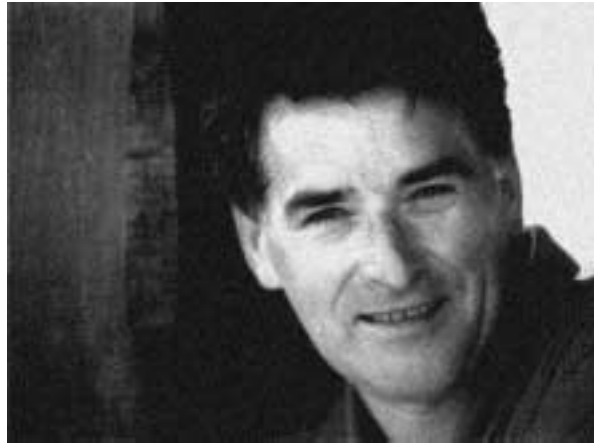


# The Egunkaria Six

On February 20, the Spanish paramilitary police, the Civil Guard, shut down Egunkaria, the first and only newspaper in the world written entirely in the Basque language. Ten members of its staff or former staff, including the paper's editor Martxelo Otamendi, were arrested and held incommunicado for five days. Afterwards, when four of them were released on bail, they denounced that some of the detainees had been tortured by the Spanish Police, who wanted to force them to admit that they and the paper itself had links with the armed pro-Basque independence organisation ETA.

Six are still in prison, among them some distinguished Basque journalists, writers and intellectuals. Here is a brief profile of these prisoners, the Egunkaria six.

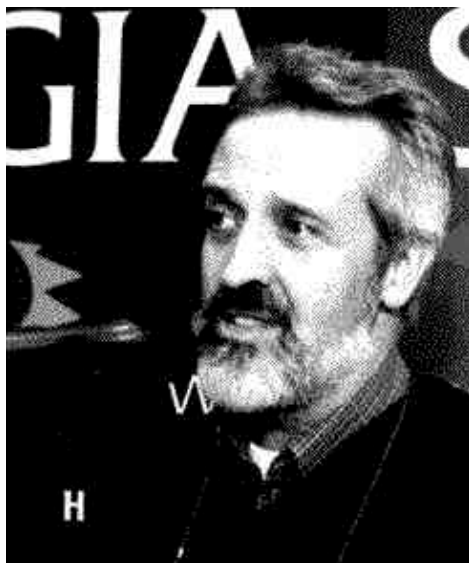
## Joan Mari Torreal dai



Torreal dai is chairman of the board of directors of Egunkaria. He is the editor of *Jakin* (To Know), a journal on contemporary thought and philosophy, and is author of many works that are a point of reference for pieces of research into Basque culture. In 1977 he published *Euskal Idazleak Gaur* (Basque Writers Today), and twenty years later *Euskal Kultura Orain* (Basque Culture Today), two works that are essential to know about 20th Century Basque literature. He obtained a degree in Social Studies in Paris, and a doctorate in sociology from Bilbao, with a thesis on censorship under Franco’s dictatorship. He was born in Foru (Biscay) –where the town’s cultural centre bears his name— in 1942. He and his wife have two children.

In 1998 he published *El Libro Negro del Euskara* (The Basque Language’s Black Book), a historical review of the attacks suffered by the language and the laws issued against it since the Spanish and French states were formed. Ironically enough, he has become a victim of one of those attacks in the end. After being released, his colleagues declared Torreal dai had been “dreadfully beaten up” by his torturers.

## Txema Auzmendi



This 55-year-old man became a catholic priest in 1978, after having been awarded a PhD from the Jesuit University of Deustu. He obtained a doctorate in ethics from a German university, with a thesis on the rights of minority groups. He worked as a teacher in many schools and faculties in the Basque Country. He was one of the founders of Egunkaria in 1990. At that time he was working as a journalist for Herri Irratia, a radio station owned by the Society of Jesus. From his microphone he has always highlighted social concerns and given a voice to the marginalized and NGOs. When he was arrested he was deputy director of Herri Irratia.

## Iñaki Uria



Iñaki Uria was born in Zarautz (Gipuzkoa) 42 years ago. He started a PhD in Medicine, but soon afterwards gave up his studies to start working in favour of the Basque language and culture. His first job as a journalist was in 1980, with the Susa literary magazine. Two years later, he moved to the revamped Argia magazine (The Light). This weekly —originally called Zeruko Argia (The Light of Heaven)— had been created by the Catholic Church long ago, but was languishing and needed fresh blood to modernise it. Uria took part in the project along with Joxemi Zumalabe, Pello Zubiria, Josu Landa, Joxemari Ostolaza and Jon Barandiaran. The first three years of the magazine were very hard, and none of the journalists could live on Argia's salaries. Uria had to work as a Basque teacher and translator, and used his free time to write for Argia.

By the end of the 80's Argia was well established, and Uria and some of the other members of the weekly moved on to a more ambitious project: the creation of a daily newspaper in the Basque language. In December 1990, Euskaldunon Egunkaria's first issue was on the press stands. Uria was the vice-editor and took charge of the opinion section. In 1992, he became editor after Pello Zubiria went back to work for Argia, and a year later, after the death of Joxemi Zumalabe, he took over as representative of the Board of Directors, a post which he currently holds.

## **Xabier Alegria**



Before starting a political career in Basque pro-independence organisations, Xabier Alegria worked as a Basque teacher in AEK (Basque language schools for adults) and later became head of AEK in the province of Araba (Alava in Spanish). In 1995, he was elected member of the Provincial Parliament in Gipuzkoa and in 1999 local councillor in Lezo (Gipuzkoa), where he lives with his wife and a daughter. It has been in prison twice before. In July 1998, he was sent to prison in connection with the closure of Egin newspaper and was not released until May 1999. This case has yet to be heard in court, although Egin has remained shut down since then. In September 2001, Alegria was imprisoned for the second time. The Spanish judge Baltasar Garzon accused him of being member of the alleged political apparatus of ETA, called Ekin. He was released last spring on bail.

## **Xabier Oleaga**



Xabier Oleaga was born in Erandio (Bizkaia) 46 years ago. After helping to create AEK (Basque Schools for Adults), he started a career in journalism in *El Punto y Hora de Euskal Herria*, a political magazine. From 1987 to 1989 he worked in Brussels as an assistant to Txema Montero, Member of the European Parliament for Herri Batasuna. When he came back to the Basque Country, Oleaga was appointed editor of *Egin* newspaper. He quit the post two years later, but kept on working as a journalist. In 1994, Oleaga moved to *Egunkaria* and worked as deputy-editor for two years. Since 1997, Oleaga has been working as PR representative of Partaide, the federation of Basque-medium Schools (Ikastolas). He is also chairman of the *Ikastola* of Errenteria, where his two daughters study.

## Pello Zubiria



Pello Zubiria was born in Usurbil (province of Gipuzkoa) in 1958, and nowadays lives in Hernani, with his wife and their two children. He was the first editor of the Egunkaria newspaper from December 1990 to the end of 1991. That year, Zubiria went back to Argia, the magazine he had been previously working for. In spite of having a degree in History, Zubiria has always worked as a journalist in the Basque language. In 1979 he started writing for the magazine Zeruko Argia, as a music critic. In 1981 he entered the weekly Argia, at the same time as Iñaki Uria. Working alongside Joxemi Zumalabe, Joxemari Ostolaza and Josu Landa, among others, they gave new strength to Argia. He worked mainly in the politics section. While in Argia, he founded and was editor for some years of the Larrun think-tank publication. In 1994 he became editor of Argia and he was in that post until 2002. Besides that, he has for a number of years been a member of the Basque Language Council in the Basque Autonomous Community (of Araba, Bizkaia and Gipuzkoa). Zubiria is currently the deputy editor of the weekly, although he has been on a sick leave for the last few months, because of a serious disease affecting his back (ankylosing spondylitis). Two days after his arrest, Zubiria had to be sent to a hospital in Madrid. According to Police sources, he tried to commit suicide while on Police premises. His wife has had serious difficulties in visiting him in hospital, and has declared that

Zubiria cannot remember what happened to him during the first days in solitary confinement.