

## Spanish Minister rejects torture accusations and threatens legal action against critics

[Barcelona 4/03/03, by Jaume Clotet](#)

The accusations by Martxelo Otamendi (Euskaldunon Egunkaria's director) of torture for five days while in jail have provoked a wave of anger both among Spanish government officials and in the ranks of the conservative Popular Party. Interior minister, Angel Acebes, has been appointed by his cabinet colleagues to publicly reject the accusations, a task he is pursuing vigorously.

In the last few days, Acebes has frequently rejected any investigation or enquiry into the case, arguing that the paramilitary Civil Guard is a 'fully democratic force' that does not torture its prisoners. Moreover, Acebes threatened legal action 'not only to those who lie but also to those who believe these accusations' and attributed the media impact of Otamendi's accusations to the fact that 'he is a journalist'.

A very different reaction came yesterday from Pasqual Maragall, former mayor of Barcelona and leader of the Catalan socialists. In a speech to some journalism students at Ramon Llull University, Barcelona, he said that: 'At a personal level' he believed that Martxelo Otamendi was tortured by the Civil Guard paramilitary corps. Moreover, he said that initially he did not really believe those accusations until he listened to Otamendi's accusations on a radio station interview'. At that moment Maragall said, 'I had the impression that he was telling the truth'. According to him the closure of Euskaldunon Egunkaria is a 'very serious case' and he urged the judge to 'resolve the situation as soon as possible'.

Other political parties, especially in Catalonia and the Basque country, commented on Otamendi's accusations and asked the Spanish government to take action. Basque Nationalist Party (PNV) congressman Iñaki Anasagasti rejected the Interior Minister's warnings and said that, in the next few days, he will bring the issue up in the Spanish Chamber in order to request an official inquiry by the Minister.(EL)