

ETA ceasefire: Armed struggle vs. political practice in Basque nationalism

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Abstract

In October 2011, the Basque armed organization ETA announced an end to its activities. This article aims at studying the reasons leading up to this unilateral decision which had been taken without prior negotiations or agreements. To this end, a large part of existing bibliography on the subject was consulted and most of the documents released by ETA in recent years, including those for internal use, were also reviewed. In our opinion, ETA reached this decision on the basis of two conclusions and an overall view of the state of affairs. The first of these conclusions found that the two main channels opened up in 1975 to reach its tactical goals, namely, negotiation with Spain and a national front, had been fully exploited. The second concerns the great difficulty in continuing to defend armed struggle on the grounds that it helps reinforce these two channels. Moreover, the belief that it is possible to make greater advances without, rather than with, armed activity, was widespread, paradoxical as that might seem. Forty years after its political positioning with respect to post-Franco Spain, convinced that both channels had been exhausted, and of its limited legitimacy to explore new ones in its capacity as a political movement, ETA reassessed the situation, and once again changed its discourse and practice, with an aim to attaining its strategic goals.

Keywords

ETA, Basque nationalism, terrorism, Basque Country, peace process

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Introduction

In October 2011, the Basque separatist organization ETA (initials in Basque for “the Basque Country and Freedom”) announced an end to its terrorist activity which had been ongoing since 1968. Though the news came as no surprise, as it had shown its willingness to make that final decision on a previous occasion, it did give rise to a great variety of reactions.

In our opinion, this decision was the culmination of a lengthy process which got under way during the political dictatorship and was the result of an attempt by the armed organization to bring its objectives into line with the newly founded democracy. Tensions arising from the need to adapt to new external and internal circumstances, and the need to explore the possibilities implied by terrorism lasted for thirty years until the abovementioned final decision was taken in 2011. We aim to study the different reasons leading to this decision and underline what we consider internal reasons, as they are less often cited and have been poorly studied. To this end, we avail ourselves of a variety of documents released by ETA.

The article is structured in four sections. The first part affords some considerations on the nature of nationalism in general and Basque nationalism in particular. The second provides a quick overview of the birth of a new way of understanding Basque nationalism and its political practice, structured around ETA, in the 1950s. The third explains ETA’s need to bring its objectives into line with the newly created democracy and the activation of the two traditional channels of negotiation it used to attain national liberation. The fourth sums up the different reasons affecting its decision, and the reflections it made with respect to the abovementioned strategies, as well as the growing contradictions between its armed and political practices. The article concludes with some final considerations on the changes that have occurred.

Nationalism and political practice: The Basque case

Although the importance of ethnicity for defining a nation has previously been one of the great topics of debate, it is not as common today perhaps because, as Calhoun (1993: 211) says, “while it is impossible to dissociate nationalism entirely from ethnicity, it is equally impossible to explain it simply as a continuation of ethnicity or a simple reflection of common history or language.”

Thus, although certain grand theories on the nature of nationalism are still identified, the practice is far less linear than these grand theories claim it to be. We have therefore moved on from the clearly economic theories which associate nationalism with the development of modernity and industrialization (Anderson, 1983; Gellner, 1983, 1997) to those underlining ethnic, historical or cultural elements (Connor, 1994; Smith, 1998, 2009), and, in addition, we can identify a third theoretical approach according to which nationalism is simply a political phenomenon relating to the state and the fight for power. Nevertheless, at present it appears that none of these theoretical paradigms is capable of wholly explaining this complex problem.

In any case, for the purposes of this article, we are interested in going deeper into the last interpretation, as it is related to one of the arguments we wish to develop: the political expediency of terrorist strategy. However, we also admit that there may be other factors which are not considered in this approach. We agree with May et al. in that ethnic movements should not be reduced purely to their political dimension, notwithstanding the undoubted importance of political factors (2004: 18).

The political interpretation is concisely summed up by Finlayson (1998: 117): “nationalism is not a matter of history, sociology or philosophy but always a matter of politics.” Brass (1991) too, states that nationalism is, by definition, a political movement. One of the main defenders of this thesis is Breuille, who states that “the term “nationalism” is used to refer to political movements seeking or exercising state power and justifying such actions with nationalist arguments . . .” (1985: 3). According to this point of view, the basis of the nation is political, not primordial; rather, it is *built*, and, consequently, a result of the nationalist movement (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983; Maíz, 1999, 2003).

As nationalism needs to build the nation, it uses a variety of elements to present people with a familiar and suggestible discourse. This discourse may be based on primordial or immediate premises but its objective is always political. As Agnew (1989: 174) points out, “nationalism relies on appealing to cultural symbols of identity in pursuit of political goals, prime among which is control over the state.” In any case, Linz (1985: 204) points out that, initially at least, in Western Europe and particularly in regions that have experienced high levels of immigration, nationalist movements tend to base themselves on primordial links and, according to the extent to which they gain popularity, these movements are obliged to make themselves more accessible to all sectors of the population, and therefore eventually seek ties which are less strict and associations which are more overtly political. This was revealed by Keating (1996: 92) in relation to Quebec. At first, ethnic identification, so-called *Franco-Canadian*, was sought. This encompassed all residents in Canada who complied with this linguistic condition. Later, identification through territory, the so-called *Quebecois* condition, common to the whole of Quebec and taking in the entire population in this territory, was favored.

In our opinion, the pertinence of the aforesaid to the Basque case is evident, and, depending on where the emphasis is placed, Basque nationalism has been considered primordialist or civic. The relative nature of all these different categories is clearly appreciated in Heiberg’s interpretation (1989), in which she identifies the change in the grounds for the nation from race to language. The Basque language and culture have become symbols of new Basque nationalism, and language performs the function formerly held by race, namely, to differentiate between Basques and non-Basques. Other writers too, such as Etxeberria (1998), or Serrano (1998), have highlighted the ethnic nature of Basque nationalism.

Clearly, this is not the only interpretation of Basque nationalism. Other authors underline its political component. For Raento (1999: 232), “the Basque example shows that a nationalist conflict is essentially about territory and political power.” More specifically, the abovementioned comment by Linz referring to the fact that

the success of a nationalist movement called for a gradual abandonment of the primordialist material in the nationalist discourse and an increase in political characteristics is apparent in the Basque case in relation to the two principal formulations we have mentioned. Thus, in the case of the discourse based on race as in the subsequent one based on language, political practice has led to the primordial element, race or language, being downplayed with the aim of winning over other sectors of the population who may not possess these linguistic or racial characteristics. A variety of studies, such as those by Beobide (1993), Fusi (1984), De Pablo et al. (1999), Santiago (2001) or Zabalo (2008), uphold this proposition concerning the role of ethnic and linguistic identifiers. Other interpretations of a more anthropological nature which concern aspects such as the process of building a community and reinforcing its nationalist outlook are also worth considering (Aretxaga, 2005; Douglass and Zulaika, 1990).

As has already been pointed out, in the case of ETA, the political approach is of particular interest because it is one of the keys to the decision to declare the cease-fire in 2011 (Lecours, 2008), although there is no doubt that other variables also affected this decision, which will, in turn, be analyzed.

New Basque nationalism and ETA

ETA was created in 1958 (1959, according to some sources, as it was in July of that year that the first communiqué, addressed to the then exiled Basque president, was released), and, since the end of the 1960s, has called itself the Basque Revolutionary Socialist Organization for National Liberation. Although the ethnic component of its nationalism is often highlighted, there has been less discussion of its political component. We agree with Brubaker (2002: 173) when he says that “it is clear that organizations, not ethnic groups as such, are the chief protagonists of ethnic conflict and ethnic violence and that their relationship between organizations and the groups they claim to represent is often deeply ambiguous.” This may include, for example, relationships between organizations such as states and terrorist groups.

In line with prevailing opinion, ETA too, shied away from Arana’s biological concept of Basqueness, and adopted a more proactive and political understanding of the Basque nation. As Conversi points out, “Basques, in ETA’s eyes, were distinguished from non-Basques mainly on the basis of their involvement in the struggle for Basque liberation” (1997: 252) (qv. Muro, 2005: 580–581). Indeed, with the passage of time

as opposed to the ethnic and linguistic idea of nationality, ETA (...) defended independence based on the concept of a “Basque working-class people”, a concept that turned the Basque working and immigrant class into the basis of Basque nationality; as opposed to the PNV’s Christian democratic concept of life and society, ETA defended revolutionary ideology and Marxist language. (Fusi, 1984: 211; our translation)

On ETA or new Basque nationalism see also Apalategi (2006), Clark (1984), Douglass and Zulaika (1990), Ibarra (1987), Jáuregui (1981), Lecours (2007), Letamendia (1994), Mansvelt Beck (2005), Muro (2005, 2007), Sullivan (1988) and Watson (2007). Texts by ETA from this period can be found in Egaña et al. (1993) and Hordago (1979).

The emergence of ETA is usually considered the result of a dispute, in part generational, within Basque nationalism. It was provoked by the fierce repression of Franco's regime,¹ which, during the war and the corresponding extended post-war period, had robbed the traditional Basque nationalist movement, represented by the Basque Nationalist Party (PNV),² of intellectual leaders and activists. The new generation was therefore denied the channels for transmitting the nationalist tradition. Furthermore, these channels had been deliberately concealed by the previous generation, fearful of Franco's repression (Conversi, 1997: 267; for more on the different generations of Basque nationalists, see Perez-Agote, 1984; Gurrutxaga, 1985). Thus, at the beginning of the 1950s, the new generations reproached their predecessors in the PNV and the Basque Government in exile for their lack of activism and their inability to adapt their political action to the situation of Basque Country at the time (Wieviorka, 1993: 150).

The new youth movement, soon to be structured around ETA, needed to find a way to *reinvent* its nationalist base. Though, at first, its interpretation of history did not differ greatly from that put forward by the traditional nationalist movement, this new Basque nationalist trend, with no organic links, felt free to add new elements pertaining to the changing times and to eventually rewrite Basque nationalist theory.

This reinterpretation, which was initially closely linked to the traditional interpretation of Basque nationalism, eventually proposed a Marxist interpretation of Basque oppression, in total opposition to the traditional ideas of Basque nationalism. It must be remembered that it was Sabino Arana who propagated these ideas in the last decade of the 19th century. His classical formulation was based on two main concepts: a Basque nation consisting of a race different from all others and the objective to lead that nation to God (see Arana, 1980).

Without a clear standard bearer to ensure allegiance to traditional, orthodox nationalism, this new, intellectually active generation was more readily influenced by the ideas dominant at the time, and, within a period of 15 years, had moved onto a new formulation of Basque nationalism. On the one hand, the Basque language was proclaimed as the main identifying mark of the Basque nation. On the other, this nationalist movement was presented as socialist, and its working-class nature impregnated its theoretical writings to such an extent that Basque identity was associated with it, in clear deference to the growing immigrant population from Spain in those years. Thus, ETA proclaimed that the Basque people are made up of "Basque proletariat and diverse oppressed elements in other social classes (...) All the Basque proletariat is nationally oppressed" (in Hordago, 1979, vol. VII: 98, our translation).

Undoubtedly, the origin of this interpretation of nationalism under the ideological prism of socialism lies in the fact that ETA, like many other left-wing

movements in Europe, absorbed the ideology, and later the strategy, of different revolutionary anti-colonial movements of the 1950s and 1960s (Jáuregui, 1981: 238–248; Muro, 2007: 99–105; Saratxo and Zabalo, 2013: 18). Thus, the revolutionary theories of Frantz Fanon, Ernesto Guevara, Mao Zedong and Lenin were the basis for the ideology supported by ETA, which, in the space of a few years, went from advocating secular and progressive nationalism to establishing revolutionary nationalism as its official ideology, as approved in 1967 (see Bruni, 1988; Iztueta and Apalategi, 1977; Sullivan, 1988). According to Conversi (1993: 256),

the experience of Algeria seemed to promise that only violence could pay off and lead the insurgents to victory. This theory of violence as the only solution was obviously also determined by the internal condition of ruthless dictatorship in Spain.

In this new scheme of things, great importance was granted to direct action, which led to theorizing on armed insurgency in the Basque Country. So, from the mid-1960s, ETA claimed that the use of political violence would generate the necessary conditions for a popular revolt against Franco's government, which was seen to be lacking in popular legitimacy. ETA was clear as to its own role in the revolutionary process that it advocated:

Raise the awareness, organisation and level of popular struggle and that of the working class in particular as the ruling sector, and create the necessary subjective conditions for achieving our ultimate goals, namely, the destruction of Spain's bourgeois Government in Euskadi and the setting up of a Basque Socialist State. (ETA, 1974) (Our translation)

The combination of these factors and the rebirth of a cultural movement at the time led to the resurgence of mass nationalism in the Basque Country, practically non-existent since Franco's victory in the Spanish Civil War (Jáuregui, 1981: 273). According to Watson (2007: 23), this cultural resurgence in Basque nationalism, together with a theorization of political violence, was one of the main determining factors in ETA's foundation (see also Laitin, 1995; Waldman, 1997). The recently created Basque organization was aware of this new cultural and political reality in the Basque Country which is why it appealed to the Basque people, particularly its intellectual sector, to join the so-called *integral revolution*:

It is up to you now to continue with the difficult task of building an ideology to properly respond to the needs of the Basque people (...) use all your means of expression so that Euskadi can live an integral revolution. (ETA, 1965) (Our translation)

The unequivocal popular support it received³ helped reaffirm this idea, and its insurrectionary interpretation, which considered armed struggle to be legitimate in the face of a dictatorship like that of Franco, further elicited mass sympathy (Sullivan, 1988: 71). As Byman reflected, "ethnic terrorist acts are usually intended

to influence the political and social balance within the terrorists' own ethnic community, although influencing the state's political decisions is the terrorists' nominal goal" (1998: 152–153).

Revolutionary nationalism in a democratic context

ETA's new revolutionary theorization developed within the context of fierce and constant political repression by Spain's dictatorial regime, the end of which was considered imminent, especially since ETA had assassinated Franco's apparent successor, Carrero Blanco.

ETA was by no means indifferent to this general mood and knew that widespread armed resistance would now become impossible, as, in the foreseeable context of a parliamentary democracy, upholding subversion by the people against the government would be untenable. Consequently, it gradually brought its discourse and political practice into line with the changed social reality. It therefore embarked on the design of a new political and democratic scenario. From that point in time, ETA became convinced of the need for a true democratic framework with room for all political ideas and projects, and which would need to be negotiated with Spain. In consequence, ETA put forward certain tactical objectives for its negotiation with the Spanish government, with an aim to eventually attaining its strategic goals of independence and socialism for the Basque Country. In 1978, ETA expressed this new tactical and strategic logic as follows:

... as Basque socialists, we defend the territory of Euskadi as an autonomous framework from which to develop the class struggle, until national liberties have been conquered and capitalist exploitation eliminated (...) we do, however, acknowledge that the degree of awareness of the workers and the correlation of forces attained by left-wing nationalist sectors suggest that now is not the time to fight to reach our strategic goal (...) Our current tactical claim is the attainment of political democracy to permit certain bonds and truly popular institutions which guarantee a process of autonomy for the Basque Country. (ETA, 1978) (Our translation)

This change in ETA's discourse and tactical approach to the use of violence contrasted with an escalation of violent attacks perpetrated in the following years. With regard to this apparent contrast, Mees has pointed out that ETA sought to interfere in all of the transition's crucial moments by considerably intensifying its violent activity (2003: 35). In this respect, it is significant that there was only one fatality caused by ETA in 1975 whereas there were 64 in 1978 and 84 in 1979.

How can this intensification in terrorist activities be explained? According to Lecours (2008: 121), ETA violence has two dimensions. On the one hand, there is the purely instrumental dimension: the use of violence as a way to attain political objectives. On the other hand, there is a symbolic dimension, a way to reassert the Basque nationalist community, and more specifically, the *radical* community (2008: 126). According to Aretxaga, violence inflicted by ETA can be understood as an

attempt by the organization to demonstrate a certain degree of sovereignty pertaining to the Basque nation (understood as an imaginary entity based on a process of identification), in opposition to the long list of powers of the nation-state (2005: 253) (see also Douglass and Zulaika, 1990, on this symbolic dimension).

In order to achieve these tactical goals, it utilized two contrasting and coexisting approaches,⁴ with each being pursued with varying intensity depending on the situation. On the one hand, ETA sought direct negotiation with the Spanish state, in which certain fundamental democratic principles regarding the right to self-determination would be recognized in exchange for an end to armed activity. On the other hand, it pursued the idea of a national front, whereby all of the Basque Country's nationalist forces would unite to force the Spanish state to accept all the rights considered particular to the Basque people. ETA's strategy focused on these two approaches for many years, and, in our opinion, the lack of progress with regard to these objectives is one of the main reasons for the ceasefire of 2011, which is why we shall now take a moment to explain them.

The idea of a national front

ETA had considered the creation of a national front practically since its inception. During the political transition process following the death of Franco in 1977, a further attempt was made at creating a national front with Basque nationalist forces. On this occasion, the aim was to adopt a common political position regarding the nature of the change of regime within the Spanish state (see Letamendia, 1994, vol. 2; and particularly Renobales, 2011).

Due to poor results, this national front strategy was abandoned until the end of the 1980s when, after yet another breakdown in direct negotiations with the Spanish state, the Nationalist Left⁵ began to theorize the concept of national construction in the sense mentioned above: that a nation needs to be made, to be *built*, from the very beginning. This inevitably called for constant work towards the cohesion and homogenization of its people and territory. Moreover, two major external circumstances at that time contributed to this stance.

On the one hand, the fall of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia revived the clamor for the right to self-determination, which was now being claimed in Central and Eastern Europe as a democratic means to solving territorial conflicts. This in turn gave rise to a major wave of claims on the part of different nationalist movements in Western Europe, among them, the Basque nationalist movement. On the other hand, the Irish negotiation process which was under way during the 1990s provided a sense of hope for ETA and the Nationalist Left.

Together, these external factors and the theorization of the concept of national construction led to a reconsideration of the national front option. As a result, extended mediation between the Nationalist Left, the PNV and EA⁶ led, firstly, to consideration of the significantly named *Forum of Ireland*, and to the analysis of the possibility of applying the Irish negotiation model to the Basque case. This led,

in September 1998, to the *Lizarraga-Garazi Agreements*. These agreements were also signed by a variety of political groups, trade unions, and social and cultural organizations. They were accepted by ETA, and shortly afterwards it declared a ceasefire. (On the *Lizarraga-Garazi* agreements, cf Giacopuzzi, 2002; Keating, 2001; Letamendia, 2001; Lorenzo, 2004.)

The agreements granted special importance to the concepts of democracy and self-determination. An apposite phrase, popular at the time, sums it up perfectly: *It is the Basque Country's turn to speak and it is up to it to decide*. Likewise, particular attention was paid to the already mentioned concept of the national construction of the seven territories making up the Basque Country.⁷ Last of all, it was agreed that the solution to the conflict between the Basque Country and France and Spain should be sought using exclusively political means, and always with the consent of the population (Lorenzo, 2004: 141).

The objectives defined on this occasion required the establishment of a strong nationalist institutional front and the progressive creation of alternative Basque political institutions to existing Spanish ones. It would therefore seem, as pointed out by Lecours, that ETA's goals would be attained, just when its support in society started to decline (2008: 125). It was precisely the discrepancies regarding the pace and the character to be given to these institutions that led to the failure of the initiative. Mutual reproaches were made and this led to the breakdown of the newly formed nationalist institutional unity and renewed armed activity on the part of ETA following a ceasefire lasting over a year.

Negotiation with the Spanish state

Aware of the non-viability of developing its strategic scheme of popular insurgency, ETA theorized the possibility of adding a prior step. This step would involve political negotiation with the Spanish government whereby an agreement on certain democratic fundamentals would be reached and thus lead to the end of the armed struggle. The basis of the negotiation was expressed as a democratic alternative and was published under the name KAS.⁸

Strategic means involving negotiation or dialogue between the Spanish state and ETA were used numerous times, although we can identify two particular occasions when said contacts were recognized by both parties. The first occasion was commonly known as the *Algiers process*, as it concluded with official conversations between a delegation of the Spanish government and ETA representatives in the Algerian capital in 1989. During the course of these conversations, ETA upheld the *KAS Alternative* as the basis of a hypothetical minimum agreement that would lead to the end of its armed activity, but not as the *sine qua non* for negotiations. The Spanish government position, meanwhile, focused on technical matters, such as the situation of Basque political prisoners, in order to force ETA to declare a permanent ceasefire. Deep-seated disagreement led to the breakdown of the negotiations after a period of three months (regarding this process, cf Clark, 1990; Egaña and Giacopuzzi, 1992; Irvin, 2000).

As this negotiation model was blocked, ETA and the Nationalist Left were obliged to re-think their strategy. In 1995, the *KAS Alternative* was updated and profoundly modified to become the so-called *Democratic Alternative* (ETA, 1995). Following the failure of the *Lizarra-Garazi initiative*, the goal of negotiation with the Spanish state was taken up again, though on this occasion it was based on a new model, designed by the Nationalist Left, and subsequently accepted by ETA. This new initiative, called *Orain herria orain bakea* (Now the people, now the peace), also known as the *Anoeta Proposal*, urged the Spanish government to start a new negotiation process whereby a new political status for the four Basque provinces in Spain would be agreed. It would then be put to a referendum in the Basque Country (Nationalist Left, 2004).

As a result, in 2006, ETA announced a permanent ceasefire in a statement in which it affirmed that, taking into account the plural nature of the Basque Country, it behoved Basque political and social agents to drive the development of the process and reach an agreement on its political future (ETA, 2006a). Three months later, the Spanish government declared that conversations with the armed organization's representatives had officially begun.

Nevertheless, ETA and the Spanish government once again fell into the familiar pattern of mutual recrimination and ultimately failed to agree on the conditions for starting a resolution process.

Political practice and armed struggle: ETA's decision to end the armed struggle

For years ETA availed itself of terrorist activity to activate one of the abovementioned channels and it would appear that, on occasions, it came close to its objective: negotiation with the Spanish Government in 1989, an attempt at a national front in 1998, and further negotiation with the Spanish Government in 2006. However, none of these attempts ended in success. This, together with the various changes occurring at home and abroad, led ETA to its final decision to abandon arms. We shall now look at some of these changes and highlight how ETA felt it could then achieve the strategic and tactical objectives it had set after 1975, a subject given little attention to date.

A changing and adverse context

We need to underline four significant changes at four different levels. The first is at the theoretical level and refers to a consideration of the use of violence for attaining political objectives. ETA started armed activities in the 1950s and 1960s, in the context of increasingly widespread use of revolutionary violence as a means to liberating peoples (Conversi, 1993; Lecours, 2007: 77). But, by the end of the century, this modus operandi had lost momentum, particularly as a result of the efforts on the part of pacifist movements, and, following the events of 9/11 in 2001 in New York. After the IRA abandoned its terrorist activity, the case of ETA and the

Nationalist Left was practically the only one combining a strategy of violence with one of institutional politics in Europe (Byman, 1998: 159).

The second change can be placed within the international context, one in which, in direct opposition to the former policy of non-interference in internal affairs of state, theorizing on how conflicts need to be settled democratically and with dialogue became more and more important. Increasingly, the international community was encouraged to apply pressure and to intervene in order to avoid humanitarian catastrophes and lead conflicts to negotiation channels and agreed solutions. Justification for international intervention in a variety of countries, such as Iraq, Afghanistan and the former Yugoslavia, was based on such theorization. In consequence, though ETA was losing popular legitimacy in its use of violence, it could find new support internationally for its goals, as can be witnessed in the Irish case, an important reference point for ETA, whose model it tried to follow at the end of the 1990s (see, for example, Whitfield, 2014: 86 ff).

Nevertheless, such a scenario is totally incompatible with terrorist activity, and ETA itself realized that, on occasions, the absence of violence is more profitable in political terms than violence (this fact was also pointed out by Lecours, 2008: 133–134), in addition to being in clear contradiction with its discourse. Whereas political practice spoke of democracy, participation or tactical objectives, its terrorist activities were clearly an obstacle to the same and, moreover, were insufficient to attain these objectives. It could be said that ETA began to reflect on what was expounded by Laqueur to the extent that the political impact of terrorism is generally limited and often counterproductive for the groups exerting it (1987: 203).

The third change is the most visible, and affects the state. Spain, in close collaboration with France, initiated a powerful attack on several fronts, clearly reducing ETA's operational capacity. This involved, on the one hand, a direct attack on ETA, based on better organized and more efficient Spanish security forces, and privileged coordination with the French police. There was a gradual reduction in attacks by ETA, and a major rise in the number of arrests of its commando units. On the other hand, there was an indirect attack on what from then on would be called "ETA's milieu," which encompassed not only the Nationalist Left, but also other political groups which the government considered were under the former's influence. As Spanish President, from 1996 to 2004, Jose María Aznar wrote in his memoirs, "we knew that we couldn't distinguish between a terrorist organization and its purportedly non-violent setting, it's all the same" (in Whitfield, 2014: 82).

As a result, most of the organizations making up the Nationalist Left were banned,⁹ hundreds of their members were arrested and sent to prison, newspapers were closed, etc. Moreover, Spain did not hesitate to make use of dirty war tactics. The measures triggered numerous and constant protests and their legality was questioned by an avalanche of legal appeals. Needless to say, following the ruling by the Strasbourg Court in June 2009 ratifying the Political Parties Act in force in Spain, the Nationalist Left's chances of obtaining political representation in any of the institutions were practically nil, as the Act banned its electoral

candidates. Consequently, any chances of obtaining political representation were highly unlikely while the armed struggle continued.

Last of all, we shall refer to the fourth change occurring internally. The possibilities for support for ETA and for its expansion within society were gradually diminishing. On the one hand, Nationalist Left activists were unable to carry out their work due to increasing bans and limitations. There was a general feeling that any organization close to the Nationalist Left could be banned and their members imprisoned. In addition, society's perception of ETA changed. Its attacks were beginning to lose some of the support which they previously elicited from sections of the population, or, where there had formerly been indifference, there was now clear rejection, in particular following certain actions such as the kidnapping and assassination of Miguel Angel Blanco.¹⁰ In relation to this matter, Mees believes that the demonstrations held in 1997 were an incentive to initiate internal debate on the relationship between armed struggle and institutional politics and on violence itself (2003: 131). This debate would become more evident and decisive ten years later, when, following the failure of the 2006–2007 process, in February 2010, the Nationalist Left held meetings in towns and villages, and 80% voted in favor of embarking on a new stage, in the absence of ETA violence (Whitfield, 2014: 220).

Two strategies with an incompatible element: The armed struggle

Faced with this situation, ETA continued its armed activities, its aim still being to foment a national front or force the Spanish Government into a process of negotiation. However, neither of these two options materialized and, indeed, it appeared to be increasingly less likely that they would.

As far as the national front is concerned, as we have already pointed out, following the failure of the Lizarra-Garazi process, Basque nationalist forces, except for ETA and the Nationalist Left, considered the armed struggle and the rebuilding of a national front similar to that created in 1998 incompatible. In 2000, the then Basque president, Juan Jose Ibarretxe (PNV) stated that, "We shall never work together with members of EH [i.e. Nationalist Left] in the presence of violence, not in Lizarra, and not anywhere else." Similarly, PNV president from 1987 to 2004, Xabier Arzallus, affirmed that "Lizarra will be *on hold* until ETA declares a new ceasefire."¹¹

With regard to negotiation with Spain, the main Spanish parties (PSOE and PP) did not contemplate any real negotiation. Furthermore, there is clear evidence to show that their main objective was to "gain time." According to Whitfield (2014: 72), in 1989, the main task of the negotiators with Spain was to obtain peace, and, at most, offer freedom for prisoners. Ten years later, then Spanish president José María Aznar authorized the Government to contact ETA, or what he referred to as the "Basque liberation movement" in November 1998. The Spanish Minister of the Interior, Jaime Mayor Oreja added that "the Government is willing to enter into dialogue with ETA without the need for decommissioning of arms." Nevertheless, when less than 10 months had passed, Mayor Oreja affirmed that the ceasefire had

been no more than a “ruse.”¹² Last of all, and particularly revealing, is a statement released by José María Aznar in 2010 to the effect that all ETA ceasefires were simply a way of gaining time.¹³ Khatami said (2013: 59) that Julian Hottinger, an experienced international mediator in conflicts, had confessed that the most frustrating moments in his career had been when he realized that Aznar truly believed that he was defeating ETA by force and that he did not really need to concern himself with any form of peace process. Moreover, according to Hottinger, the same was to be expected of Spain’s current president, Mariano Rajoy.

In any case, during 2008 and 2009, immediately after the failed negotiations of 2006–2007, in some documents ETA (2008, 2009a) continued to call for unity among nationalist forces, and, in one interview, stated that it was involved in a process of internal debate with the aim of designing an efficient political and armed strategy (ETA, 2009b). In the same interview, ETA yielded the centre stage in the negotiation process, as it considered that the process should be between the Basque Country and Spain, while ETA would limit itself to acting as an instrument for reaching negotiations.

This strategic approach was accompanied by a series of attacks in the summer of 2009, placing the organization in a relatively strong position as regards the aim of negotiations. But the Spanish government’s position was equally firm, as it reiterated its unwillingness to start a negotiation process with ETA, and its intention to uphold the ban on the Nationalist Left.

At that time, ETA was in a paradoxical situation. There were too many obstacles for its strategy of terrorism to obtain positive results, whereas a non-violent strategy appeared to be overcoming certain obstacles. Two new factors appeared to confirm this.

International involvement and agreement between forces in favor of independence

The first factor is related to the new possibilities being opened up as a result of greater international involvement in internal affairs. Twenty public figures with long experience in the resolution of political conflicts, such as the Irish and South African cases, among whom there were several winners of the Nobel Peace Prize for their work and mediation in different negotiation processes, signed what was known as the *Declaration of Brussels* in March 2010. In this declaration, as well as praising the steps taken by the Nationalist Left, they called on ETA to declare a permanent and verifiable ceasefire and on the Spanish Government to respond in accordance with the former in order to *reach a lasting peace* (Whitfield, 2014: 233).

A few days after the release of the *Declaration of Brussels*, ETA issued a statement underlining the importance of international involvement in the resolution of the Basque conflict, while it pointed out that putting an end to armed activities in itself would not lead to the resolution of the conflict (ETA, 2010b).

Within this context, in which international implication was actively sought, the possibility of obtaining support from the European Union was also studied. It was possible in principle and had already occurred in the case of Ireland and with the dialogue between ETA and the Spanish Government in 2006–2007, when the European Parliament passed a ruling in support of *the peace initiative in the Basque Country* (in Khatami, 2013: 201). This ruling clearly supported Spain's policy, just as the same European Parliament maintained its distance with respect to the new situation that had been created following ETA's declaration in 2011, and accepted the strategy and discourse of the Spanish Government in relation to the peace process. Nevertheless, it was a possibility worth exploring.

In relation to this, it must be remembered that there has always been a federalist current of opinion within the European Union (particularly so in its beginnings), which is why it was possible to imagine, just as Conversi did (2014: 39), the EU creating a model capable of overcoming the legacy of conflict of nation-states. This is the case because, as Kraus has pointed out, cultural homogenization was one of the paradigms of modernity in Europe, but the shift in contemporary political discourse towards diversity is a significant change in this respect (2011: 8).

However, a second factor affected the debate on the relevance of the terrorist strategy, namely, the possibility of nationalist parties joining forces, a proposal which was now always linked to the use of exclusively non-violent means. Therefore, in June 2010, a strategic agreement between the Nationalist Left and Eusko Alkartasuna (EA) was made public. This agreement set the creation of a Basque state on the political horizon, and underlined the need to resolve the political conflict between the Basque Country and Spain. The document likewise listed what would be the pillars of this new strategic approach of the majority of Basque pro-independence forces: an *accumulation of forces, democratic confrontation and national construction* (Nationalist Left and EA, 2010), thus giving rise to a series of pacts and alliances between pro-independence parties, which would quickly trigger a positive response from ETA.

Another consequence of this agreement was the formation of a new coalition of parties called *Bildu*. Its electoral force was evident in the successive elections in which it took part. Despite the difficulties imposed by the Spanish Government, they managed to stand for the first time for the municipal and regional government elections held in 2011, and it became the second force in terms of the number of votes won in the Autonomous Community of the Basque Country, and the third force, in Navarre, in addition to being the leading political party in the two Autonomous Communities in the European elections in 2014.

Consolidation of the union of pro-independence forces and ETA's definitive ceasefire

This context helped sway ETA in favor of laying down its arms. Moreover, at the end of 2009, the Nationalist Left released a document with the self-explanatory title, *Clarifying the political stage and strategy*. At the same time, a large group made up

of some of its more well-known representatives appeared publicly to explain how it intended to promote a resolution process based solely on democratic and political means, that is, a strategy with which armed struggle was incompatible. This new scenario was characterized by the abandonment of bilateral negotiations (state/ETA), as it was thought that through such negotiations the state was being given the opportunity to impede any kind of progress. On the contrary, one of the main bases of this new initiative was unilaterality. In other words, it was thought that progress could be made, in a unilateral fashion, without state involvement, towards uniting the forces in favor of independence, which could then force the state to seek a solution to the political problem which it was facing (see Nationalist Left, 2009).

At the beginning of 2010, following a process of internal debate, the Nationalist Left ratified its new strategic approach based on exclusively non-violent channels and on the aforementioned concept of unilaterality. For its part, ETA promptly expressed its wish to aid progress in this direction and its willingness to take the necessary steps to steer the political change that appeared imminent on the Basque political scene (ETA, 2010a).

In September 2010, ETA announced its *decision not to carry out any offensive armed actions*, and once again called on the international community to take part in the resolution process (ETA, 2010c). A few weeks after this declaration, ETA, in another statement, addressed the international community and agreed to take further steps and to take on greater commitments in order to support the resolution process and facilitate the participation of the different parties in that process (ETA, 2010d).

In addition to this, the alliance between pro-independence forces was strengthened by other kinds of initiatives, particularly the *Gernika Accord*, which urged ETA to declare a *unilateral and verifiable ceasefire as the first step towards the definitive abandonment of its armed activities*. It also recommended that the Spanish Government and ETA start a process of dialogue with mediation of the international community based on the *Mitchell Principles*, which had already been applied in the Irish peace process. ETA responded to this call and, three months later, declared a permanent and verifiable ceasefire. Subsequently, the Group of Basque Political Prisoners¹⁴ likewise signed up to this agreement. This implied the support of the Basque political prisoners for the new strategy adopted by the Nationalist Left two years before.

At the other end of the spectrum, the Spanish Government's unwavering stance is likewise an important element to consider: it continued to arrest members of ETA as well as members of the Nationalist Left, while the Spanish Supreme Court declared the new political party presented by the Nationalist Left, *Sortu*,¹⁵ illegal despite the fact that the party expressly rejected ETA's violence in its articles of association.

Meanwhile, Bildu, the newly formed coalition obtained excellent electoral results in 2011, which was positively evaluated by ETA (2011b). This was followed by a joint statement, in October 2011, by those taking part in the *San Sebastian International Peace Conference*. This conference was attended by internationally renowned figures such as Kofi Annan, Jonathan Powell and Bertie Ahern. In this

declaration, ETA was called upon to declare a definitive cessation of its armed activity and to request the Spanish and French governments to enter into talks related exclusively to the consequences of the conflict, while both governments were urged to agree to said talks in the event that ETA declared a cessation. All those signing the declaration expressed their willingness to form a committee to follow up their recommendations.

Just three days after the conference, ETA announced a definitive cessation to its armed activity, and called on the Spanish and French governments to enter into direct dialogue in order to reach a resolution of the consequences of the conflict (ETA, 2011c).¹⁶

Conclusion

In our opinion, ETA's decision in October 2011 to announce the cessation of armed activity was facilitated to a large extent by its reaching two conclusions and its perception of the state of affairs.

The first of these two conclusions concerns the unfeasibility of the two main channels opened up in 1975 in order to achieve its tactical objectives. The channel implying negotiation with Spain had been attempted on repeated occasions, but the Spanish Government's unwillingness to negotiate was becoming increasingly clear. On the other hand, efforts had been made to set up a national front but, in practice, it was impossible to maintain in the environment of violence generated by ETA.

The second conclusion concerns the great difficulty in upholding the grounds for armed struggle as a way to strengthen both these channels. In theory, in a world where the concept of democracy or pacifist theories were on the rise, it was increasingly difficult to justify the use of violence while appealing to a democratic ideal, which is why the legitimacy of ETA and its followers began to diminish. Proof of the same is the increase in votes obtained in the absence of ETA's violence, something that did not necessarily occur in the 1980s and 1990s. On the other hand, on a practical level, the Spanish offensive, with the collaboration of the French Government, in terms of ideology, repression and police efficiency, helped to significantly reduce the chances of imposing a framework for entering into negotiations.

In addition was the perception, to a large extent paradoxical, that it was possible to make greater progress without armed activity than with it. This meant that the main obstacle for exploring new ways to accumulate forces, be they nationalist or social, was ETA's existence. In this respect, a significant case is that concerning EA, which decided to split from its former ally, the PNV, and approached the Nationalist Left. This approach became official when ETA first announced an end to its armed activity. This new union gave rise to subsequent alliances, all of which were clearly reflected in the different elections subsequently held. In this respect, the possibility of international actors getting involved in the Basque conflict, something which was fervently desired by the Nationalist Left, or of a solution within the framework of Europe necessitated the cessation of violence on the part of ETA.

ETA had given up on its first strategy advocating armed insurrection in the 1970s, when the demise of Franco's regime was expected to lead to a new political framework, one which would be incompatible with revolutionary theories of insurrection. In a new scenario of liberal democracy, ETA tested its new formula whereby the armed struggle was used to attain certain strategic goals, namely, to achieve through negotiations with Spain: a sole autonomous community for the four Basque territories in Spain, the right to self-determination, etc.

Forty years later, the conviction that the channels explored had been exhausted, and its legitimacy to explore other new channels was limited, together with the hope offered by fresh channels, led to ETA's decision in October 2011 to announce an end to its armed activity. As a political movement, as had occurred 40 years before, ETA reassessed the situation and changed its discourse and practice, with an aim to attaining its strategic goals.

Glossary

- ANV: "Basque nationalist action."
- Askatasuna: "Freedom."
- AuB: "Convergence for self-determination."
- Aukera Guztiak: "All the options."
- Batasuna: "Unity."
- Bildu: "Reunite."
- D3M: "Three million democracy."
- EA: "Basque solidarity."
- EH: "Basque Citizens."
- EHAK: "Communist party of the Basque lands."
- ETA: "The Basque Country and Freedom."
- HB: "Popular unity."
- Herrera: "To the people."
- HZ: "the citizens' list."
- KAS: "Socialist patriotic coordinator."
- Nationalist Left: A Basque socialist and pro-independence political movement including different organizations, among which political parties or popular and youth associations.
- PNV: "Basque nationalist party."
- Sortu: "Create."

Nationalist Left's documents

Nationalist Left (2004) *Orain herria orain bakea*. 2004 November.

Nationalist Left (2009) *Clarificando la Fase Política y la Estrategia*. 2009 October.

Nationalist Left and EA (2010) Bases de un acuerdo estratégico entre fuerzas políticas independentistas. 2010 June.

ETA's documents

- ETA (1965) Carta a los intelectuales. 1965 August.
 ETA (1974) *Hautsi 5*. 1974 July.
 ETA (1978) *Zutik 69*. 1978 February.
 ETA (1995) *Alternatiba demokratikoa*. 1995 April.
 ETA, PNV, and EA (1998) Untitled document. 1998 August.
 ETA (1999) ETAREN agiria Euskal Herriari. 1999 November.
 ETA (2006a) ETAREN agiria Euskal Herriari. 2006 March.
 ETA (2006b) ETAREN agiria Euskal Herriari. 2006 August.
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 ETA (2010a) ETAREN agiria Euskal Herriari. 2010 March.
 ETA (2010b) ETAREN agiria Euskal Herriari. 2010 April.
 ETA (2010c) ETAREN agiria Euskal Herriari. 2010 September.
 ETA (2010d) ETAREN agiria nazioarteari. 2010 September.
 ETA (2011a) *Zutabe 113*. 2011 April.
 ETA (2011b) ETAREN agiria Euskal Herriari. 2011 July.
 ETA (2011c) ETAREN agiria Euskal Herriari. 2011 October.
 ETA (2012) ETAREN agiria Euskal Herriari. 2012 November.
 ETA (2013a) ETAREN 2013ko Aberri Eguneko agiria Euskal Herriari. 2013 March.
 ETA (2013b) ETAREN agiria Euskal Herriari. 2013 April.
 ETA (2013c) ETAREN agiria Euskal Herriari. 2013 September.
 ETA (2014) ETAREN 2014ko Aberri Eguneko Agiria Euskal Herriari. 2014 April.

Notes

1. Together with a group of other army generals, General Franco rose up in 1936 against the legitimately elected Spanish Republic, in a Fascist uprising. Its victory, in 1939, brought with it fierce repression in different spheres, particularly in relation to politics and trade unionism, curtailing freedom of association and expression. In the Basque Country, it also meant the repression of Basque culture, including the prohibition of the use of the language.
2. Basque nationalism was formulated at the end of the nineteenth century by Sabino Arana. He founded the PNV (Basque Nationalist Party), the sole exponent of Basque nationalism for many years. Despite the subsequent emergence of other organizations, the PNV preserved its hegemony until the war, and, after that, until the emergence of

- ETA. On Basque nationalism and its emergence, cf. Anderson (1990); Beltza (1978); Conversi (1997); Corcuera (2008); Diez Medrano (1995); Douglass (2004); Elorza (1978); Heiberg (1989); Jacob (1994); Larronde (1977); Muro (2007); Payne (1975); Solozabal (1979). A variety of texts from the period can be found in Arana Goiri (1980); De Pablo et al. (1999).
3. The death penalty was requested for several members of ETA at a trial in 1970. This triggered a widespread movement in solidarity in the Basque Country, Spain and Europe with the accused of the so-called Burgos trial, and it was ultimately a great victory for ETA. When ETA assassinated General Carrero Blanco in 1973, it acquired international fame.
 4. This is recorded in teaching materials for a training course, called Eskola, organized by LAB (*Nationalist Workers' Committees*, a trade union classified under the Nationalist Left milieu) in September 2009. See also Saratxo and Zabalo (2013: 19–22).
 5. We shall call the broad political and socialist movement which grew up around ETA and the new type of Basque nationalism the *Nationalist Left* (a term frequently used in Basque, *Ezker Abertzalea*, and Spanish, *Izquierda Abertzale*). It comprises a variety of organizations, with no organic connection, according to the Nationalist Left movement itself, and, in the opinion of certain judges, the police, and successive Spanish Governments, sharing the same project with ETA.
 6. A party founded in 1986 as a result of a split within the PNV. It is considered pro-independence and social democratic in tendency. Its number of representatives in the different institutions had diminished in years prior to the split. It currently forms part of several pro-independence coalitions together with the Nationalist Left and other Basque parties.
 7. The Basque Country or *Euskal Herria*, in Basque, is made up of seven territories historically considered Basque. They spread over Spain (Biscay, Gipuzkoa, Araba and Navarre) and France (Lapurdi, Lower Navarre and Zuberoa). Basque nationalism claims the political unity of all of them.
 8. The KAS (Nationalist Socialist Coordinator) *Alternative* brought together a large number of the Basque nationalist groups of the time, among which was ETA (split into two branches at that time), though not the PNV. The minimum political terms claimed in the Alternative, which would result in an end to armed conflict, were, among others, amnesty for Basque political prisoners, the legalization of all political parties (as some parties were still banned), and one Statute of Autonomy for the four Basque territories in Spain (not two differentiated ones as is currently the case), with the recognition of the national sovereignty of the Basque people and the right to self-determination.
 9. Since 1998, political parties making up the Nationalist Left movement (one only need cite their initials: *HB*, *EH*, *Batasuna*, *EHAK*, *ANV*, *D3M* and *Askatasuna*) have been declared illegal in Spain. Added to them is the party candidate for the elections for the European Parliament, *HZ*, a coalition made up of dozens of municipal electoral groups, and the party candidates for the Autonomous Community elections, *AuB* and *Aukera Guztiak*. Similarly, youth associations, *Jarrai*, *Haika* and *Segi* or the organization supporting Basque prisoners, *Askatasuna*, suffered the same fate. Besides that, the *Egin* and *Egunkaria* newspapers were closed by court order. With the announcement by ETA of the ceasefire, this policy has dropped in intensity but it has not been abandoned altogether. In fact, *Herrira*, a new people's association in support of Basque prisoners was declared illegal in 2013.

10. In 1997, ETA kidnapped Spain People's Party (PP) councilor Miguel Angel Blanco, and demanded its prisoners be moved to Basque prisons nearer their homes. At the end of the ultimatum with a deadline of 48 h and having failed to obtain a positive reply from the Spanish Government, the kidnappers shot the councilor twice. His death caused great consternation and there were numerous demonstrations to protest against ETA, such as had previously never occurred.
11. Both declarations in *El País*, 13 May 2000: Ibarretxe warns EH that the Lizarra Agreement was "invalidated" by the ongoing violence. Available at: http://elpais.com/diario/2000/05/13/espana/958168801_850215.html [Accessed 22 September 2012].
12. Statements made by J.M. Aznar may be found at: http://www.cadenaser.com/actualidad/audios/presidente-jose-maria-aznar-senala-ha-autorizado-contactos-entorno-movimiento-liberacion-vasco-1998/csrcsrpor/20060221csrcsr_12/Aes/ Those made by J.M. Oreja may be consulted at http://elpais.com/diario/1999/09/17/espana/937519215_850215.html and <http://ecodiario.economista.es/politica/noticias/2008603/03/10/ETA-Mayor-Oreja-recuerda-que-tampoco-habia-pruebas-fehacientes-con-la-tregua-trampa-o-la-negociacion-de-Zapatero.html#.Kku8rwYeCXAdpl>
13. A statement taken from an internal report by Strategic Forecasting, Inc., (StratFor), specialising in intelligence and espionage services, and based on a speech made by José María Aznar in Georgetown. The document was revealed by Wikileaks. Available at <http://www.publico.es/internacional/423909/los-espies-norteamericanos-se-burlan-de-aznar-y-de-sus-ideas> [Accessed 8 September 2012].
14. The Basque Political Prisoner Association is currently made up of over 600 people in prisons in Spain, France, England, Scotland, Northern Ireland and Portugal. Their number includes as many ETA members as members of the different organizations making up the Nationalist Left.
15. In June 2012, the Spanish Constitutional Court revoked the sentence banning said party.
16. At the beginning of 2014, the ceasefire declaration, a permanent ceasefire according to ETA itself, was still in force, and, since 2011, ETA has repeatedly stood by that decision (ETA, 2012; 2013a; 2013b; 2013c; 2014). Despite the Spanish Government's refusal to enter into any kind of dialogue, ETA carried out a symbolic decommissioning process in the presence of international observers in January, 2014. As Whitfield pointed out in his conclusions, there is no precedent for the case where a terrorist group proposes abandoning its armed activity and a government completely ignores the fact (2014: 295).

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