

Basques call general strike as Spanish Government reacts angrily to Council of Europe Torture Report

[Bilbao and Brussels 14/03/03, by Jaume Clotet and Davyth Hicks](#)

Basques called a general strike yesterday to mark solidarity with Euskaldunon Egunkaria and its workers after a call made by eight unions.

At noon an hour-long general strike won support from thousands of workers, including the Basque public radio and television corporation which interrupted its normal programming.

Jose Elorrieta, secretary-general of ELA, the biggest trade union in the Basque Country, said during the strike that the closure of the newspaper was just 'another step' against all Basques, and reminded people that the party for independence, Batasuna, will be banned in the next few weeks.

Last night more than ten thousand people gathered in a sports stadium in Bilbao to express their support. Euskaldunon Egunkaria's director Martxelo Otamendi insisted that he was tortured despite the denials by the Spanish government and promised that his guards 'will be brought to court one day'.

Otamendi also thanked the Catalan people for their solidarity after a three-day long visit to Catalonia by invitation of the Catalan media.

The day of solidarity also helped to gather financial support to guarantee Egunero's future and to launch, in four months time, a new Basque language newspaper.

According to Otamendi: 'This new project should be at least as good and serious as Egunkaria was, and, if possible, even better'.

Meanwhile the Spanish government reacted angrily to the Council of Europe's Anti-Torture Committee (CPT) Report. Speaking to the press, Spanish Interior minister Angel Acebes reiterated that 'anyone who accuses the Government of torturing prisoners will be brought to court.'

Furthermore, the Spanish Government has declared that it will not follow any advice contained in the Report and will also take steps to increase the amount of time that a prisoner can be held incommunicado from five days to thirteen.

Safeguards against ill-treatment by law enforcement officials in Spain are examined in the CPT Report. During the visit in July 2001 the CPT received allegations of ill-treatment by National Police and Civil Guard officers. It also gathered evidence, including that of a medical nature, consistent with those allegations. In its report, the CPT concludes that the existing legal framework fails to provide detained persons with an effective set of safeguards against ill-treatment.

The Report was published at the request of the Spanish authorities together with their response. In their response the Spanish authorities indicate that they do not consider it necessary to review the current legal framework.

The CPT report and the response of the Spanish authorities are available on the CPT website (<http://www.cpt.coe.int>).(EL)