

UK and Spain strike 'historic' deal over Gibraltar's future and borders

Level 2: Intermediate

1 Warmer

a. Look at the image of Gibraltar and discuss these questions.



1. Which countries are the closest to Gibraltar?
2. Why might people in Gibraltar want to travel to Spain or from Spain to Gibraltar?
3. Why is free movement so important for the economics of Europe?

2 Key words

a. Match the correct word to each definition. Then find and highlight them in the article to read them in context.

agreement

deal

residence

barrier

dispute

Schengen

bilateral

guaranteed

self-governing

breakthrough

mirror

sovereignty

clause

shadow foreign secretary

surrendering

1. a big and important discovery or success _____
2. controlling its own government without help from others _____
3. giving up control or power to someone else _____

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4. involving two groups, especially two countries _____
5. something that stops or makes it difficult for people to do something _____
6. the British politician from the opposition party who is responsible for dealing with other countries _____
7. to have identical features to something else _____
8. the power of a country to control its own laws _____
9. the place where someone lives _____
10. a general promise or decision made by a number of people or groups _____
11. a group of European countries that were part of an agreement allowing their citizens to travel freely without borders _____
12. describes a promise that something will definitely happen or be done _____
13. a serious argument or disagreement _____
14. a single part of a legal document or contract _____
15. an arrangement or agreement between people or groups _____

b. Complete the sentences with words from the previous activity. You may have to change the form of the word.

1. The three countries signed a(n) _____ to reduce pollution.
2. Language was a significant _____ between the tourists and the locals.
3. The two national leaders had a(n) _____ meeting to discuss trade.
4. Looking at the results, the scientists knew they made a(n) _____ in cancer research.
5. There is a special _____ in the contract that lets you cancel at any time.
6. The tree was between the gardens, so the neighbours made a(n) _____ to share the fruit.

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7. After the divorce, the couple had a horrible _____ over where the kids would live.
8. You are _____ to get your money back within a 30-day period.
9. They will open a second shop, and the design will _____ the original exactly.
10. The _____ disagrees intensely with the government's position on Europe.
11. Having lived in Madrid for five years, she got permanent _____ in Spain.
12. He loves travelling in Europe because it's easy to move between the _____ countries.
13. There will be a vote to allow each state in the country to be _____.
14. Many people voted to reduce European control and protect the _____ of the UK.
15. After _____, the bank robbers walked out of the bank to meet the police.

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People to be able to move across land border with no checks, and airport to have Eurostar-style dual border checks

Eleni Courea, Jennifer Rankin and Sam Jones
11 June, 2025

- 1 The UK and Spain have struck a "historic" deal over Gibraltar's future, ending the long-running dispute over the territory after Brexit and easing the movement of people and goods across the border with Spain.
- 2 The deal will lead to the introduction of Eurostar-style dual passport checks at Gibraltar's airport and eliminate checks on people and goods crossing the land border between Spain and Gibraltar.
- 3 The agreement does not affect Britain's sovereignty over Gibraltar, and the Foreign Office said it included a clause to this effect agreed by all sides. However, it will apply Schengen rules to Britons arriving in Gibraltar who are not resident there. This means they could be turned away at the border if they have already spent 90 days in the Schengen zone over a 180-day period.
- 4 David Lammy, the UK foreign secretary, said the breakthrough delivered "a practical solution after years of uncertainty" and that the UK's commitment to Gibraltar "remains as solid as the Rock itself". José Manuel Albares, the Spanish foreign affairs minister, and Fabian Picardo, the chief minister of Gibraltar, hailed it as a "historic agreement".
- 5 An estimated 15,000 people cross the land border every day, including thousands of workers who live in Spain but work in Gibraltar. At present, Gibraltar residents can cross using residence cards without having their passports stamped, and Spanish citizens can cross using a government ID card. The deal aims to prevent a hard border from being imposed under new EU rules.
- 6 The agreement establishes a system where British and Spanish border officers will carry out passport checks at Gibraltar's port and airport. This will mirror the system in place for Eurostar travellers at St Pancras station, where travellers go through British and French passport control before boarding trains to the continent.
- 7 Spanish border police, based at Gibraltar's port and airport, could refuse access to a UK citizen who has broken Schengen rules, such as staying longer than 90 days during a 180-day period without a visa.
- 8 At a press conference in Brussels on Wednesday afternoon, Albares hailed the agreement as a new beginning in relations between Spain and the UK that brought down "the last wall" on the continent. "With this agreement, the barrier will disappear. That's the last wall on continental Europe, and we will guarantee free movement of persons and goods. Gibraltar will be linked to the Schengen area, and Spain will control entry and exit," he said.
- 9 UK prime minister Keir Starmer spoke with Picardo to congratulate him. No 10 added: "Both leaders also agreed that this development unlocks huge opportunity to advance the bilateral relationship between the UK and Spain, on behalf of the British and Spanish people."
- 10 Priti Patel, the UK's shadow foreign secretary, said: "Gibraltar is British, and given Labour's record of surrendering our territory and paying for the privilege, we will be reviewing carefully all the details of any agreement that is reached."
- 11 Gibraltar is a British overseas territory on the southern tip of the Iberian peninsula. It has been ruled by Britain since 1713 but is self-governing in all areas except defence and foreign policy. Spain claims sovereignty over the territory, but Gibraltar's 1969 constitution states there can be no transfer of sovereignty to Spain against the wishes of locals. In a 2002 referendum, 99 per cent of people in Gibraltar rejected a proposal to share sovereignty with Spain.

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3 Comprehension check

a. Answer the questions using information from the article.

1. Why is the new agreement between the UK and Spain significant?
2. What system will be introduced at Gibraltar's airport as part of the agreement?
3. How long can people stay in a Schengen zone, and how will this affect British citizens arriving in Gibraltar?
4. Why did the UK foreign secretary David Lammy say the agreement was as 'solid as the Rock itself'?
5. How many people cross the Gibraltar-Spain land border daily?
6. Which current system is similar to the new passport check system in Gibraltar?
7. Why did the Spanish foreign affairs minister José Manuel Albares describe the agreement as removing 'the last wall'?
8. Why did the shadow foreign secretary say it was important to review the agreement?
9. Who controls the government of Gibraltar: the UK or Gibraltar?
10. What prevents Spain from controlling the laws of Gibraltar?

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4 Key language

- a. Use the words in the box to complete the reported speech version of the direct speech from the article. Use those sentences to choose the correct options in the rules for reported speech

had delivered
remained

unlocked
would be reviewing

would disappear

Direct speech	Reported speech
David Lammy, the UK foreign secretary, said the breakthrough delivered "a practical solution after years of uncertainty".	1. He said that the breakthrough _____ a practical solution after years of uncertainty.
The UK's commitment to Gibraltar "remains as solid as the Rock itself".	2. He said that the UK's commitment to Gibraltar _____ as solid as the Rock itself.
"With this agreement, the barrier will disappear."	3. He said that the barrier _____ with the agreement.
"Both leaders also agreed that this development unlocks huge opportunity to advance the bilateral relationship between the UK and Spain".	4. They said that this development _____ huge opportunity to advance the bilateral relationship between the UK and Spain.
"We will be reviewing carefully all the details of any agreement that is reached."	5. They said they _____ carefully all the details of any agreement.

Rules of reported speech

- When changing from direct speech to reported speech, you move the tense **back / forward**, e.g. from present simple to past simple.
- Modal verbs also change tense, e.g. from *can* to *could* or from *will* to **would / should**.
- Other words, such as subject pronouns (*we*, *they*, *he* and **her / she**) and words that identify time or location (e.g. *this* and *that*) also change.

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b. Change the direct speech into reported speech.

1. 'The UK and Spain have signed an agreement to make travel easier at the Gibraltar border.'
2. 'The UK and Spain will continue to work on this bilateral relationship.'
3. 'The agreement includes a clause that says the UK still owns Gibraltar.'
4. 'The two countries made a deal to control the border together.'
5. 'The Gibraltar airport checks were mirrored on the system at Eurostar stations.'
6. 'People with residence in Gibraltar can cross the border more easily.'
7. 'Gibraltar is self-governing, but the UK controls its defence and foreign policy.'
8. 'We are worried that the UK is surrendering too much control to Spain.'

c. Ask two classmates for their opinion of the article. Then report what they said.

5 Discussion

a. Discuss these statements.

- Countries should only have control of territories that are within their own national borders.
- National sovereignty is more important than allowing people to travel freely without borders.
- National identity should not be limited to the country you are born in or live in; for example, people could identify as English despite never having lived there.

6 In your own words

a. List the arguments for protecting national sovereignty and the arguments for free borders. Use these questions to guide your ideas.

- What would be the effect of Spain having sovereignty over Gibraltar?
- 99 per cent of the people of Gibraltar want to stay British. Should the opinion of the people of Gibraltar be the most important factor?
- How does staying under British control affect the ability of Gibraltar to decide on things like defence and foreign policy?

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- How do free borders improve the lives of workers and the national and regional economy?
 - Why does the relaxing of border controls help countries such as the UK and Spain work together more peacefully?
 - To what extent does having free borders show that we all live in an increasingly interconnected world?
- b. **Hold a debate. One group represents the views of the UK shadow foreign secretary and wants to protect the sovereignty of the UK over Gibraltar. The other group represents the views of the UK foreign secretary and wants to open the borders of Gibraltar. Debate the arguments in favour of your views. Here are some phrases to help you during the debate.**
- *In my opinion, ...*
 - *In my view, ...*
 - *What I mean is ...*
 - *What I'm saying is ...*
 - *I agree / disagree ...*
 - *Yes, I agree up to a point. However ...*
 - *Well, you have a point there, but ...*
 - *I'm not so sure about that.*
 - *I don't think so!*