

Claude Moraes 'removed' as spokesperson for Brexit visa waiver report

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News

Senior Labour MEP Claude Moraes has hit out after he was "removed" as spokesperson for an upcoming parliamentary legislative report on the Brexit visa waiver file.



Claude Moraes | *Photo credit: European Parliament Audiovisual*

The draft laws form part of the EU's no-deal Brexit preparations, and the European Commission has proposed a tweak to existing visa legislation to allow British travellers to benefit from visa travel.

However, on the insistence of the Spanish government, EU Member States added a footnote in the legislation referring to Gibraltar as a 'Colony of the British Crown'.

After a meeting, Parliament's two largest two groups took the decision to strip Claude Moraes of his

responsibility for the legislation.

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Moraes said he believes this was done because he was “standing up” for the rights of UK and EU citizens to continue to enjoy visa-free travel in the event of Brexit.

Moraes, who is chair of Parliament’s civil liberties, justice and home affairs committee (LIBE), said, “I have been removed from the Brexit visa waiver file following a request from the highest decision-making body in Parliament.”

“This is because I stood up to clear manipulation of this important and added-value law for UK citizens and citizens across the EU27.”

“With this new law, UK citizens and the EU27 would not require visas in the event of Brexit - with or without a deal.”

“I think it is sad that this attempt to remove me has been preceded by huge pressure from Spanish politicians and press. I hope I have been able to stand up to this bullying, both for the integrity of Parliament’s procedures and the integrity of the position of Gibraltar” **Claude Moraes MEP**

He added, “I was not prepared to see Spain hold this file hostage in the European Council with an addition that described Gibraltar legally as a 'colony'. This was a misuse of our legislative duties.”

“As committee chair, I was appointed as the rapporteur of the file unanimously by coordinators as the file was considered institutional, not political.”

“In committee, a number of amendments were tabled but no amendments on Gibraltar, and the report was adopted in LIBE by unanimity with 53 votes in favour and none against, and all Spanish members present voted for the parliamentary text.”

“During the various trilogues - meetings between Parliament, Council and the Commission - I have submitted alternative wording which mentions Gibraltar which would be acceptable both to Spain and the UK, and some of this wording has even been used in very recent Brexit legislation.”

“Despite all the various compromise proposals from us we have been met with something of a brick wall from Council due, we believe, to Spain lobbying hard for the maintenance of the word “colony” in the footnote.”

“At all times, I have not acted as a British rapporteur but as an independent chair of the LIBE committee, defending the position of Parliament and understanding the fact that there was no legal requirement for the footnote to be added by Council, but also understanding the tense political situation surrounding the general election in Spain.”

“I have done everything possible to suggest alternative wording which still mentions Gibraltar in the footnote.”

“He [Tajani] spearheaded the meeting of Parliament’s political factions that saw the largest two groups take the decision to strip Moraes of his responsibility for the legislation” **Ashley Fox MEP**

“I think it is sad that this attempt to remove me has been preceded by huge pressure from Spanish politicians and press. I hope I have been able to stand up to this bullying, both for the integrity of Parliament’s procedures and the integrity of the position of Gibraltar, which had nothing to do with this visa waiver file.”

Further criticism of the decision came from UK Conservative delegation leader and MEP for Gibraltar Ashley Fox.

He branded it as “further unnecessary posturing from Spain and their MEPs.”

Fox also criticised Parliament’s President, Antonio Tajani, who, he said, “took the unprecedented step of intervening in the matter.”

Fox said, “He [Tajani] spearheaded the meeting of Parliament’s political factions that saw the largest two groups take the decision to strip Moraes of his responsibility for the legislation.”

“Gibraltar is part of the British family, and part of it by choice. What should have been a technical measure has been jeopardised by Spain’s incessant and baseless posturing.”

“Parliament’s President has shown real weakness in allowing himself to be brow beaten by Spanish MEPs, whose parties are in full campaign mode with elections coming. He should know better and stay out of it,” Fox added.

The draft laws, with the footnote on Gibraltar, will now be voted on again by the whole Parliament before entering into law, in the event that the UK leaves the EU without a deal.

About the author

Martin Banks is a senior reporter at The Parliament Magazine

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