

## Basque journalists seek justice and solidarity in Brussels

### *Periodistas vascos buscan justicia y solidaridad en Bruselas*

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Journalists from the Basque language newspaper Egunkaria along with the Basque Nationalist Party (PNV) MEP Josu Ortuondo Larrea, Green / EFA MEP Frassoni and Plaid Cymru MEP Eurig Wyn, spoke today at the European Parliament calling for justice after the forced closure of Egunkaria and the subsequent arrests and reports of torture.

Speaking to the press journalist Jose Mari Pastor of Egunkaria's international section said: 'We have come to the heart of the democratic Europe to condemn what has happened. The arrests are an attack on Basque democracy. It is incredible that this can happen in an EU member State.'

He added that while the Bilbao office had been closed down the Bayonne office, in the northern Basque country and administered by the French State, was open. 'This office has not been closed down because it couldn't happen in France with her tradition of democracy. The arrests and torture stand as a threat to basic human rights and freedoms.' The journalists will be conducting more meetings with other international institutions in the next few days.

Speaking to EuroLang Pastor said: 'There are still five journalists being held, I don't know when they will be released. They know the accusations against them. They are in jail, some of them have been tortured. There have been accusations that Martxelo (Otamundi) is lying but who should I believe - my friend and colleague or the Spanish Minister of the Interior? Spain as a democracy says that torture doesn't exist there but we know that it does.'

'This chapter has shown that human rights legislation in the EU is just symbolic, it is unbelievable that this can happen in the EU.'

Pastor stated that according to the Spanish government 'Egunkaria was dead.' However, he added: 'In one month we hope to normalize production of Egunkaria as a daily paper.'

PNV MEP Jose Ortuondo said that: 'I've always rejected terrorism and the use of violence.' Referring to Egunkaria he said that: 'Democratic freedoms were being threatened by a centralist state' and that it underlined the need for Euskadi to have more powers devolved. He added that while the EU institutions were unable to take action directly it would be possible to bring the matter to the Human Rights Court at Strasbourg. Green MEP Monica Frassoni added that she would raise an 'urgent question' in Parliament.

Welsh MEP Eurig Wyn added his solidarity, stating: 'Obviously press rights and freedoms have been infringed. If this were to happen in Wales there would be outcry if a Welsh language newspaper was closed. I would like to add my support to the Basque journalists over what is a clear infringement of international justice.' He added that the journalists could present a petition to raise the matter in the European Parliament.

The Spanish Minister for the Interior meanwhile, has been vigorously rejecting any accusations of torture (see News in Brief 4/3/03). (EL)