

# Madrid bans Basque editor from attending conference

BY CIARAN 6 PRONNTAIGH  
in Dresden, Germany

THE Spanish government refused to allow a Basque newspaper editor to attend a media conference held at the weekend in Germany.

Martxelo Otamendi, the editor of the Basque daily *Berria*, is a board member of the Minority Dailies Association (Midas).

Madrid's refusal to let him attend the annual conference was one of the issues on the agenda at the weekend.

The conference emphasised

the importance of press freedom and respect for linguistic minorities.

Setting the tone for the conference, Toni Ebner, the association's re-elected president, said cultural diversity was extremely important and democracy depended on the freedom of the press.

Referring to the Spanish government's closure of the Basque paper *Egunkaria*, he said minorities could not be prohibited from using their own language.

He said: "Midas can use its

membership to ensure that such violations of press freedom do not occur again, as an attack on one is an attack against all minorities."

The association now has 30 member publications — all European daily newspapers publishing in a minority language.

The newspapers include Daily Ireland's sister paper *La*, as well as Basque, Catalan, Danish, Galician, Polish, Sorbian, Southern Tyrol and Swedish newspapers.

The conference was held in the Sorbian town of Bautzen, to

the north of Dresden. Government influence on dailies in minority languages was another topic discussed, including the holding-up of a grant for *La*.

The conference unanimously re-elected Martxelo Otamendi to the board.

It called on Madrid to end his internal exile in the Spanish state.

A conference motion gave the board power to decide how to help Inaki Una, the managing director of the Basque daily *Egunkaria*.

The Spanish government

closed down *Egunkaria* two years ago.

Mr Una still faces unspecified charges by the Spanish state and was tortured while in Spanish custody.

Speaking on the motion, Toni Ebner said *Egunkaria* was a founding member of Midas and that the banning of *Egunkaria* was not because of any fault of the newspaper.

Other issues discussed ranged from the technical and local to European policy on minority-language media.

The conference was told that

some three million people read a Midas member publication every day.

A new member will be the Welsh-language daily *Y Byd*, which sent word that it will begin publication in March next year.

Although the situation was getting better, board member Bojan Bezigar warned: "Some bureaucrat in Brussels could wake up some morning and say that all subsidies for minority newspapers [should] be cut. We have to be ready for such attacks."