

Spain: new flanks in the fight against ETA

by Elizabeth Hellenbroich

Since the cold-blooded murder of 29-year-old Miguel Antonio Blanco, mayor of Ermua, Spain, by an ETA commando on July 12, a “political phase change” has occurred in Spanish society. For the first time since ETA’s founding, several million Spaniards went out into the streets to demonstrate against ETA and its political backers, demanding from the government harsher measures against ETA. “Enough! Down with ETA and Herri Batasuna,” were the slogans in the demonstrations. Across the country, a united front has begun to develop among the people, the political parties, the trade unions, the government, and the King. The message that President José María Aznar, Interior Minister Manuel Oreja, as well as King Juan Carlos I delivered was: The Spanish people will not tolerate ETA. We will take the necessary measures to isolate Herri Batasuna, the political arm of ETA.

ETA was founded in 1959 at the Jesuit-run Deusto University in the Basque country, and is one of the most violent terrorist organizations in the world. It has a radical ethnic-separatist profile, and it functions as a “mother” for all international terrorist organizations. With hundreds of Etarras still today living in clandestinity in Ibero-America—Cuba, Mexico, Venezuela, Nicaragua, and so on—today’s narco-terrorist operations in Ibero-America are all very much interconnected with ETA and Herri Batasuna. Among these are the Mexican Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN) in Mexico (from July 23 to Aug. 3, Zapatista envoys sent by Subcommander Marcos were the focus of attention at the Second International Conference Against Neo-Liberalism in Madrid, a conference whose sole purpose was to spread the support networks for the EZLN in Europe), as well as the FARC and ELN in Colombia, and the MRTA in Peru. These international connections in turn lend the narco-terrorist guerrillas logistical and ideological support. For example, according to the Spanish daily *ABC* on July 21, there are up to 130 Etarras living in Mexico, 39 of whom are sought by Spanish authorities. Most of them, according to *ABC*, live undercover as tourist guides or restaurant owners in states including Guanajuato, Toluca, Jalisco, Guerrero, and Queretaro.

Three flanks

The Spanish government, in response to the recent ETA murder, has been conducting its fight against terrorism essentially along three flanks:

First, the government is making use of the mass protests, to break the “controlled environment” and the climate of terror by politically isolating Herri Batasuna, while simultaneously exploiting all existing legal measures against them. In October, 25 leading members of Herri Batasuna will be tried by Spanish judicial authorities for having actively supported an armed gang, ETA.

Herri Batasuna, indeed, is ETA’s main political base, with 25 mayors out of 254 in the Basque country (concentrated in the countryside) and a base of 100,000 voters. Herri Batasuna’s main response to the social mass ferment against ETA, has been to call its members for “counter-demonstrations,” which often provoke violent incidents, while simultaneously attacking the government for its harsh policy against the 600 imprisoned ETA members. The more the resistance grows in Spanish society, the more desperately Herri Batasuna tries to intimidate and terrorize the Basque population, as was shown in late August, when the press reported that Herri Batasuna has been deploying its “Intifada,” the youth group KAS, which is close to ETA, which went around in various Basque cities, vandalizing and attacking mostly Civil Guard posts, while a letter containing a death threat was sent to the mayor of Pamplona by ETA, telling him to either leave within 30 days or be killed.

In the context of mounting social resistance against ETA and Herri Batasuna, a precedent-setting case to successfully isolate Herri Batasuna was set into motion by the city council of the Basque city of Mondragon. Here, as result of a vote of no-confidence initiated by all the democratic parties against the mayor, who belongs to Herri Batasuna, the latter was voted out of office and replaced by a member of the Basque National Party, José María Loiti. There are other cities where similar steps are being taken. Yet, in this context, it is also noteworthy that the Spanish communist party, Izquierda Unida (United Left), in reaction to the move in Mondragon, launched a huge campaign: The chairman of IU, Julio Anguita, compared the Spanish government’s anti-terror fight, in particular its strategy to politically isolate Herri Batasuna, with the Nazi Holocaust against the Jews.

ETA’s narco-terrorist connections

The second significant flank in the anti-terror fight is the investigation into ETA’s narco-terrorist connections. In early August, the leading Spanish dailies *El País* and *El Mundo* reported that the Spanish government would investigate ETA for its possible links to the drug trade. For the first time ever, leading members of the government began talking publicly about the possible links of ETA and narco-terrorism. President María Aznar declared in front of the press that ETA and Herri Batasuna are financed through the drug trade. The chairman of the Interior Committee of the Popular Party in Parliament, Ignacio Gil Lázaro, was quoted in the press, saying: “ETA is nothing but a criminal organization. It should be of no surprise if ETA has connections to the drug trade and

to money-laundering operations from the drug business of organized crime.”

Civil Guard chief Santiago López Valdivieso stated that the drug trade could be one of the sources out of which ETA finances itself, while the official in the Financial Guard who is responsible for the investigation of money laundering, Javier Alberto Zaragoza, said, during a conference in Escorial, that connections between ETA and the drug trade would be very probable: “The channels for money laundry of illegal origin like the drug trade and terrorism are the same.” According to the *El Mundo*, Spanish authorities are investigating Colombian Carlos Florentini Fernandez (whose origin is Spanish), who was arrested in Spain in 1996 and is a key figure in the drug-money-laundry business, and his connections to ETA member Emilio Arrizabalaga Ruiz Azua, arrested in June after Spanish police launched a spectacular operation to free José Antonio Ortega Lara, who had been held hostage by ETA for two years. What is being investigated are 14 real estate firms which were used by Arrizabalaga for dirty-money-laundry operations.

International cooperation

A third flank in the government’s anti-terror fight is intensification of international cooperation: A significant upgrading occurred in cooperation between France and Spain after

the 16th Hispano-French summit in July, as well as between Spain and Ibero-America. It is widely known that France, where approximately 60 ETA members (among them leading figures of ETA) live underground in the Pyrenees and the Bretagne, where ETA enjoys a large support network of sympathizers, is being used as a logistical base for ETA operations. In August, two leading ETA members who were responsible for the logistics and information department of ETA, were extradited from France to Spain. The Dominican Republic extradited three former leading ETA members to Spain: Eugenio Etxebeste (alias Antxon), who in 1989 had conducted “negotiations” between ETA and the Spanish government in Algiers (as a result of which several dozen ETA members were deported to Ibero-America); Ignacio Aracama (alias Makario); and José María Gantxegi (alias Peuio). With this extradition, a “channel of negotiation” between ETA and the Spanish government was finally closed.

The public outcry could mark the beginning of the end of ETA. But, this will only be the case if the resistance of Spanish society against ETA and Herri Batasuna persists, and the government continues its harsh stance, by bringing to the fore ETA’s international narco-terrorist connections and by naming the names of those oligarchical forces that deploy ETA against NATO’s southern flank.

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