

SPANISH POLICE CLOSE BASQUE NEWSPAPER EGUNKARIA

Last night the paramilitary Spanish Civil Guard Police arrested 10 people connected with the Basque newspaper EGUNKARIA. Among the arrested are the paper's editor, Martxelo Otamendi, its chairman Inaki Uria , and its CEO, Joan Mari Torrealdei. The other seven people are former or current members of the board of directors or the senior editorial staff. The Spanish judge, Juan del Olmo, has accused them of being either members or collaborators of the Basque group ETA. These are absurd accusations and are without foundation. This judge has ordered the closing down of the newspaper's premises and Internet sites.

The police operation of the Civil Guard against current and past members of the Governing Board and the management of Euskaldunon Egunkaria started at one thirty in the morning. Nine of the ten people arrested by the Civil Guard, were taken from their homes by order of the Judge Juan del Olmo, of the sixth Court of the Spanish National Criminal Court. The Civil Guards battered down the doors of several of their homes and searched all of them.

At about half past three in the morning, the police entered the private homes of the people in charge of the offices in Bilbao and Pamplona. In order to enter and search these offices, the Civil Guard declared they had an order signed by the Judge Del Olmo. In Pamplona, the Guardia Civil seized all the computers, reports and documents of the journalists. Eight bags were taken away by the police. When the search was over, the office was sealed, in spite of the fact that the order of the Judge Del Olmo did not mention the possibility of sealing. The protest voiced by the person in charge at the office was not taken into consideration.

In Bilbao, the Civil Guard took some neighbours to act as witnesses of the search. After several hours, the office was sealed. The personal computers of the people in charge at the office and of the commercial staff were taken away.

The search of the headquarters of Euskaldunon Egunkaria in Andoain (Gipuzkoa) also started early in the morning. At about 04.15 hours cars of the Civil Guard and other unmarked ones appeared in front of the main entrance and halted the distribution vans. The Civil Guard brought several of the arrested people with them, and all the video cameras were disconnected so no images of the search were taken. At about 05.30 hours Iñigo Iruin, Egunkaria's lawyer, tried to be present at the search but was forbidden to enter the premises. The search of the headquarters of Egunkaria lasted about eight hours, until 11.55 am. The material was being taken away in police cars throughout the morning, and at the end of the search five other police cars left the premises. The arrested people, Iñaki Uria, the managing director and Martxelo Otamendi, the editor of Egunkaria, who presumably witnessed the search, were also taken away.

The office in Vitoria was searched in the presence of Luis Karlos Garcia, the person in charge. At about 12.45 pm, the Civil Guard left the place taking away all the computers and five boxes full of different material.

The arrested people are:

- Iñaki Uria, Chairman of the Board of Directors of Euskaldunon Egunkaria. Uria has a long history within the Basque cultural movement. He was part of the group that changed the old magazine Zeruko Argia into the modern Argia. He has taken part in the process of creating Egunkaria since its very beginning, and in December 1990, when it first appeared, he was appointed Vice-director and later Director. When Joxemi Zumalabe died, Uria assumed the post of Managing Director, which he has held until now.
- Martxelo Otamendi, Editor of Euskaldunon Egunkaria. He was a teacher and the Principal of the municipal Basque language school in Tolosa. He has worked in Basque Television and was the Director of the Egonean Giro show. He has been Editor of the newspaper since 1993.
- Juan Mari Torrealdai, Managing Director of Euskaldunon Egunkaria and Editor of the opinion magazine Jakin. He has been an active member of the cultural Basque movement since the sixties. He was a former Editor of the magazine Anaitasuna and an important figure in the Basque publishing world. At the end of the 70's he

published Euskal Idazleak Gaur (Basque Writers Today) and recently Euskal Kultura Gaur (Basque Culture Today).

- Pello Subiria, Vice-editor of the magazine Argia. Together with Iñaki Uria, he took part in the change of Zeruko Argia into Argia, and also took part in the creation of the first daily newspaper in Basque. He was the first Editor of Egunkaria, later he ran Argia, which he recently left due to ill health.
- Luis Goia. Cinema producer. He took part in Egunkaria Sortzen, the origin of Egunkaria and member of the first Board of Directors. He was the producer of a number of films including “Off-eko maitasuna”, written and directed by Koldo Izagirre.
- Fermin Lazkano, person in charge of the company Plazagunea, which provides computerised services for the Basque world. He was Managing Director of Euskaldunon Egunkaria at the beginning of the 90’s. Before that, he was a teacher in AEK and had several posts in the “Adult literacy in Basque” campaign.
- Inma Gomila. Member of Egunkaria Sortzen and first Manager of Euskaldunon Egunkaria.
- Xabier Alegria. Member of Udalbiltza. He has been accused in the case of the newspaper “Egin” and in the case against “Ekin”.
- Xabier Oleaga. He is in charge of External Communications of the Federation of Basque-medium Schools. He was editor of Egin and later, in the mid 90’s, he was appointed Vice-editor of Egunkaria.
- Txema Auzmendi. Deputy Director of Radio Popular of San Sebastian. He was one of the promoters of the newspaper and he has been the Secretary of the Board of Directors since the beginning.

One again the Basque world is a victim of judicial and police absurdity. The frontal attack against Euskaldunon Egunkaria and the arrest of ten people involved in its creation is a brutal attack against the whole Basque language and the organisations working for its development and survival. This time, the assault on the whole Basque-speaking community has no comparison with previous actions.

EGUNKARIA has been closed, brutally and by force, but each and everyone of us involved in this project will do everything in our hands to put the newspaper in the Basque language on all the stands every morning, to enable our readers to receive information in their own language.

The Basque people created EUSKALDUNON EGUNKARIA. Thanks to their ideas, work and money, this project became reality. EGUNKARIA was created to fill a very important gap: the lack of a newspaper in the Basque language, providing Basque people all kinds of news every morning. For thirteen years, without missing a single day, EGUNKARIA has kept its word. And knowing that it is a project of the whole Basque community, EGUNKARIA has tried to respond in a varied and respectful way. Our daily work is living proof of the independence and pluralism of EGUNKARIA.

We consider that this operation is not only against the Basque community but also against freedom of expression itself. It is therefore, an act against the freedom to give and receive information.

EGUNKARIA is a project that has come from the Basque people, and at this critical moment, we appeal to the whole of Basque society to protest against this action, to work even harder in favour of the Basque language, in favour of the right to live in Basque. We thank all the citizens, politicians, trade unionists, journalists and all the people involved in the Basque language and culture who have shown their solidarity in these unhappy moments. He appreciate your love and support. We appeal to you all to take part in all the future actions which will take place to protest against the closing down of EGUNKARIA and the arrest of our people.

And finally, all of us involved in the making of EGUNKARIA, wish to express our solidarity and love to all the detained people and their next of kin. We want you all back, to be able to work together and continue with this our beloved project .

- Contact us:

You can get more information calling to 00-34-607-27-97-13 (Jose Mari Pastor)

Express your support or send your solidarity message to egunkaria@wanadoo.fr or egunon04@yahoo.com