

Egunkaria managers to be charged for making accusations of torture

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Following last week's threat of legal action the Spanish Minister of the Interior, Angel Acebes, has decided to charge Euskaldunon Egunkaria's director Martxelo Otamendi and three other Egunkaria managers over their accusations of torture while in prison. In addition, Spanish judge Juan del Olmo at the Audiencia National court ordered that the paper remain closed for six months.

All four have accused the paramilitary Civil Guard of torture following their arrest at the end of February, an accusation the Spanish Government has refused to investigate. Along with Otamendi, the Ministry has also accused Xabier Alegria, Xabier Oleaga, and Ignacio Uria.

According to Acebes, the four of them 'committed a crime' when they made their accusations, a crime which could be considered as that of 'collaboration with an armed gang'.

The Minister also accused the four of following instructions from ETA alleging that in the event of arrest they were instructed to accuse the Spanish police of torture.

Basque Government spokesman Josu Jon Imaz rejected the Spanish Interior Minister's decision saying that: 'What he should do is investigate the alleged tortures because, if as he says, they did not take place, then the investigation will prove that, so he has nothing to be scared of.'

Imaz added that: 'What one cannot do is to confront an accusation of torture with a judicial case'. However, Imaz refused to comment on the Basque Government's opinion regarding the credibility of Otamendi and his colleagues only insisting that an investigation should take place.

A spokesperson from Egunkaria's substitute newspaper Egunero told Eurolang that: 'A decision like this was expected, we can expect all kinds of things from the Spanish Government, even absurd decisions like this one'. They added that their lawyers will deal with the new accusations but that they did not have much confidence in Spanish justice. They also expressed their concern at the lack of coverage of the matter in the European media.

Eurolang contacted the Ministry of the Interior who said that they had nothing to add to Minister Acebes announcement.

Martxelo Otamendi was in Barcelona on Monday talking about the situation of Egunkaria and his own experiences in jail at an event organised by Catalan journalists. Earlier, responding to the Minister's charges he said: 'I won't retract what I have said: I was tortured. I know it is not easy to prove that I have been tortured because nobody is tortured in broad daylight in the middle of Bilbao high street. However, I want to denounce it for the sake of my own dignity as an individual, and for the other tortured people's dignity'.

Later Otamendi spoke to hundreds of people gathered at Santa Maria del Pi church in the old part of Barcelona. This event was organised by several civic organisations, along with the NGO Ciemen. He continues today with a visit to Girona.