

Press release about Egunkaria:

Lá chapel of the The National Union of Journalists

The NUJ chapel of the Irish language newspaper Lá has written to the Spanish Embassy in Dublin to express condemnation of the Spanish Government's decision to close the Basque language newspaper and arrest its editors and management team.

Describing the operation as a flagrant attack on the free press and one which should be condemned by all who value the freedom of expression as one of the cornerstones of democracy, Lá journalists have said that they will be also making their views known to Irish and British government representatives.

"This is an action reminiscent of Nazi style censorship and also exposes the Spanish government's hypocrisy over its concern for basic human rights in Iraq," they said. "It also smacks of the tactics used by Robert Mugabe to suppress opposition in Zimbabwe."

"This has to be raised at the level of European Union. It raises fundamental questions about whether Spain should continue to be a full member of the EU given it is engaging in such anti-democratic activity."

Lá is also calling on Sinn Féin leader Gerry Adams and David Trimble of the UUP, both of whom have been interviewed by Martxelo Otamendi, the paper's editor in recent weeks, to add their calls to those condemning this attack on the free press.

Egunkaria was established in 1991 and sells 15,000 copies dailu. It is respected as the pre-eminent minority language newspaper in Europe and one of the best newspapers on the Continent. Employing 140 workers, it has been the backbone of efforts to revive the Basque language.

As well as closing down the newspaper, the Spanish government has also blocked access to the website, www.egunkaria.com. This website has regular English language updates.