

## Most Spaniards back tough line on Gibraltar: poll

2 de septiembre de 2013. **Business Recorder.com.**  
<http://www.brecorder.com/business-a-economy/189/1227487/>

Most Spaniards back Madrid's new tough stance against Gibraltar and nearly one in two would favour closing Spanish airspace to flights to and from the disputed British territory, a poll released Sunday showed. Fully 62.8 percent of those surveyed said the right-leaning Spanish government's current pressure on Gibraltar was "good" or "very good", the poll by the Real Instituto Elcano think-tank showed.

Madrid disputes Britain's three centuries of sovereignty over Gibraltar, a territory on the southern tip of Spain which measures just 6.8 square kilometres (2.6 square miles) and is home to about 30,000 people. The latest tensions between Madrid and London over the outpost began in July after Gibraltar boats dumped blocks of concrete into the sea near the territory. Gibraltar said it was creating an artificial reef that would foster fish populations.

Spain said the reef would block its fishing boats and introduced stringent border checks which it said are needed to stop smuggling, creating waits of several hours for motorists trying to enter the tiny territory.

Last month Spanish Foreign Minister Jose Manuel Garcia-Margallo said Spain was mulling a 50-euro fee to enter or leave Gibraltar, tax investigations of thousands of Gibraltarians who own property in Spain, and the closure of its airspace to planes heading to or leaving the airport in the British outpost.

"The party is over," he said in a front page interview with conservative daily newspaper ABC in what was seen as a reference to the previous Socialist government's softer stance on the British outpost.

Nearly one in two Spaniards, 48.1 percent, said they would support "very much" or "quite a lot" the closure of Spain's airspace to flights to and from Gibraltar while 46.2 percent said they backed closing Spain's border with Gibraltar.

Spain closed the frontier crossing with Gibraltar in 1969 under the dictatorship of General Francisco Franco. It was fully reopened only in 1985.

The strong backing for Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy's stance on Gibraltar comes as support for his conservative Popular Party has been hurt by a slush fund scandal that has tainted top party members, and the government's failure to revive the economy.

Gibraltar Chief Minister Fabian Picardo has accused the Spanish government of seeking to distract attention from the corruption scandal and the weak economy with its hard line.

The survey also found that while 78.5 percent of Britons consider Gibraltar to be British, fully 70.4 percent of Spaniards consider the territory to be Spanish.

But 65.7 percent of Britons said they would be "somewhat" or "not at all" concerned if Gibraltar were to become Spanish territory after they were reminded that in 1997 Britain transferred the sovereignty of Hong Kong to China.

"It is evident that the more favourable reaction to Spanish sovereignty is the result of reminding respondents of the precedent of handing over Hong Kong to China, thereby qualifying their answers," the think-tank said.

"Under these conditions, the prospect of decolonisation does not appear to be so traumatic."

The survey of 1,010 people in Spain and 1,001 people in Britain was carried out August 21-26.

Gibraltar overlooks the only entrance to the Mediterranean from the Atlantic Ocean. Its economy is dominated by off-shore banking, Internet gambling operations and tourism.

Spain ceded Gibraltar to Britain in perpetuity in 1713 but has long argued that it should be returned to Spanish sovereignty. London says it will not do so against the wishes of Gibraltarians, who are staunchly pro-British.

Agence France-Presse