more a response to domestic pressure than a serious attempt to change the withdrawal agreement."

"The best path for the people of Gibraltar - and, I believe, all the people of the UK - is to hold a People's Vote and to reverse the destructive decision to leave the EU" **Molly Scott Cato MEP**

"Nevertheless, it is unhelpful and contrasts with the constructive bilateral talks of recent months. "For the avoidance of doubt, the UK will insist that Gibraltar is included in negotiations on the future relationship."

## STOP THE CLOCK

The MEPs' comments come after Marco Aguiriano, Spain's secretary of state for the EU, said on Thursday that his government could "stop the clock" on the negotiations and force May and the other EU leaders to come back in December unless it gets its way.

Madrid has accused the UK of introducing a clause into the withdrawal agreement that would ensure Gibraltar was covered by a future trade deal negotiated with Brussels.

But Aguiriano said: "We're worried because this paragraph, which was introduced almost treacherously and under the cover of darkness, could be used by the UK in the future to argue that a future agreement between the EU and the UK could be applied to Gibraltar without necessarily requiring the prior agreement of Spain.

"The minutes that run through the night and into the hours of the early morning really count as the European council anticipates finishing its business. Or the clock could even be stopped and another European council could be called. That's nothing extraordinary or surprising; in fact, it's even fairly usual.

"I suspect this last minute political posturing from Madrid is more a response to domestic pressure than a serious attempt to change the withdrawal agreement" **Ashley Fox MEP**

"This government ... has shown very clearly what its position is: it will not agree to the withdrawal deal and the future declaration on Sunday if the question I have already outlined in great detail is not clarified."

## **EU UNITY**

The Gibraltar row comes after the UK and the EU reached an agreement earlier this week on a draft text of the 'Political Declaration' for their future relationship.

The 26-page document expands on the shorter 'Outline Political Declaration' published alongside the draft Withdrawal Agreement last week, and aims to establish "the parameters of an ambitious, broad, deep and flexible partnership across trade and economic cooperation, law enforcement and criminal justice, foreign policy, security and defence and wider areas of cooperation."

The future relationship, it adds, must "be consistent with the Union's principles, in particular with respect to the integrity of the single market and the Customs Union and the indivisibility of the four freedoms," while also "respecting the result of the 2016 referendum including with regard to the development of its independent trade policy and the ending of free movement of people."

European Council President, Donald Tusk said that the deal "has been agreed at negotiators' level and agreed in principle at political level, subject to the endorsement of the leaders."

Separately, after meeting May in London on Thursday, Austrian Chancellor Sebastian Kurz said, "We are trying our best as [the EU Council] presidency to keep the unity of the EU27."

"Rather than go through all this pain, the decision on whether we still want to leave the EU should be put back into the public's hands through a people's vote" **Catherine Stihler MEP**

"There are some issues now regarding Gibraltar with Spain, but I hope that we can keep the unity among the 27. And I hope that we will be able to finalise the Brexit and make sure there will be a strong cooperation between the UK and the European Union afterwards."

## **FISH FIGHT**

Meanwhile, Catherine Stihler, Labour MEP for Scotland and vice-chair of the European Parliament's internal market and consumer protection committee, has highlighted a less publicised last minute issue ahead of Sunday's summit, that of fishing rights.

She said, "This Brexit deal is a lose-lose situation for the UK and the EU. If no fisheries agreement is struck by 2020, EU boats will not have access to our waters – but at the same time, we will not have access to the EU markets for our most important catches.

"There is no such thing as a good Brexit deal, but any hope of securing a lasting relationship hinges on the UK dropping its red lines on freedom of movement, allowing our economy to grow in the process."

Stihler added, "But rather than go through all this pain, the decision on whether we still want to leave the EU should be put back into the public's hands through a people's vote."

### **About the author**

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