



What about Spain's own reef-laying programme?

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http://www.panorama.gi/localnews/headlines.php?action=view_article&article=10755&offset=0

The conservative Spanish daily newspaper ABC has been proudly headlining the findings of a survey by the Real Instituto Elcano that shows that 90 per cent of Spaniards are against Gibraltar. Of course such a conclusion is pure nonsense.

Are the Catalans against us? No. Are the Basques against us? No. However the Spanish Government has won the propaganda war in Spain, which is only to be expected given the slanderous outpourings of the PP politicians and populist media. Even so suggesting that 90 per cent of Spaniards give us the thumbs down is pure nonsense. Certainly in the rest of the world Gibraltar is miles ahead.

We do have to accept though that Spaniards as a nation have been brought up to believe that Gibraltar is Spanish. It is not something they think about but it is there. Just as they believe the Basque region is Spanish, Cataluña is Spanish and the North African enclaves are Spanish.

Of course as the mouth piece of the Partido Popular and all conservative thinking right of centre in Spain ABC has to peddle these conclusions for all they are worth. So to be told that 90 per cent of Spaniards are seriously or very seriously concerned over the placing of the blocks of concrete to form the reef or our alleged tolerance of tobacco smuggling and money laundering is understandable but not believable. Ninety per cent of PP supporters, maybe.

Is ABC suggesting that just 10 per cent of those questioned are just concerned, not concerned, not concerned at all or couldn't care a toss? Hardly likely. Also if you asked Spaniards during the height of the crisis in August as the Real Instituto Elcano did – do you view the situation around the placing of the reef as serious – then serious of what? Was it a serious action by the Gibraltar Government? Is it a serious conflict that has arisen? Well 100 per cent of Gibraltarians would have agreed with that latter question! Where is the question about Spain's own reef laying programme? Deep beneath the sea by all accounts.

Even ABC then has to return to a sense of reality. Sixty per cent of Spaniards took a serious view of British Navy warships sailing to Gibraltar and 48 per cent the presence of a British military base here. I said in the week this crisis first broke that the colour photograph of HMS Illustrious on the front page of ABC and all Spanish national



newspapers, which in turn were carried on TV, did go against us at a time when we'd run rings around Madrid. However it would seem that 52 per cent of Spaniards did not have a serious concern over a British base in Gibraltar: the majority.

Interestingly 60 per cent of Spaniards are against any barriers being established against Britons who live in Spain or who can live in Spain whilst 46 per cent of Spaniards are against the boycotting of British goods. On that basis 54 per cent presumably favour such a boycott. I wonder how ABC will explain these findings to the British tourists who are the mainstay of Spain's tourism industry and the Britons that Madrid is very anxious to invest in property there.

Despite ABC's xenophobia against Britain and Gibraltar it finally has to admit that 48 per cent of Spaniards want Gibraltar Español, which means the majority do not.

Finally the institute questioned Britons in the UK and reports only 48 per cent supported British Sovereignty over Gibraltar, 17 per cent thought shared sovereignty would be acceptable and 10 per cent believed the Rock should be Spanish.

Even if true I do not find those figures alarming. Britain is central to Gibraltarians lives: there is not a Gibraltarian who does not relate to the UK in some way or other. Spain is our neighbour and the Gibraltar Español dogma was instilled in to the population by Franco and continues under the PP. In contrast the UK is 1,000 miles away, a multi-ethnic country, and a nation where I have to admit a large proportion of the people either have hardly heard of Gibraltar or let's be frank, not at all. It certainly does not impact on their daily lives.

For older Britons it will because of Empire, Commonwealth and the War. Likewise for British Britons. Yet for immigrant families and young people in general it will not even be on their radar. Put it this way, Gibraltar is not a major talking point on the Clapham omnibus whilst it might be on the Madrid autobús.

Our institutional links with Britain are strong. Gibraltar has the support of all major political parties and hence all UK Governments. We share the same Monarch so all that is sound. We should feel secure in our Britishness and secure in the knowledge that Britain is 100 per cent on our site. We just have to accept a Rock of 30,000 people is not the trending topic in Bradford nor even likely to be so but the fortunes of the Indian cricket team might be. And anyway when was the last time you discussed Bradford with your neighbour?

In the meantime we shall leave the Spaniards to their lies, damned lies and statistics and prepare to celebrate being Gibraltarian at our National Day.

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