

If you want to move to Spain, take care

Although the Spanish government has been one of the main recipients of EU money, it seems less interested in accepting the principals behind the union.

The quiet backwater of Santa Margarida in the Bay of Roses is the latest to suffer the blight of Spanish government land grabs. The canals of Santa Margarida were dug out by private money from the mosquito-ridden swamp which characterized the area. Since then, the properties bordering the canals have been developed and cared for by the owners, who were acting entirely within the law as it then applied. Properties have been bought and sold legally, with appropriate taxes paid to the Spanish authorities.

In the course of last year, the Madrid government re-drew the “coastline” to include all the properties bordering the canals. They then announced that under the Ley da Costa, all those properties are subject to the rules of the coast including that a 6 metre strip from the water’s edge belongs to the state. The moorings which have been established at private expense will revert to the state. The present owners can apply to use them until 2018, but will be charged for the “improvement” of the canals. Estimates of about 9 million euros have been quoted.

Former Thames tug skipper John Scott is one of the british owners affected. He is about to celebrate his 80th birthday, and has lived by the canal for almost 30 years. “When I first came here with my wife and children, it was a swamp and we were the only house”, he says. “I grafted all my life to get this place. We did everything legally, paid our taxes as property owners and supported the local economy. Now the government is changing the goal posts. It’s our money that made this place what it is, and Madrid is stealing it. What’s the point of the EU if it doesn’t protect its citizens?”

An international grouping of property owners is fighting the change, and the local mayoress is also making a legal challenge to change the coast-line back again and

have the canals recategorised as a marina, but meanwhile the properties are unsaleable and the owners are in fear.