

# Spain and France plan joint offensive against Basque separatist ETA

Vicky Short  
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France and Spain recently held discussions aimed at strengthening their collaboration in pursuit of the Basque separatist organisation ETA. The meeting took place at the end of a bilateral summit in Santander, Spain, prior to France's presidency of the European Union starting in July.

In the words of Spanish Prime Minister José María Aznar, the object of such collaboration was “not only to weaken ETA, but to advance towards its eradication”. French President Jacques Chirac offered Spain his “total collaboration, without any reservations”, while Prime Minister Lionel Jospin said he was prepared to study Spain's proposals to improve cooperation both in terms of policing and in law. These proposals include that the French government dedicates more resources to the fight against ETA and that the existing joint police teams are increased and strengthened. Spain is also requesting that its security forces be allowed to take part in the interrogation of ETA members arrested in France, in the belief that Spanish “experts” would be able to extract more information about the organisation and plans of the separatists.

This year, the French government has arrested 13 alleged members of ETA. In 1999 the total was 31.

Following the March 12 general elections, which the right-wing Popular Party (PP) won with an overall majority, Prime Minister Aznar has intensified his government's offensive against ETA. He has sought to build a consensus among the other political parties and achieve an international recognition for his campaign to eradicate the organisation.

ETA is seeking the independence of the Basque region and the establishment of Euskal Herria—a region on both sides of the Pyrenees frontier between Spain and France. The French government's attacks on social conditions and the welfare state, together with

disillusionment with the traditional workers organisations in France, the Communist Party, Socialist Party and the trade unions, is creating the conditions where social discontent is being pushed into the dead end of Basque nationalism.

French Minister of the Interior Jean Pierre Chevenement spoke harshly of the “young radicals in the French Basque country who are beginning to imitate the violent practices of their fellow supporters in Spain”. This refers to the activities of a new youth organisation, Haika, which was established last month. It is a merger between Jarrai, the youth section of Herri Batasuna—the political wing of ETA—and Gazteriak, its equivalent in the French Basque region. They present themselves as “the independent, socialist, revolutionary and internationalist Basque youth” and are alleged to have carried out violent actions in each other's neighbour countries.

In September 1998, ETA called a unilateral truce after reaching an agreement with the moderate Basque nationalist parties and Stalinist-led United Left (IU) for a political settlement that would include Herri Batasuna (HB). However, frustrated by 14 months of fruitless negotiations, ETA announced an end to its cease-fire in November 1999. Since then, four people have been killed in three bomb attacks: Lieutenant Colonel Pedro Garcia Blanco in Madrid last January; Socialist Party member Fernando Buesa and his body guard in Vitoria in February; and José Luis López de la Calle, a cofounder of United Left since turned journalist for the right-wing newspaper *El Mundo*, in Andoain (Guipúzcoa) in early in May.

Having failed to achieve power sharing in a bourgeois government, like their role model in Ireland the IRA, ETA has returned to the very methods they discarded as hopeless in 1998 after years when terrorist violence

proved unsuccessful in achieving greater economic and political independence from Spain's central government.

In the March 12 elections, the PP received the second highest vote in the Basque country, partly due to ETA's call for a boycott and partly because of opposition to violence. ETA attempted to persuade the more moderate nationalists and IU not to take part in the elections. In the event, the votes for the nationalists as a whole went down from 55 percent in 1998 to 38 percent in March 2000. The PP is now boasting that soon it may be possible for the leader of the Basque Parliament to be a member of their party, something once considered unthinkable.

The return of ETA to terrorism and the results of the general elections have blown apart their agreement with the moderate nationalist parties in the *Pacto de Lizarra*. It has also caused rifts between HB and its coalition platform Euskal Herritarrok (EH) over what ETA should now do. This is reflected in the political instability of all the official institutions in the Basque country. EH refuses to attend parliamentary sessions, thus reducing the strength of the nationalists vis-à-vis the other parties. Last week's session ended up in mayhem, with deputies expelled and the rest hurling insults and swearing at each other.

ETA has also begun a campaign of violence against the PSE, the Basque wing of the Socialist Party (PSOE), believed to have as its objective preventing a coalition forming against ETA. The General Secretary of the PSE has put forward the basis for a pact between themselves and the PP, to which the government reacted favourably. A government spokesman declared that the “most important thing” in the socialists' proposals is to “let ETA and even the PNV [moderate Basque Nationalist Party] know that whoever is in government, PP or PSOE, the constitutional framework will not be altered.”

All parties are intent on isolating the PNV—former government partners with the PP—to pressurise it until it definitively breaks the agreement with ETA's political wing, something it is reluctant to do since it would mean an end to Basque nationalist unity. This is already under strain after ETA published minutes of a meeting between ETA, PNV and EA (Eusko Alkartasuna—a split from the PNV), something the PNV had always denied.



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