

# Basque separatist ETA blamed for explosions in Madrid

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The Basque separatist organisation ETA (Euskadi Ta Askatasuna) has been blamed for the planting of two bombs in Madrid yesterday morning.

Both bombs exploded south of central Madrid, in a district where many military personnel live. The first bomb, which was planted in the car of Army Lieutenant Colonel Pedro Antonio Blanco García, exploded in Pizarra Street just after 8am (local time). Said to have been triggered by remote control, it detonated as Blanco García stood beside his car. His body was thrown into the air, landing 12 meters away. He could only be identified by a card with his name that was found on his body. Blanco García worked in the Technical Secretariat of Economic Affairs at the Territorial Headquarters. Four other people were injured, including a 13-year-old girl.

The second bomb, planted in a stolen car with false number plates 150 meters away, exploded 50 minutes later. It caused no further casualties. Two hours after the blasts, police shot and killed a man near the scene. A police spokesman said the victim was a "local criminal" who had been trying to steal a car, and that the incident was unrelated to the blasts.

Spain's leading politicians immediately blamed ETA for the bombings, although at the time of writing the organisation has yet to admit responsibility. Should they do so, it would be their first armed act since they ended their 14-month cease-fire on November 29 last year. ETA had first announced the unilateral cease-fire on September 16 1998, after reaching a pact with the Basque nationalist parties and the Communist Party-led Izquierda Unida. It described the cease-fire as a gesture in support of a political solution to the Basque conflict. It hoped this might lead to its political wing, Herri Batasuna, being accepted into the fold of mainstream politics and a share of power, similar to the Good

Friday Agreement reached in Ireland with Sinn Fein.

The right-wing Spanish government of José María Aznar and his Popular Party (PP) rejected ETA's demands and continued the repressive police actions against the group, counting on the revulsion that ETA's previous indiscriminate bombings have provoked in the majority of the Spanish population. ETA is held responsible for causing 800 deaths during its 30-year fight.

Friday's bomb blasts came just four days after Aznar had called a general election for March 12 and had pledged to make his opposition to the Basque separatists a central issue of his campaign. The government said that they had anticipated an ETA attack in the run-up to the election. Speaking after the bombing, PP Secretary-General Javier Arenas said, "We warned this would happen. We will never, never give in to blackmail by terrorists.... Those who doubted what ETA planned to do now have their answer."

The opposition Spanish Socialist Workers Party (PSOE) supported the government's hard-line stance, while criticising their lack of initiatives to politically unite the main parties against the separatists. The first politician quoted on the Internet condemning the bombing was the new PSOE general secretary and presidency candidate Joaquín Almunia. He called for an "active unity of the democrats" after the bombing, and said terrorism should be left out of the electoral debate "so we can all appear united during the campaign".

The political establishment should be united in its reaction, Almunia continued, "giving a lead to a society which is absolutely against violence, assassinations and the madness of those very few who try to impose their ideas with bombs and pistols".

*See Also:*

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