

ETA, A TERRORIST ORGANISATION WITHIN A DEMOCRATIC SOCIETY

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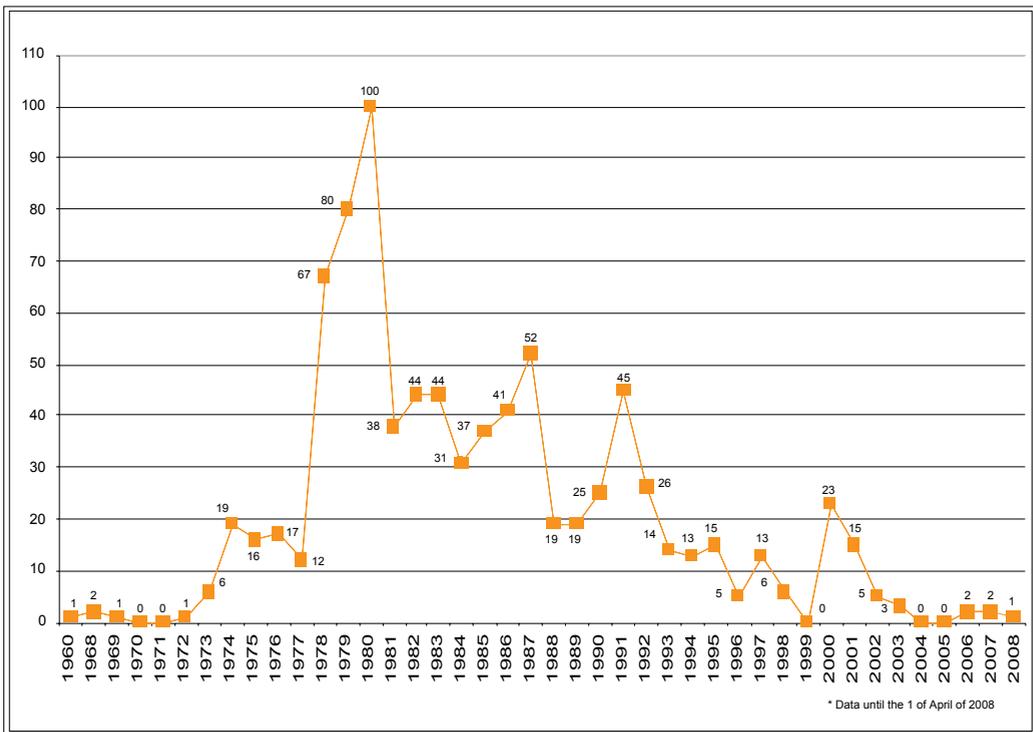
Summary

ETA was created in 1958 with the final aim of obtaining independence for the Basque Country and Navarre. The use of violence soon became their main instrument for public actions. The paradox of this organisation is that its violent activities multiplied exponentially after General Franco's death and the establishment of democracy. Between 1958 and 1977 – when the first free elections were held in Spain, ETA killed 75 people. Between 1978 to today ETA has assassinated 785 people. Since the beginning of democracy in Spain, ETA has had a political branch, first called Herri Batasuna and later Batasuna. For nearly twenty-five years this party operated in legality, in equal conditions with the rest of democratic parties. Batasuna was illegalised in 2003. Despite its propaganda insisting on the search for negotiations, ETA has refused to search for dialogued solutions. All the Spanish governments from 1977 to 2007, regardless of their political inclinations, have tried to attain the end of violence through conversations with ETA, but all attempts have failed. In the mid-1990s ETA designed a terrorist strategy to attack political and social representatives of groups contrary to independence for the Basque country, with the final aim of leaving these groups voiceless. ETA still represents a serious threat for people in the Basque Country and in the rest of Spain. ETA is the main source of violations of fundamental rights, from the right to live to the right to freedom of expression, political association or participation in public life.

ETA's victims in dictatorship and democracy

ETA (Euskadi ta Askatasuna, Basque Homeland and Freedom) was created at the end of 1958, at the height of the Franco dictatorship, with the final aim of obtaining independence for the Basque Country and Navarre, and the separation of those territories from Spain. The use of violence soon became their main instrument for public actions. Various branches, looking to act through political channels, emerged from ETA's main base, reducing ETA to an organisation which called itself "military" and was characterised by the exclusive use of terrorist violence.

MORTAL VICTIMS OF ETA 1960-2008



The paradox of this organisation is that its violent activities multiplied exponentially after Franco's death and the establishment of democracy in Spain, with the protection of citizens' rights and liberties in conditions similar to those of any other European country with a long history of democracy.

In the twenty-nine years between the creation of ETA and 1977 – when the first free elections were held in Spain, the organisation killed a total of 75 people. In

the three decades from 1978 to the present, that figure has grown ten-fold to 785 people assassinated.

In the crucial years of the transition - from 1978 to 1980, when the construction of a democratic system in Spain was at stake - ETA intensified its terrorist activities and became a threat for all citizens, endangering the very viability of a regime of liberties. In those three years alone, attacks by ETA took the lives of 247 people and injured 359 more, causing considerable political tension.

ETA rejected the citizen-approved democratic framework, the Constitution of 1978 and the Statutes of Autonomy of the Basque Country of 1979, which, in addition to establishing a system of liberties, also gave rise to an autonomic system for the Basque Country endowing regional authorities with faculties exceeding those, for example, of the German "Länder". These two legal texts were approved by public referendum, but both have been rejected by ETA with violence since then.

The history of ETA under democracy is a combination of attacks against members of the security and military forces, and other terrorist actions against the general population, both Basques and from other parts of Spain. On occasion those attacks have been completely indiscriminate, like the car bomb placed at a Barcelona shopping mall in June 1987, causing the death of 21 employees and customers.

Batasuna: ETA's political branch

Virtually since the beginning of democracy in Spain, ETA has had a political branch, a party initially called Herri Batasuna (Popular Unity) and later just Batasuna (Unity). For nearly twenty-five years - from 1978 to the end of 2002 - this party has operated in legality, in equal conditions with democratic parties. It has been allowed to present candidates for election and to have representation in all areas of power: in municipal governments and local institutions, in the autonomic parliament and in national parliamentary assemblies.

For many years, democrats trusted that the presence of the political branch of ETA in public institutions would draw the armed group towards disarmament and an acceptance of peaceful channels. While legal, the political branch of ETA had the same opportunities as other parties and led various municipal governments, in accordance with the votes obtained.

However, rather than acting as a factor to bring the armed group towards peace, the political branch has always been a puppet for ETA, which has set the guidelines and taken the most important decisions for Batasuna. The Basque Country has experienced the parapolitical phenomenon seen in Colombia, in which a terrorist

organisation uses force to sponsor friendly political representatives, while assassinating members of rival parties and intimidating the population with its attacks and threats.

In 2002 HB-Batasuna's organic dependence upon ETA, together with certain other indications of a criminal nature, led the Spanish Justice system to declare precautionary suspension of activities for the party, which was finally illegalised in 2003.

ETA's rejection to dialogued solutions

One of the peculiarities of ETA during its thirty years acting against the democratic system has been its refusal to search for dialogued solutions, despite its propaganda insisting on the search for negotiations. All the Spanish governments from 1977 to 2007, regardless of their political inclinations, have tried to attain the end of violence through conversations with ETA, but all attempts have failed. The most recent was that by the current president of the Government, José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, who between 2005 and 2007 was in talks with ETA, accompanied by the governments of other countries and by international mediators.

The cause of all these failures has always been the same: ETA's refusal to renounce its maximum demands, consisting of the integration of Navarre in the Basque Country – despite the fact that the former's population has overwhelmingly opted for non-nationalist parties, election after election – and a subsequent referendum for self-determination in order to obtain independence for these Spanish territories. In a second stage, ETA's strategy is to separate three Basque-French territories from the French Republic and join them with the Basque Country and Navarre to form what they call "Euskal Herria". ETA's intention is to forcibly change the borders of two long-standing European states, France and Spain, and to bring about a new country which has never existed as an independent nation.

To achieve this objective, ETA has to overcome not only resistance from Spain and France, but also active rejection from great part of the population of the Basque Country and Navarre.

Terrorist strategy against political opposition

To silence that population hostile to independence, in the mid-1990s ETA designed a terrorist strategy attacking the political and social leaders of that group, leaving them voiceless.

For more than a decade, ETA has been using a double network of violence to attach non-nationalist politicians, university professors, journalists or intellectuals who are public references for that part of the population which opposes breaking ties with Spain. On the one hand, ETA uses urban guerrilla or street violence groups to carry out actions including arson, the use of homemade artefacts, the destruction of property, threats and physical aggressions against members of the Socialist party (PSOE) and the Partido Popular (PP), and against the properties and businesses of their family members. These groups use non-lethal violence with a high degree of intimidation against political adversaries.

The second network of violence used is that involving ETA's armed cells, which since 1995 have assassinated or injured numerous public representatives of the aforementioned parties, as well as party members without public positions, journalists or leaders of opinion among the non-nationalist part of Basque society. The sectarian violence of ETA has caused the death of dozens of people in the last thirteen years – the most recent on 7 March 2008, in Mondragón, where the former socialist representative Isaías Carrasco was killed – and has led many more to flee the Basque Country to avoid being a target for attack. Thousands of Basque citizens have preferred to live elsewhere in Spain to avoid the threat of terrorism. The paradoxical situation has arisen where hundreds of members of the Basque Autonomous Police Force - the Ertzaintza, created under the Statutes of Autonomy of 1979 – are living outside the Basque Country to guarantee their safety and that of their families. Those agents live in neighbouring communities like Navarre, La Rioja, Burgos, Cantabria and even in French territory, travelling daily from their place of residence to work at Ertzaintza headquarters.

This generalised threat has led hundreds of non-nationalist politicians and party members to live under the protection of police agents, not leaving their houses without a bodyguard. The Basque Country has become a space without precedent in the world: it is the only territory in which all members of the opposition have to live under police protection to avoid being killed by an insurgent group, while members of the party which has been in power for thirty years - the PNV (Basque Nationalist Party) have no problems with security because they shares ETA's aspirations for secession.

ETA is still a serious threat

ETA's leadership, arsenals and hideouts are in French territory. For a long time the French Government held a non-belligerent stance, tolerating ETA's presence in exchange for not attacking France and not promoting nationalism in the French Basque Country. This gave ETA a safe retreat just twenty kilometres from San Sebastian, where it was not sought out by the police and could organise itself

without interference. In France, ETA trained its activists, extorted Spanish business people, harboured its members hiding from the Spanish justice system, and planned attacks and all other activities.

This has given ETA better conditions to survive and to carry out its terrorist activities than any other similar group in Europe. Fortunately, the passivity of the French authorities has changed over time and Paris now collaborates satisfactorily with Madrid in the fight against terrorism.

This collaboration has permitted a reduction in ETA's activities, with a drop in the number of attacks and assassinations, and has further impeded and restricted its operations.

Nevertheless, ETA still represents a serious threat for people in the Basque Country and in the rest of Spain. ETA is the main source of violations of fundamental rights, from the right to live to the right to freedom of expression, political association, participation in public life, etc. ETA's activities in the last thirteen years, in addition to assassinations, include the systematic persecution of political adversaries, making it very difficult for parties like the PP or the PSOE to do politics in the Basque Country. Fourteen members of the PP and twelve of the Socialist Party have been killed by ETA.

Additionally, ETA wields a permanent threat over the media critical with nationalism, which also represents a major restriction to the right to free expression and information. Numerous journalists and heads of news agencies have to live under police protection. Two Basque journalists have been killed by ETA, as has a media executive, and various others have been the target of attacks in which they have been injured or escaped unscathed.