

Report on the basque conflict:

keys to
understanding
the eta's
permanent
ceasefire

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REPORT ON THE BASQUE CONFLICT:
KEYS TO UNDERSTANDING THE ETA'S
PERMANENT CEASEFIRE

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INDEX

PREFACE	5
INTRODUCTION	6
HISTORY	8
POLITICAL ACTORS	9
SOCIAL ACTORS	11
THE ETA	17
TWO CENTRAL ISSUES	18
THE BASQUE CONFLICT OR PROBLEM	18
MOMENT OF OPPORTUNITIES	21
POLITICAL PROPOSALS	24
THE ROLE OF THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY	25
ANALYSIS	27
CONCLUSION	30
ANNEX 1	32

PREFACE

During the summer of 2005 three researchers, from the University of North Carolina² at Chapel Hill and Columbia University,³ came to Bilbao to conduct a series of interviews on the Basque conflict. The goal of the project was, first and foremost, to produce a document that would be an educational tool for Elkarri's international support network. The team worked with Elkarri to develop the interview protocol and to select a representative group of individuals from Basque civil society, academia, the political sphere, and the non-governmental sector. 29 in-depth interviews were conducted during the months of July and August, which have been used as the basis for this report⁴.

The current moment is a crucial juncture for Basque society, only weeks since the ETA's declaration of an unconditional and permanent ceasefire. A host of political and negotiation options hinge upon an end to the cycle of violence in Basque society. As Elkarri has repeatedly argued, fundamental progress in the process of political normalization and an end to violence in the Basque Country depends most directly on a decision by the ETA to lay down its arms. It is also clear that the long process of healing and social reconciliation cannot begin until the threat of violence has been removed. All the pieces are in place for Basque society to move towards peace and political normalization, which has been Elkarri's goal since its inception in 1992.

Most importantly, the team's research concludes that social movements in the Basque Country have voiced the deep needs of the Basque people for peace and have proven a catalyst for the transformation of the conflict—from a position of intransigence on the part of the Spanish government and the ETA to a strong will for resolution of the conflict on all sides. Social movements such as Elkarri, Gesto Por La Paz, and Basta Ya embody the demands of Basque society. They have promoted the evolution of public priorities in the Basque Country towards an unconditional demand for peace and a negotiated settlement to

1 This research was made possible with funding from the Foreign Language and Area Studies fellowship for 2004-05, travel subsidies from Elkarri, and the tireless assistance of former Elkarri Spokesperson Gorka Espiau

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4 See Annex 1 for the names and titles of all respondents. For summaries of the interviews please contact Sandi Chapman at: tximeleta.nc@gmail.com

the conflict. Precisely because of this transformation, the VIII General Assembly of Elkarrri voted in December of 2005 to transform the organization into a new entity. As of March, the work of Elkarrri has ended and the social movement has been transformed into a new organization called Lokarri, whose goal is helping to keep the peace process moving forward.

This report is designed to be a resource for those who wish to understand the nature of the conflict up to the present, as well as a tool for those who will play a role in operationalizing the demands for peace in the Basque Country and in Spain. It focuses on the complex social and political history of the conflict and on the role that social movements have played in bringing about the current victory in the long campaign for peace.

There has been no official negotiation process between the Spanish government and the ETA, and yet the ETA has declared an unconditional and permanent ceasefire with no guarantees from any other political body. In comparative context, it is important to recognize that no other contemporary conflicts have taken this trajectory, with even the Irish Republican Army declaring only a conditional ceasefire, which held during the first five years of negotiations.

The question of what brought the ETA to the point of willingness to lay down arms—with no guarantees for social reinsertion or the release of political prisoners, let alone the political demands that have always accompanied their statements regarding an end to violence—is a crucial one. This report aims to illuminate the forces that have come to bear on Basque and Spanish society during the past decades, as well as on the ETA, the Basque and Spanish governments, and the other political formations involved in the conflict. Fundamentally, the report concludes that Basque society has reached this historic moment due to a confluence of social and political, internal and external factors, and that it has been social movements such as Elkarrri, Gesto, Basta Ya, and others that have canalized Basque society's need, hope, and demand for peace and political normalization.

Most respondents feel that these social movements have given voice to the priorities of the Basque people, as well as creating tools for mediation and conflict management, which have transformed the context of the conflict and created the space for a peace process. The development of a peace process was much more tentative when the interviews were conducted last summer. At the time that this report is being published, the peace process has clearly begun. There are no guaranteed outcomes, but the permanent ceasefire of the ETA and the political will of the Spanish and Basque governments for achieving peace are the result of years of struggle. This fruit is born of the collective will and action of Basques and Spaniards who organized to demand an end to the violence and a political solution to the Basque conflict. That social will still exists and has provided the fuel for the ETA, the Basque and Spanish governments, and Basque society to begin making the commitment to peace a reality.

INTRODUCTION

In almost every community there are words with contextual meaning, particular to the experience of that place. There are subtleties to accent and word choice that may seem meaningless to newcomers, but which have a great deal of meaning for those who share the frame of reference or historical context of a given community. As non-Basques, one of the major challenges for the researchers was to gain an understanding of the subtleties of language, symbolism, and identity that are clearly important in any attempt to explain and seek resolution in conflicts such as those in the Basque Country.

In this case, the simplest example is also one of the most relevant. There are many different names for the Basque Country and understanding the meanings of these terms is key to understanding what the respondents are attempting to convey. El País Vasco, or the Basque Country, is the Spanish name for the territorial unit called La Comunidad Autónoma Vasca, the Basque Autonomous Community (BAC). The names for the Basque Country are not only different in the Basque language, but sometimes refer to a different

geographical space. The founder of the Basque Nationalist Party, Sabino Arana, coined the term Euskadi as a Basque and Spanish name for the Basque Country. Euskadi is the official term for the BAC in the Basque language, Euskera, and is used by politicians and citizens, both nationalist and non-nationalist, and by many outside of the Basque Country. Euskal Herria translates roughly from Euskera as the land of the Basque speakers and is the word used by Basque nationalists to describe the socio-cultural space in which the Basque people have historically lived. That land lies under three different administrative systems, in two nation states, and in seven provinces—three of which are in France and four of which are in Spain.

There is no other word for this territory either in English or in Spanish, as it is a geographical space claimed fundamentally by those who see the Basque homeland as a living entity without political manifestation. One of the most notable symptoms of the embedded social tensions is the importance of using the correct words. A non-nationalist would not normally use the term Euskal Herria and someone using it would know that they would be seen as a nationalist because of that word choice. Likewise, the choice to use the term País Vasco when speaking Spanish in the Basque Country suggests non-nationalism. In a general context, a non-nationalist Basque is one who does not pursue the right to self-determination for the Basque people and who would not vote in favor of Basque independence in such a referendum. Though motives for voting behavior vary, it is unlikely that someone who is non-nationalist would vote for the Basque Nationalist Party and certainly not for any of the independentist parties. A great many people in Basque society are troubled by the politicization of language and culture, which have been exploited by all political tendencies.

The three provinces that make up the BAC—Alava-Araba, Vizcaya-Bizkaia, and Guipuzcoa-Gipuzkoa—contain 2.1 million people out of Spain's total of approximately forty million. The BAC covers 7,234 square kilometers and has traditionally had one of the strongest regional economies in Spain. As a whole, the Basque language, Euskera, is understood “fairly well” or “perfectly” by 35% of the population of the BAC. Only 28% of the population says it speaks Euskera “fairly well” or “fluently,” but these numbers differ greatly by age and province. In Gipuzkoa 47%, in Bizkaia 22%, and in Araba 13% speak Euskera well. As a whole in the BAC, 24% of those over 65 and 44% of those between the ages of 15 and 24 speak well. In the BAC 28% read well and 25% are able to write well in Euskera. Currently, more than 50% of young people complete their studies in Euskera⁵.

During the industrial revolution, Euskera was associated with the countryside and the social backwater. Castilian was the language of business and of the provincial capitals and Euskera became stigmatized as a rural, unsophisticated language of the agricultural working class. This rural identity has been the focus of Basque nationalism since its inception in the early 20th century—a reclamation of ethnicity and cultural heritage that had been neglected for generations. The percentage of Basques who spoke Euskera had already dropped markedly before the Franco dictatorship began in 1939, which made the language illegal and resulted in a generational language gap. Many older Basques barely speak the language and their children have learned Basque in school, though through extended efforts over the past thirty years, the percentage of Euskera speakers is growing.

Navarre is part of the territory that preserves Basque culture, but is administratively separate from the BAC. For many reasons, over the centuries the lands occupied by Basque speakers have been retracting. Though Navarre still enjoys some uniquely Basque cultural traditions and heritage, as well as a strong Euskera-speaking population in the northern part of the region, it is no longer a clear-cut part of a contemporary Basque cultural space. There are approximately 55,300 Euskera speakers, 10.8% of the total Navarrese population⁶, concentrated in the northern part of Navarre. Another 52.2% consider themselves to be “mixed” or limited Euskera speakers. Unlike the three provinces in France (known as Iparralde or the Northern Basque Land), both Navarre and the BAC have constitutional protection for certain aspects of the traditional Basque legal system, which is quite different from that of the rest of the Spain.

5 See the Basque government's report “Competencia y Deseos Lingüísticos en la CAPV”, October 2002.

6 Data from the Navarrese Statistical Institute or Instituto Estadística de Navarra

These are called the *fueros* and the most notable difference is that these two Autonomous Communities (ACs) collect their own taxes and then cede back to the state a negotiated amount for services rendered, whereas everywhere else taxes are collected centrally and then a negotiated amount is ceded to the AC. This special concession was a political necessity at the time the Spanish Constitution was created in 1979, a moment conditioned by the forces of the previous regime, the development of a democratic system, and the presence of political parties in exile. This arrangement generates a great deal of tension since regions like Catalonia are now pushing for the same rights and, in general, these two regions contribute differently (and are seen by many other regions as contributing less) to the coffers of the state.

HISTORY

As became apparent during the interview process, the understanding that people have of their history conditions how they view the present. When searching for the roots of the Basque conflict, the question is often “how far back do you want to go?” Elkarri mentions two longstanding features of the Basque question that help to guide the reader through the sea of dates and events covered in this report: the difficulty of harmonizing internal relations in the Basque Country, particularly in coming to agreement on the relationship with the Spanish state, and the recourse to violence as a way to solve the problems that arise from these conflicts.

Though much has changed in the Basque Country, Spain, and the rest of Europe in the past few centuries, most Basques still feel that social differences based on language, culture, and traditional institutions still exist. During the consolidation of the Spanish state, and particularly throughout the 19th century, the question of Basque sovereignty and territorial definition led to numerous wars and violent confrontations. It is in this context that the Basque nationalist movement arose at the end of the 19th century.

Though during the 2nd Republic (1931-1936) a process of decentralization led to legislation granting rights of self-government to the Basque Country, Catalonia and Galicia, the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) and subsequent fascist dictatorship of General Francisco Franco upheld a centrist ideology that aggravated the Basque problem. For nearly four decades the regime violently suppressed use of Euskera, all symbols of Basque identity and all forms of self-government. Euzkadi Ta Azkatasuna (ETA, Basque Homeland and Freedom) was born in the 1950s in the context of this repression with their primary demand the creation of an independent Basque state made up of the territory in France and Spain. During the early years the ETA depended on propaganda to support its cause but began to use bombs, extortion and sabotage to achieve its political goals and killed for the first time in 1968.

Amidst growing pressure for democracy throughout Spain, Franco died a natural death in 1975 and was succeeded by Juan Carlos I de Borbón, under whose rule the transition to democracy began, culminating in elections in 1977. A new constitution provided for special autonomy rights for the “historic nationalities” and an asymmetric process of decentralization. Some nationalist parties felt they had been excluded from the constitutional process and the Basque Nationalist Party (PNV) called for abstention in the referendum. As a result, over sixty percent of Basques voted against or abstained in the vote on the Spanish Constitution (SC). However, a “yes” vote was necessary only from the majority of Spaniards, not the majority of each province, and the SC was approved in the referendum of 1978.

The ETA's decision to continue to use violence after the transition to democracy, and a change in tactics that included targeting civilians, journalists and politicians, caused an important shift in their social support base, which has diminished with time. In 1989 the ETA called a brief ceasefire during the negotiations in Algiers with the Socialist (PSOE) government of Felipe González and a longer ceasefire was declared in 1998 during the government of José María Aznar's Popular Party (PP). Both of these processes had included talks between the Spanish government and the ETA. Both attempts ended in failure and a return to violence by the ETA. The targeting of non-nationalist PSOE and PP politicians by the ETA has increased social and political tensions.

On the 22nd of March 2006, the ETA released a communiqué declaring a permanent ceasefire. The statement affirmed a “commitment to continue taking steps” towards peace and asking that the French and Spanish governments allow the process to take whatever direction it may, respecting the decision of the Basque people⁷. Most social and political actors view this step as a positive sign, particularly given its permanent and unconditional nature. This is the first time in history that the Spanish government has had a mandate from Parliament to negotiate with the ETA once the organization made a commitment to peace. Many actors feel that the window of opportunity for the ETA and the Spanish government to conduct negotiations without the presence of violence is a narrow one. When these interviews were conducted, most participants were deeply uncertain whether either side, particularly the ETA, would be capable of taking advantage of this ephemeral opportunity. At the present moment, the ETA has taken a major step forward that seems likely to open the doors for a negotiated settlement and an end to the violence that has plagued the Basque Country and Spain for so many years.

POLITICAL ACTORS

Basque society has traditionally been very diverse both in political orientation and sense of national identity. Trade union leader Loli Garcia points out that “in this country there are those who feel that the territorial question was not sufficiently resolved during The Transition and that the trajectory of the Statute [of Guernica] aggravated the problem. Others believe that the State of Autonomies has served to open the way towards meeting the needs of the Basque people and another group believes that even this change was excessive.”⁸

The political parties in the Basque Country are the following:

- **The Basque Nationalist Party (PNV-EAJ):** The PNV has traditionally been the majority party of the BAC. Through diverse coalitions it has governed since the first democratic elections in 1979 and is a Christian Democratic party. The PNV rejects the violence of the ETA and recently backed a proposal for a free-associational relationship with the Spanish state.

- **Basque Solidarity (Eusko Alkartasuna):** EA was born from a split with the PNV in the 1980s. It is a nationalist Social Democratic party and rejects the violence of the ETA. It is currently part of the three-way coalition of the PNV-EA-EB that governs in the Basque Country. EA has a standing coalition agreement with the PNV to run together in elections and receive, accordingly, a number of seats in the Basque Parliament—in the most recent elections in April 2005 it was seven of twenty-nine.

- **The Basque Socialist Party (PSE):** The PSE is the regional affiliate of the Spanish Socialist Worker's Party (PSOE) that governs in Spain and is currently the main party of the opposition in the Basque Country, having formed coalition governments with the PNV in the past. The PSE recognizes the viability of a reform of the Statute of Guernica and defends a federal territorial organization for Spain that does not accord a differentiated status for the Basque Country.

- **The Basque Popular Party (PP):** The PP in the Basque Country is fully integrated with the Spanish and European Popular Parties. It rejects the political character of the Basque conflict and supports maintaining the status quo in relation to the State of Autonomies and the Spanish judicial system. The PP was the primary opposition party in the Basque Country for two legislative periods, prior to the April 2005 elections when the PSE became the largest opposition force.

- **The Communist Party of the Basque Homeland (PCTV-EHAK):** EHAK is a small party formed in 2002 that opened its party lists to accommodate voters of the illegalized **Batasuna** and **Aukera Guztiak**,

⁷ See coverage in El País at <http://www.elpais.es/comunes/2006/eta/treguas.html?foto=11>, April 4, 2006.

⁸ Except for the words of Teresa Toda, all quotes in this document have been translated by the author from Spanish

just prior to the April elections last year. EHAK is a leftist-independentist party whose primary goals are to promote a negotiated settlement in which all of the political formations involved in the Basque conflict would participate. The party is currently being investigated by the Spanish High Court (Audiencia Nacional) where it is argued that it should be illegalized on the basis of connections with the ETA. Batasuna has historically been the main party of the Basque Movement for National Liberation, as it calls itself (Movimiento para la Liberación Nacional Vasca, MLNV), and was illegalized by the Spanish courts in 2002. Batasuna does not condemn the violence of the ETA and defends self-determination and unification for the Basque territories.

- **Basque United Left (Ezker Batua):** Part of the statewide United Left coalition, EB supports a federal vision of Spain's territorial organization and defends the right to self-determination of all peoples. For several legislative periods, EB has formed part of the three-party coalition government in the Basque Country, with the PNV and EA.

- **Aralar:** The most voted party of the MLNV in Navarre, Aralar broke from Batasuna in 2002 and won its first seat in the Basque Parliament in 2005. Aralar rejects violence and condemns the ETA's actions publicly. It supports non-exclusionary party dialogue and recognizes the plurality of the Basque people while maintaining an independentist platform.

The most recent elections for the Basque Parliament have produced significant changes in the political landscape. The PNV hoped to receive electoral support for the proposal approved in the Basque Parliament earlier this year, a proposal for a new free-associational relationship with Spain. The results of the elections were a general decrease in the number of votes cast, with all parties except the PSE losing votes. The new distribution included a decrease in seats for both the PNV and the PP, a sizeable gain for the PSE and EHAK, and one seat for Aralar. This reorganization has weakened the three-party governing coalition but has created a need for parliamentary negotiation and pacting, which many Basques view as difficult but positive for the peace and political normalization process. The previous elections had produced record turnout in the Basque Country and it was not surprising that voter participation was not sustained at that level.

At the state level, there are only two parties currently in positions to govern—the PP and the PSOE. The United Left (IU) is the third party but is very small in comparison. After eight years of government by the PP in Spain, in March 2004 the PSOE won the general elections. The government of Aznar had maintained a policy of zero-dialogue, accompanied by stringent police action against the ETA and activist judicial proceedings based on the Law of Political Parties, which was supported by the Socialists and makes possible the illegalization of political parties that do not condemn terrorism, since 2002. Ramon Múgica, a former representative for the PP in the Bilbao City Council, described the position of the PP as “an authentic rock. No talking, no concessions, just the application of the laws: police and judicial action.” Elkarri, along with many social and political actors in the Basque Country and in Spain, were openly critical of this policy of zero-dialogue, which was implemented after the failed ceasefire in 1998.

The government of José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero has opted for a different strategy in its first two years in office. Institutionally, the PSOE tends to have a different reading of the question of territoriality, upholding the unity of the Spanish state and at the same time backing an open-ended definition of the State of Autonomies. Currently, proposals for reform of the Statutes of Autonomy (akin to regional constitutions) are underway in several ACs. The debates in Catalonia are being followed carefully in the Basque Country as a litmus test for any future proposals there, something that the central government knows well. Specifically in relation to the Basque conflict, the Spanish President has personally implicated himself in a campaign to negotiate the end of the ETA. Elkarri and a majority of Basques positively evaluate Zapatero's actions in this area, though Oskar Matute of Ezker Batua expresses the common sentiment that “we are living a moment of uncertainty mixed with hope: the [Spanish] governments always start out with the will to arrive at an agreement with the ETA, which later gets twisted into a false closure of the process.”

Earlier last year, Zapatero solicited and was granted parliamentary approval to open a dialogue process with the ETA if they were to declare a ceasefire. Criticism from the PP has been strong, particularly since these tactics represent a break from the strategy that was agreed to by the two parties during the previous government's rule. Currently, the PSOE governs in Madrid with the conditional parliamentary support of the center-right Catalan nationalist party *Convergència i Unió* (Convergence and Union) and IU, though conflicts over the budget and the reform process of the Catalan Statute of Autonomy have stressed these relationships. The issue of Catalonia's reformed Statute of Autonomy has touched a raw vein for many Spaniards and has come to dominate public opinion regarding the socialist government. The difficulty of resolving disagreements over territorial organization with Catalonia, given the fact that the Catalans are much more unified behind their proposal than the Basques were, illuminates the challenge that lies ahead for the Basque Country in the political arena.

SOCIAL ACTORS⁹

Labor unions in the Spanish ACs are organized both by sector and in cross-industry unions, though the strongest generally have a presence in most major industries. In the Basque Country there are four principle unions: ELA, CCOO, LAB, and UGT in order of membership strength in the BAC. The labor unions in the Basque Country are some of the strongest in Spain and play an important role both as representatives of political and trade union ideologies and as agents who speak on behalf of most Basque workers.

- **The Basque Worker's Union (ELA-STV):** This union is the strongest in the Basque Country with over 100,000 members. Founded in 1911 it has an independentist orientation and is one of the few economically independent trade unions. Though ELA supports the right to self-determination, in recent years the union has removed itself from the political debate regarding dialogue and negotiations. As a labor union that gives priority to the question of national self-determination, the basic position of ELA is that the Spanish state is unwilling to cede this and therefore negotiating tables for political questions are not in their interest at this time. A democratic accumulation of forces is necessary to change the balance of power in order to demand these goals, in their view. Xabier Anza of the Robles-Aranquiz Institute describes ELA's position, saying that "here everyone talks about consensus. I wish there were a consensus but in my opinion, there hasn't been consensus for 200 years and it's just not possible at this time. If it isn't possible, what should we be doing as a labor union whose strategy is to prioritize the right to decide? We want self-government with social content, a country with more sovereignty in the economic arena and with greater international integration, without precarious working conditions, without poverty—self-government with these elements. As a trade unionist, knowing that the Spanish state has no need to reach consensus in this and they aren't going to do it, my strategy is an accumulation of forces. Find others in the political and social arena and get underway a process that in five, fifteen, or fifty years will force the Spanish government to give way."

- **The Worker's Committee of the Basque Country (CCOO Euskadi):** This union is the largest labor union in Spain and generally alternates with LAB as the second or third force in the BAC. Traditionally connected to the Spanish Communist Party, the CCOO has become politically independent since the democratic transition. In the Basque Country, the CCOO represents a non-nationalist ideology but houses a wide variety of political perspectives within its ranks. Loli Garcia describes her personal orientation within the union as "more a feeling of class than of country. Apart from the fact that I have my roots here and I want to live in Euskadi and I feel emotionally, physically and professionally connected to this land, my primary orientation is that of class. I am not worried so much by what kind of political organization

⁹ The social actors section is an adaptation and translation of current research being conducted by Gorka Espiau for the United States Institute for Peace, Washington, D.C.

we will have, what framework (though I personally defend a federal model) as by the content of that framework. A concrete example: I don't mind so much who controls the system of Social Security but rather that we maintain a public pension system."

- **Basque Workers for Independence (LAB):** This union is part of the MLNV. LAB is currently under investigation by the Audiencia Nacional for connections with the ETA and many of its union organizers have been arrested or imprisoned on related charges in the last few years. LAB identifies itself as a union that "unites social transformation and national liberation under the trade union strategy. [The union] has struggled against class exploitation at the same time that it has shown a permanent commitment to nation-building in the Basque Homeland."¹⁰

- **General Worker's Union (UGT):** The second force in Spain and fourth in the BAC, the UGT has historical roots in the PSOE and is a firmly non-nationalist trade union. The UGT identifies itself as a union that "defends a model of vertebrate sectional unionism, open to all collectives and workers, from a position of respect for the ideological and political pluralism that exists in the working class."¹¹ UGT representative Raul Arza describes the ETA as the most significant problem in the Basque Country, saying, "the ETA is first, after that we can look at other questions. The ETA distorts everything. We have to utilize the Spanish Constitution to search for a comfortable relationship between the Basque Country and Spain."

SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

There are a number of important institutions and organizations that operate in the context of Basque civil society. Here, three of the major tendencies are outlined, represented by the three largest social movements in the Basque Country. Other important institutions include the Basque Catholic Church, which has consistently chosen to implicate itself in the issues and problems of Basque society and has often played a mediating role, and the various associations of victims, which are numerous and play a complex role in politics and social life in the Basque Country and Spain. Though these organizations have conditioned the reality in the Basque Country and the political status of the victims, in particular, the respondent's spoke much more frequently of social movements when discussing which organizations had played a major role in creating this moment of opportunity for resolution.

The three primary social movements for peace in the Basque Country have been Gesto Por La Paz, Basta Ya, and Elkarri.

- **Gesto Por la Paz (A Gesture for Peace):** Gesto was born in 1986, bringing together six smaller local groups that had been holding silent vigils after each death that occurred in relation to the Basque conflict, at a time when the death toll reached up to 100 people in a given year. The primary concern for Gesto is the existence of violence as a tool for political action and its central beliefs are that political problems should not be associated with violence. The struggle for non-violence in the Basque Country is an end, in and of itself. Violence is an antidemocratic pressure in the context of resolving political problems and Gesto has worked to foment public opposition and rejection of the violence of the ETA and of political violence of any kind. An early leader of Gesto, Imanol Zubero, described their philosophy, saying that "the application of the theoretical principle of a separation between violence and politics is founded on the affirmation that, in opposition to the thesis defended by radical nationalism (and in some cases by Basque nationalism in its entirety), there exists no necessary relationship between the violence of the ETA and a political problem, real or imagined." Violence only becomes an instrument of struggle based upon a particular vision of reality for the Basque territories, one that Gesto does not share.

¹⁰ See LAB website www.labsindikatua.org

¹¹ See UGT Euskadi website www.ugteuskadi.org

The application of Gesto's philosophy to the political realm is manifested in the idea that "it is crucial that the democratic forces commit themselves to the labor of doing what can and should be done, leaving violence aside. Distinguishing practically between violence and politics supposes that political parties are capable of putting forth political proposals (in the broadest sense of the term: development of self-government, social and economic policy, the defense of human rights, etc) so that civil society can engage them and so that they can be debated between the rest of the political forces and be converted democratically into legislative action. It is fundamental that the parties be capable of proposing and developing a strategy for political and social normalization in Euskadi and in Navarre without admitting the use of violence. It is important that political parties hold the reins of the peace process...clearly, everyone hopes that doing this will contribute to a transformation of our current vision of reality, which today is based upon violence, but never again should we articulate a necessary connection between the two issues."¹²

Over the years the activities of Gesto Por La Paz have been numerous and central to the development of a civil society and political sphere dedicated to peace. In addition to the silent vigils, which give Gesto its name and are its best-known activity, the organization has played an important role in a number of other areas. On the anniversary of Ghandi's death, Gesto organizes a demonstration each year. These have been important rallying points in the struggle for peace, particularly when these demonstrations coincided with an assassination and became multitudinous events with thousands of participants. During the period in which the ETA used kidnappings as a political and economic tool, Gesto led the movement to oppose these events and stand in solidarity with the families of those kidnapped, initiating the symbolic practice of wearing blue ribbons to signify support for the victims. The political advocacy work of the organization centers around promoting initiatives focused on supporting the victims of violence, articulating the need for peace education, an end to the abuse and torture of suspected ETA members, and a resolution to the situation of Basque political prisoners.

Though in recent years the Basque and Spanish governments, as well as numerous non-governmental organizations, have become involved in solidarity work with the victims of violence related to the Basque conflict, for many years Gesto was the only source of institutional support and solidarity with the families and victims in the Basque Country. In addition to providing social and emotional support, Gesto served as an intermediary, attempting to communicate the economic and physical needs of the families, which in most cases had been deprived not only of a beloved family member but also of the primary breadwinner in the home. As many other groups have done, Gesto organizes seminars, round tables, and debates in order to foment communication about these issues.

The organization is primarily supported by volunteers and depends on a very small professional staff made up of two part time employees. Gesto is financed primarily from two sources: public subsidies and individual collaborators, though it occasionally engages in other fundraising activities. Public subsidies come principally from the Basque government's Department of Justice and, to a much smaller degree, from provincial and municipal governments. A 2001 study calculated that at that time private donations accounted for 24.4% of the organizations financing.¹³

Gesto has made two strategic decisions that fundamentally impact its range of activities. First, it has decided that its sphere of activity should be limited to an ethical debate and should avoid the expression of opinions or proposals that impact the political sphere. Second, Gesto has made a strategic commitment to a non-professional volunteer base, which it believes to be a positive form of internal organizational structure.

- **Basta Ya (Enough!):** Basta Ya is part of the movement known as the Constitutionalist Movement (CM), which originated in response to the kidnapping and assassination of a member of the PP, Miguel Ángel

¹² See the document "Separar violencia y política" in the section "Fundamentos de Gesto por la Paz" on the organization's website www.gesto.org

¹³ <http://www.gesto.org/financiacion.htm>

Blanco, in 1997. The cold-blooded killing of this young local politician produced a massive and generalized social outrage across the Basque Country and in Spain. It sparked the creation of several new organizations, in particular the Foro de Ermua (Ermua Forum), followed by Basta Ya and later, the Fundación para la Libertad (Foundation For Liberty). As the CM grew, it became a specific target of the ETA and its members have lived under constant threat until now.

The founding document of the Foro de Ermua, the first organization in the CM, explains its divergence from the position of Gesto Por La Paz: "recognizing the great works realized by the pacifist groups created in Euskadi during those difficult years, we believe that our society requires new forms of opposition to Basque fascism, which appeal more to democratic law and to action rather than to pacifist gestures and testimonial silence...[U]p until the infamous assassination of Miguel Ángel Blanco, the demonstrations against terrorism had traditionally been organized by pacifist groups and always developed in a silence somewhere between resignation and mysticism. The ones yelling were in the opposing demonstrations organized by Herri Batasuna while the [pacifists], mute, turned the other cheek and took not only the insults but also the stones...[W]e reject any strategy originating from mediators, politicians, unions, or ecclesiastical forces that attempts to erase the footprints of the democratic mobilization initiated in Ermua and to temper our unequivocal message: to end, once and for all, the ambiguity in the Basque Country regarding this question, putting a definitive end to all forms of collaboration between democrats and fascists."¹⁴

One of the primary contextual differences between the origins of Elkarri and Gesto and that of the CM is that the latter originated during the political tenure of the PP, when it had an absolute majority in the Spanish Parliament. For the first time, and specifically in the case of the constitutionalist organizations, the central government and Spanish national parties offered their full support to strengthen the work of these groups. New forms of public economic support were created, these groups received access to the professional services and resources of political parties and institutions in the social sphere, and political leaders participated in their demonstrations. The primary media outlets at the national level gave wide and exclusive positive coverage to this movement and its program.

Basta Ya believes its activity to be necessary "because fundamental liberties and human rights are in danger in the Basque Country, especially for non-nationalist citizens, because of the terrorism of the ETA and its support groups, some legal and some 'illegal,' and also because of the force of ethnic and xenophobic nationalism among the moderate nationalist parties and other entities, which hope to produce agreements with the ETA that will be favorable for nationalist interests and exclude those Basques with other ideas and identities."

For the CM, the primary problem is not ending the violence of the ETA but combating the ideas and initiatives of nationalism in general, which makes possible that violence in their opinion. Its message is directed primarily to the PP and the PSOE in the Spanish government, demanding an intensification in the political and judicial initiatives against Basque nationalism. Specifically, Basta Ya and the Foro de Ermua demand political agreements between the two main Spanish parties in order to oust the PNV from power in the Basque Parliament, to legalize Batasuna, and to bring criminal charges against President Ibarretxe. In parallel, they demand new methods of reparation for the victims of violence and they reject any possibility of dialogue with the MLNV.

Basta Ya has the least formally developed internal organization of the three organizations. Membership and voting rights are open to any wishing to participate and assemblies are held for making important decisions. Like Gesto, Basta Ya lacks a core group of professional workers and depends primarily on volunteers. Unlike Gesto and Elkarri, Basta Ya and the other organizations in the CM are private entities that do not make their accounting records public, making difficult the task of understanding the internal

14 Founding Manifesto, Foro de Ermua "Por la DEMOCRACIA en EUSKADI," February 13, 1998

financing of the organization. Basta Ya states that the organization is financed completely by individual contributions and by grants from the Miguel Ángel Blanco Foundation, the Gregorio Ordóñez, Manos Blancas, and Denon Artean Foundations, and with a grant of 50,000 euros from the European Parliament, received in the year 2000 in the form of the Sajarov Award.

In its relationships with other organizations, the CM clearly identifies social and political friends and enemies, using confrontation with those groups of a different philosophy to unite its supporters. This has produced a strong opposition to the movement by certain sectors of society, but has also bound tightly those who are considered allies. The work of the CM includes tapping academic, political, and social leaders to lead its events and demonstrations, utilizing the court system as a mechanism for fighting Basque nationalism, and conducting a campaign to oust the PNV from power in the BAC. For the first time, this campaign fomented the idea that moderate Basque nationalism supported the violence of the ETA and, though the campaign was ultimately unsuccessful, it has had deep repercussions and a polarizing impact on the relations between nationalist and non-nationalist parties in the Basque Country.

- **Elkarri:** Elkarri was born in 1992, when the Ajuria-Enea Pact¹⁵ had been in effect for several years and when the Basque Country faced a social and political scenario marked by the violence of the ETA and the revelation of the socialist government's implication in the activity of the GAL (Antiterrorist Liberation Group).¹⁶ The primary difference with the previous period, in which Gesto originated, was the discrepancy between the major political parties regarding the possibility of articulating a dialogue process to end the violence and the frustration of Basque society with the Ajuria-Enea Pact, which had not produced solutions to the problem. The Spanish national parties interpreted the pact as leaving no space for dialogue with the MNLV after the failure of the negotiations in Algiers, while the moderate nationalist parties defended the validity of Point 10 of the pact—the development of a dialogue process in the context of non-violence. In particular, Elkarri's early orientation reflects a shift in Basque society as more and more people found themselves unrepresented in the dichotomy of democrats versus terrorists, reclaiming an analysis of the situation that allowed for building bridges and finding avenues for dialogue.

Elkarri saw Basque society facing a two-part problem—differentiated, yet related and interdependent. On the one hand, Basque society suffers from a political conflict based on the lack of a sufficiently broad agreement about the basic rules of coexistence. The Statute of Autonomy and the SC continue to cause conflict between the different political forces. Connected to the political conflict (but not caused by it), Elkarri believes that violence, in addition to violating the fundamental rights of thousands of people, impedes democratic dialogue regarding the norms of coexistence, which would make possible a new agreement with a greater level of consensus than what exists currently. Therefore, Elkarri's primary aims were to end the violence and get underway a process of dialogue that could yield new agreements.

Elkarri understands violence to include all violations of fundamental human rights—first and foremost the activity of the ETA for its human impact and social repercussions, but also abuse and torture, which are consequences of the policy of dispersion and other such situations. Elkarri believes in constituting multi-party talks and is convinced that if this is done correctly, it will be possible to reach an agreement that covers the primary aspirations of all the existing viewpoints in the Basque Country. Without promoting

15 Signed on January 12, 1988, the Ajuria-Enea Pact was entitled "An Agreement for Normalization and Pacification in Euskadi". The pact was signed by all the major parties in the Basque political spectrum, uniting nationalist and non-nationalists in an attempt to tackle the problems of peace and political normalization

16 The GAL was a state sponsored terrorist organization created in secret by members of the Spanish government to fight the ETA. They were financed and protected by the Spanish Interior Minister and used torture, kidnapping, extortion, and assassination principally in the French Basque territories. Though several people have been imprisoned on charges related to the GAL, no government representatives have ever apologized or admitted its connection to the government and its victims do not receive the same stat

Report on the basque conflict: keys to understanding the eta's permanent ceasefire

any specific outcome, the organization believes that a new agreement with a greater level of consensus can be reached if all parties are present at the table in a situation of non-violence.

This social movement organized its base in the form of heterogeneous volunteer groups called local workshops. The participants in the local workshops elect the provincial bodies and the primary decision-making body, the Permanent National Workshop. Elkarri has a professional staff that oscillates between five and fifteen people. The General Coordinator and the various spokespeople are part of the paid staff. Elkarri has seventy active local groups, 3000 dues-paying members, and a network of over 10,000 periodic collaborators. Elkarri's budget has been over 600,000 euros for the past few years, considerably greater than the other organizations mentioned here. The salaries of the staff and basic operations of the organization are always covered by membership dues, allowing Elkarri to remain politically independent. These dues generally cover around 50% of the budget with public subsidies making up another 20% and the rest originating from diverse fundraising efforts. The majority of public subsidies come from the Basque government's Human Rights Bureau and some provincial and municipal government grants. Elkarri has combined traditional fundraising efforts, such as raffles and the sale of its journal, with the sale of art from collaborators such as Nobel Prize winner José Saramago, Antoni Tapies, Chillida, Oteiza, Bernardo Atxaga, and Manuel Vazquez Montalbán, who have donated sculptures, paintings, or poems to Elkarri. Major decisions are made by the General Assembly, which meets every two years. Other decisions are made by the Permanent National Workshop, the regional assemblies, or in special sessions.

Unlike Gesto, Elkarri chooses to play a role as an internal agent in the conflict. In the sphere of social action, Elkarri collaborates with Gesto on campaigns against the violence of the ETA and in solidarity with the victims, and with the associations of the families of ETA prisoners against the policy of dispersion or the cover-up of torture cases. Ideologically, Elkarri has a great deal in common with the analysis and proposals that have come from the Basque Catholic Church. In the political sphere, Elkarri's role has shifted over time. In its early years, Elkarri proposed an alternative to the Ajuria-Enea Pact and received much criticism and even hostility from those groups supporting the Pact. Early on, the MLNV perceived Elkarri as a potentially useful organization because many of Elkarri's members came from that political tradition and because there were points in common regarding analysis of the conflict. However, these positions began to shift quickly. The supporters of the Pact, such as the PNV, EA, and Ezker Batua believed that a large sector of their electorate agreed with this new analysis and they began to investigate alternative options in line with Elkarri's suggestions. The MLNV, on the other hand, began to distance itself because of Elkarri's firm rejection of the violence of the ETA. These positions have deepened with time and Elkarri has created a strong network of relationships and collaboration with the PNV, EA, EB, Convergencia de Demócratas Navarros, Abertzaleen Batasuna (AB), Aralar, the PSE, and sectors of the Partido Socialista de Navarra and the MLNV. The primary opponents of Elkarri's work are the PP, the UPN, sectors of the PSN, and the more radical organizations within the MLNV. Within civil society, the organizations that form part of the CM such as the Foro de Ermua, Basta Ya, Fundación Para la Libertad, and others also oppose Elkarri's work.

Elkarri's major initiatives included:

- The three Conferences for Peace in Euskal Herria, beginning in 1993, which brought together politicians, international observers, and social organizations to talk about constructing a peace process
- Several demonstrations that have brought thousands of people to the streets demanding dialogue and peace
- numerous discussion forums, working groups, research projects, and publications oriented towards developing methodologies and momentum for beginning a successful process of peace and political normalization.

To support the Peace Conference process, Elkarri formed an international support committee, which included Nobel Prize winners such as the Dalai Lama, John Hume, Rigoberta Menchú, José Ramos Horta, Mairead Maguire, and former Director General of UNESCO, Federico Mayor Zaragoza.

THE ETA

The challenge of laying out an analysis of the ETA's role in the current political scenario lies in the inaccessibility of those currently within the organization, requiring some speculation about power relations and internal dynamics and limiting the picture to public actions and to communiqués. This may begin to change with the declaration of a permanent ceasefire and the inevitable commencement of a process of social reinsertion. It is believed that the number of members of the ETA is a few hundred and has been reducing over time. The demographic of the armed group has changed as well. Many of the founders and original members abandoned the group after the democratic transition and many more have been imprisoned over the years. The hard core of the organization is thought to be younger and may have a different political formation, having not grown up during Franco's dictatorship.

The ETA's goals are the exercise of the right to self-determination for the Basque people and the creation of an independent state that unifies all the Basque territories—the three provinces of the BAC in Spain, Navarre, and the three provinces of the French Basque Country. The letter sent by six of the historic leaders of the ETA from prison last year, calling for the end of the armed struggle, caused the expulsion of these members and revealed tensions within the organization. At the time that preliminary analysis of these interviews was being conducted, these internal disagreements were judged both as an opportunity—that part of the ETA was ready to talk and perhaps to lay down arms—and as a new uncertainty, as any split within the organization would make negotiations riskier from a tactical perspective. The ceasefire makes it apparent that the internal power balance certainly favors an end to violence and it is unlikely that a permanent ceasefire would have been declared if this were not the overwhelming priority of the organization. However, because the ETA has historically been supported by a social movement and a portion of Basque society, rather than an isolated handful of individuals, political progress on issues such as the policy of dispersion, the status of political prisoners, and the process of reinsertion may condition the behavior of the organization or of some of its members.

Reporting data on the number of prisoners and the number of victims of the ETA is an uncertain process. Even the definition of who counts as a victim is disputed and the number of prisoners is constantly changing. Official sources generally will not publish formal statistics due to the political disagreement over these questions. It is estimated that, since its inception, the ETA has participated in over seventy kidnappings. There have been 817 assassinations, which include 339 civilians, 198 members of the Guardia Civil, and 145 police. Of those assassinations, 547 took place in the Basque Country, 121 in Madrid, and 55 in Catalonia. The number of deaths caused by the ETA is generally the most consistent among different sources, with the same number reported by the Spanish Interior Ministry, the Basque government, and most major news agencies.

According to various media sources, including *El País*, the number of victims of the GAL is 23 people, killed between 1983 and 1987. The organization *Etzerat* (representing the families of prisoners of the ETA) estimates that, as of 2005, there were 674 Basque political prisoners dispersed in 88 prisons. The majority, 514, are in 47 Spanish jails of an average distance of 700 kilometers from the Basque territories. In France, there are 154 Basque political prisoners in 28 jails an average of 800 kilometers from their place of residence. Five are in Mexican jails and one is in London, while 11 are in the Basque Country, despite the existence of European legislation guaranteeing prisoners the right to complete their sentences in jails close to their place of residence. Other media sources claim the number of total prisoners is 659, with 499 in Spain, though the Spanish Interior Ministry claims there are 544 in Spanish prisons.

When asking the respondents why they believed the ETA had not killed in over two years (now closer to three), most agreed that there were a combination of forces that had pressured the organization in recent years. While all recognized that if the ETA was not killing it would be, in general, a matter of choice, various elements are seen to have influenced that decision—the pressure of police and military action

(which has made life in exile more difficult and has eliminated important aspects of the leadership and support network of the ETA), internal changes in the MLNV and a recognition of the limited support among their social base for the use of violence, and the terrorist attacks of March 11, 2004. The Basque journalist Roberto Urkitza sums up neatly the points made by many, stating that “the fact that the ETA has not killed in two years is not completely a question of conscious decision. They attempted the assassination of some ertzaintzas in September 2004 but without success. The ETA has been seriously considering what would be necessary for them to lay down their arms. September 11th [2001] and March 11th [2004] have affected them deeply and for various reasons. At one level, they see that if the government is not going to fold faced by two hundred deaths, they are not going to do it for whatever harm the ETA could cause. They also feel isolated given the enormity of radical Islamic terrorism and with the IRA looking for peace. March 11th showed that perhaps they will not be able to win with their strategy, but the difficulty is that they cannot afford to appear to have lost. They have to find a way to end it without seeming to have lost, even if that is what's really happened. When the ETA began killing members of the PP, many doors were closed, which is logical. Although dealing with the PP is difficult, they are a key element because they are one of the two parties that will be governing in Spain.”

TWO CENTRAL ISSUES

The problem of violence in the Basque Country has persisted for many years, though the cause is disputed. Today the problem of violence is first and foremost manifested in the existence of the ETA, which, until the ceasefire, continued to use violence as a means of obtaining its political goals. The partial ceasefire that the ETA declared early last summer had only touched a part of the population upon which the group had declared death penalties, and the use of bombs and threats for economic extortion and political pressure continued unabated. The ETA's violence was generally not arbitrary, though there have been important exceptions, and has conditioned political activity and coexistence in profound ways—from the loss and suffering of victims in part of the population to the distortion in the political arena caused by the need for Socialist and Popular politicians to be permanently under the protection of bodyguards.

Secondly, there exists a political conflict. Though the relationship between politics and violence is an area of some disagreement amongst the respondents, the political conflict in the Basque Country is conditioned by the persistence of violence and could manifest itself differently under conditions of peace. Currently, the political conflict is primarily oriented around the national question. There exist important and historically rooted differences in the visions of territorial organization, relationship with Spain, and spheres of sovereignty and decision-making power, which have not been resolved.

These two problems are central to creating peace and normalizing political coexistence and activity in the Basque Country. Most political and social actors recognize the complex intertwining of the territorial political question and the issue of violence. The major challenge lies in rejecting the use of violence under all circumstances and at the same time not allowing the violence that exists to paralyze political activity and attempts to find a democratic and negotiated solution to the various conflicts that exist.

THE BASQUE CONFLICT OR PROBLEM

During the interview process each conversation began with the question of how the respondent views the problem or conflict in the Basque Country. In general there is an important level of agreement about what the obstacles are to a peace process, a similar assessment of the opportunities and challenges of the current moment and in perspectives on the role of victims. Significant differences exist in the historical analysis and goals of the different political and social agents, which tend to produce differences in position regarding acceptable or necessary political action.

Violence

All of the respondents recognized violence as a factor that negatively affects social and political coexistence and that touches all aspects of life in the Basque Country. Most agreed that while a solution to the problem of violence and the end of the ETA would open many doors and is necessary, it is not enough, alone, to resolve the political conflict. On the other hand, those few who do not believe that a political conflict exists, but rather that the violence of the ETA is the only problem, argue that ending this violence will be sufficient.

The definition of violence in and of itself is not uniform and is one of the items that should be debated when creating conditions for multi-party talks. Txema Urkijo, former Director of the Basque government's Human Rights Bureau, says "there is a question of how we decide what kinds of violence is inadmissible, and which will be tolerated—because at some point we must draw the line. There are very concrete and evident types of violence where there will be no discussion. An assassination by the ETA is something in which we will all coincide. But as we distance ourselves from such evident examples we begin to dilute a strict conceptualization of violence and we enter into discussion about more subtle forms of violence, which are debatable."

One of the main priorities in addressing the question of violence is recognizing the importance of legitimizing individual suffering. These interviews reveal hopeful signs that across the entire political spectrum, social and political agents, as representatives and as citizens, are finding themselves capable of acknowledging the suffering of "the other." One of many distortions produced by the presence of violence employed for political goals is that it is much more difficult for those who have lived through such experiences to see that their loss or suffering is not diminished by recognizing that others have also suffered. Spanish society in general, and in a very concentrated way in Basque society, encompasses several generations that have suffered violence and do not feel that there has been a social recognition of that experience. Josu Gago, psychologist and educator, said that the most important process would be "the creation of a climate of recognition of the other. Recognizing other ideas as ideas that deserve to be taken into account. This forms part of the theory of human communication—basically there are three ways of responding to the message of 'the other': to accept, to reject, or to dismiss. The worst possible way is dismissiveness because at least if I reject the content of what you say to me, that forms a part of the human dialectic. I reject what you say because I don't agree with it, but I still value you as a human being."

The Spanish Civil War was a long and bloody affair and the dictatorship that followed produced new wounds. The amnesty declared after the death of Franco has complicated some aspects of coexistence, as there are many crimes that have gone untried and many perceive a lack of closure. In the Basque Country, there are numerous small towns where social relationships are direct and magnified, where the last years of Franco's regime were particularly harsh, and where the violence of the ETA has been present for more than three decades with all of the internal tensions this implies. In this context, for many Basques, familial memory and personal suffering have accumulated, rather than diminishing over time.

Itziar Aspuru, Spokeswoman for Gesto Por La Paz describes what she sees as a central problem—"I believe there is a confrontation of pain, I have this pain and you have that one, which weighs more, which weighs less? There are people who only think of the one and those who think only of the other, when someone mentions the pain of one group it is always answered and confronted with the pain of the other. It is important to be careful because it can seem that by speaking of both you are putting them on the same level. Let's talk about victims and only about victims, let's talk about the prisoners and only about the prisoners. They are two worlds whose pain is in confrontation and remains unshared." Those respondents who agreed with this analysis also suggested that the change in government at the state level and the lack of deaths resulting from ETA attacks for several years are a slow but positive beginning to blunting the

sharpest edges of personal suffering. Most feel that the social healing process will be the slowest of all and some argue that the generations that lived the Civil War, franquismo, and the violence of the ETA must all pass before Basque Society can fully recover.

Political Conflict

In some ways the political conflict is both more complex and more straightforward. The primary debates around this issue are questions of constitutionality, sovereignty, democracy, and the right to self-determination. The proposal that Elkarrri has supported for years, which has been deepened as new possibilities have opened up, is that of two sets of talks in which the question of the ETA and violence are dealt with at one, and another includes political parties that will debate questions of territoriality and political reforms. This proposal came out of the Third Peace Conference process.

The interviews revealed an ample consensus supporting a negotiating process of some kind, reflecting the broad support in the Basque Country and in Spain for a negotiated end to the Basque conflict. The challenge arises from the important differences that exist in two dimensions—between the different political formations and between what individual actors believe would be ideal and what seems to be taking place on the ground, given the existing political realities. Enrique Portocarrero, a businessman and Chair of the Basque Business Circle, gives an example, saying that “for many years this country has been governed by coalitions between nationalists and non-nationalists, between the PSE and the PNV, that is what has been forgotten here. We have to give time to time itself. We have to recover that intention of saying that it’s possible to find space for everyone. In the last three legislatures we’ve seen a lot of unintelligent political positioning. I think the Basque political class has failed us in the last few years. There needs to be a solid judicial-political framework. And what will that look like? Well, something that insures a sufficient level of self-government, to start.”

The challenge of divergent political visions can be seen clearly in the respondents’ comments. How can fundamental differences of perception of the same reality be bridged? Can a way be found to communicate across this divide in order to normalize political relations and processes? Exemplifying one of the traditional areas of disagreement is the discourse of Alberto Buen, member of the Spanish Senate for the PSOE. Buen states that “there is a sector of the [Basque] population that has not accepted the rules of the game, established in Spain through the Constitution and our own Statute of Autonomy. And precisely by not accepting these rules we have been brought to a violent confrontation and the persecution of all those of us who are not nationalist, and even some of those who are.”

One of the roots of the fundamental political disagreement in the Basque Country is the legitimacy of the Spanish Constitution. In the Basque Country, the PNV called for abstention in the vote and in the end approximately 33% of Basques voted in favor. Since the SC was never supported by a majority of Basques, the very foundation of the argument that the “rules of the game” are legitimate is questioned by many nationalists, not only independentists.

Calling the Basque problem a “conflict” is debated, as most members of the PP would argue that calling it a conflict gives some semblance of equality, of two sides with equal legitimacy. “Armed conflict” is a term used primarily by the MLNV to describe the violence both of the ETA and the various military and para-military operations of the Spanish and Basque security forces. The political question of Batasuna’s status is one of the most important in the Basque Country. To end the violence of the ETA, most of the respondents agreed that the people who make up the ideological arena behind Batasuna have to be represented, otherwise there are no interlocutors, since the ETA is a terrorist organization whose members are in exile or in jail, and would not be legitimate parties to a political negotiation anyway. Batasuna has been illegalized since 2002, making it impossible for any official government delegation to speak publicly with them.

Though the extremes on both sides might not believe in negotiating at all, even those closer to the middle disagree fundamentally about how to incorporate Batasuna. Socialists like Alberto Buen see no problem for Batasuna to participate—all they have to do is reject the violence of the ETA and they will be legalized, which will allow them to negotiate. However, Batasuna rejects “all human rights violations” and is unwilling to separate the violence of the ETA from what it perceives as the terrorism of the state. Here, there are two disagreements. First, there is a mainstream political debate about whether or not Batasuna can legitimately be illegalized—can a political party commit a crime? If there are individuals guilty of involvement with the ETA, why aren't the individuals arrested? Many observers point to the seeming incongruity of illegalizing the party without arresting any of its members for pertaining to the party. Others argue that since Batasuna is the political offspring of the ETA, it is inherently connected to the terrorist group and such a group cannot claim to be a legitimate political party. Though Batasuna's status remains up in the air after the ceasefire, the violence of the ETA was the main practical obstacle to Batasuna's political participation and it is likely that a change in Batasuna's status can be expected in the future.

The second conflict is over what needs to be done for Batasuna's voters. Between 10 and 13% of the Basque electorate votes for Batasuna on a regular basis. Illegalizing the party left this group with no party that represented its goals. It is unsurprising, given this reality, that there have been constant efforts to ensure the presence of a proxy party at the polls. Most observers agree that the major victory for EHAK in the last elections was, to some extent, a reaction to what many Basques perceived as anti-democratic behavior on the part of the Audiencia Nacional and the state government in illegalizing Batasuna.

The fundamental challenge is to change the hearts and minds of the people, which has been one of Elkarri's primary commitments over the past 13 years. Political heavy handedness, however legal or seemingly necessary, is unlikely to produce the desired results when the people themselves have not changed their preferences. The key to resolving the Basque conflict, over time, is to create avenues for social transformation. The work of Elkarri, Gesto, and other social initiatives aims at this goal. At the same time, barriers continue to pop up. The illegality of Batasuna gives rise to bitterness and feelings of desperation among a large segment of the population. Until now, the ETA's continuous use of bombs and extortion deepened the Basque business class's exasperation and frustration. The victims associations and associations of Basque prisoners have tended to compare and contrast their pain and suffering, which has not made social reconciliation easier.

Jonan Fernández, one of the founders of Elkarri, gave the most hope-filled assessment of the situation near the end of the interview process, when it sometimes seemed that matters were too complex for anyone to take useful steps forward. Fernández pointed out that “the key to resolving the Basque conflict is the end of the violence of the ETA. The reason I know, without a doubt, that eventually we will succeed is that the ETA does not see violence in its own future. The ETA is looking for a way out. The armed struggle is no longer part of their long term strategy, and this means that with time we will be able to move forward.” Though with the ceasefire, these words lose some of their prophetic nature, it is important to understand that last summer there was no sense of surety that a permanent ceasefire was anywhere in the near future.

MOMENT OF OPPORTUNITIES

One of the questions asked during the interview process was whether each person felt that this was a “moment of opportunities,” and why. There are a number of major themes that have emerged from this line of discussion, which continue to condition the relations among actors in the Basque Country and give insight into how to create the ideal circumstances for peace. The resounding response to whether or not the current moment was one of opportunities was yes. Most respondents felt that the convergence of a series of factors made this moment a unique one, despite the fact that there have also been moments of opportunity in the past. Hope was conditioned by uncertainty, the recognition that opportunities do not assure outcomes and that many opportunities in the past did not produce the ultimate outcome of an end

Report on the basque conflict: keys to understanding the eta's permanent ceasefire

to violence. Joseba Aurrekoetxea of the PNV describes it saying that “this is a moment of new opportunities. The end of the Aznar era is a change that has given oxygen, which has brought back a certain air of expectation that it is possible to work on things within politics. I say Politics in capitals. The processes of opening up and of new opportunities tends to be cyclical, these opportunities must be taken with prudence, recovering trust between the political parties.”

The shift in focus on issues of international terrorism since September 11th, 2001, exposure to the peace process in Northern Ireland, the change in domestic policy produced by the change in government in Spain, the accumulated police action against the ETA, and the war-weariness of the Basque people were all cited as reasons why this moment is a particularly good opportunity for building peace.

Pedro Garcia, Press Advisor to the Delegation of the Spanish government in Bilbao, illuminates a number of these points, stating that “there are three key points to understanding why the ETA has not committed an assassination in the last two years. Two years ago, the PP governed, Aznar was President and Acebes was Interior Minister. Even though the ETA operates on the thesis that the worse things are, the better, they committed no assassinations. There’s a refrain in Spanish, ‘the rougher the water, the better the fishing.’ Two years ago the ETA didn’t kill because it couldn’t, because the majority of its armed infrastructure had been dismantled and the majority of the commandos were deactivated. There are three reasons why there have been no assassinations in the past year during the government of Zapatero. First, because the ETA was giving some breathing room to see where Zapatero’s government was headed. Second, Zapatero’s government has made 120 arrests and, with the help of France, has detained the number 1, Mikel Arbizu “Antza.” Third, they haven’t killed because of the weight of March 11th. Putting a dead body on the table after the tragedy that Spanish society suffered would have been to dig their own grave. It would have put a [negotiated] solution off for years into the future.”

One of the major points that was brought up, not only by people like Pedro Garcia, who works with the Spanish armed forces, and Teo Santos, who works with the Ertzaintza (Basque autonomous police force), was that the shift in focus on international terrorism has been difficult for the ETA and for those who believed in an “armed struggle” as the way forward for Basque nationalism. The ETA was born at a time when national liberation struggles were taking place across the developing world—indigenous peoples were rising up against imperialism and colonial domination and the ETA saw itself fundamentally as a movement for national liberation. Over the years those movements have come to fruition or petered out, but aside from the conflict in Northern Ireland, there remains little of the company that the ETA originally felt as its natural political and social community at the international level. The memory of the dictatorship fades as a young generation of Basques grows up with linguistic and cultural rights that are generally accepted and are protected constitutionally. As one of the wealthiest regions in the Spanish state, with a strong union culture and a developing welfare state, it has become harder for the ETA to build its political and social identity on the concept of national oppression.

Oskar Matute, Basque parliamentarian for EB, touches on what is both a weakness of the ETA and a challenge for bringing peace, saying that “there are people who have been in the ETA for twenty-some years. Of those who entered in 1971, they can think ‘well, the dictatorship has passed and now there is democracy, even though it’s not perfect, surely without us it wouldn’t be half what it is now’...and this can act as a mental decompression to be able to reintegrate yourself into civil society. Now, those who entered the ETA in the nineties—what significant change has there been for them to qualify their 10 or 12 years in prison or exile as something that was worthwhile? When they come out they are going to see no change—the same scenario as when they went in, the same level of self-government, the same legal system, the same government in Madrid, the same government in Euskadi, and that’s the drama.” The ETA as an organization is a less viable option for those members of society who want independence, but that same fact will make it harder for those leading the organization to reintegrate their members into society at some point in the future.

Another pressure that has come to bear is that both the ETA and many members of Basque society have tended historically to look to the conflict in Northern Ireland and the way the international community responded as a litmus test for the Basque Country. With the IRA negotiating peace, the ETA loses one of its traditional allies and people begin to ask “if the IRA can do it, why aren’t we?” Sabino Arrieta, one of the wealthiest Basque entrepreneurs and a member of the PNV, voices an analysis shared by many in the Basque Country, saying that “this problem is not relevant for the European community. This conflict has never mattered to them, it’s a very small conflict. Well, there’s a hundred dead, alright, but it doesn’t matter if you’re talking about three dead, five, or a thousand...clearly this isn’t a problem for the European Union. Of course, to me it seems a very direct problem! They are much more worried by the Brigadas Rojas or the IRA than with Euskadi. Ireland is on its way to finding a solution, the Brigadas Rojas don’t exist, this problem still exists but for them we aren’t relevant.”

Finally, many of the respondents talked about the importance of 9/11/01 and 3/11/04 in creating a new context for relations between the government and the ETA, as well as giving the ETA pause and forcing the organization to consider its tactics and the emotional space in which it operates. The September 11th attacks in the United States took place on the watch of the Aznar government and coincided with and influenced a strategy of heightened security on its part. March 11th in Madrid, however, had a very different impact, though no less severe. First, the government of Aznar claimed that the ETA was responsible for the attacks in Madrid, even hours after international news had found evidence of al Qaeda participation. The three days after the event and before the national elections were intense. Spontaneous demonstrations against the PP, demanding the truth, overwhelmed many towns and cities. The ETA came out very quickly in response to the claims of the government saying that it had no part in the bombings. This is an important fact because it helps to understand the thinking of the organization. Those close to Batasuna were the first to say that the ETA knows that social support for violence is waning rapidly, that this is why they have made no lethal attacks in so long. They know they will lose all support if another person dies.

Another important aspect of the country’s response to March 11th is described by Teo Santos, member of the Ertzaintza and long time educator and academic, as he discusses his perspective on the role of the security forces in the conflict. Santos comments that “[what we have to look at is] what Spain has done with M11 and England with what happened there. In the way that you respond you can generate greater problems, if you do not limit yourself to using the framework of human rights. Where do the greatest human rights abuses generally take place in a society? In the prisons. What we are attempting as police is to show other police that respecting human rights is an effective policing strategy.” Here, Santos comments on the way that the response to March 11th was dealt with in Spain, which was fundamentally with tolerance and without a major public security crackdown. For the ETA, the violence and enormity of this event dwarfed their most extreme actions and at the same time, the government’s response negated the ETA’s traditional strategy of drawing oppression on the Basque people through attacks against the rest of Spain.

In Spain a delicate balance has been struck. The PSOE has stuck by a strategy of negotiation, of democratic response, of balancing police action with a realistic and flexible set of tactics in dealing with the complex politics of the Basque Country. But the national government is elected by the entire country and there are many who have suffered and have no interest in showing mercy or who, perhaps rightly, believe that far too much time and resources have been spent dealing with the issues of the Basques or the Catalans—two of the most prosperous regions—when pressing socio-economic problems face much of the rest of the country.

There are certainly groups within the Basque Country and within the major political formations that understand the delicacy of the central government’s position. While the socialists were strengthened by their victory in Galicia last year, ousting one of Franco’s former ministers who had ruled there since the end of the dictatorship, that victory also ushered in a regional coalition government that brought in a third regional nationalist party—the Bloque Nacionalista Galego. In Catalonia, the regional coalition government is made up of socialists and regional nationalists. However, the Partit dels Socialistes de

Catalunya is far more regionalist than its state-level umbrella organization, the PSOE, and the Catalans have been pushing hard for many years to acquire both a greater level of autonomy and a fiscal system similar to that of the Basque Country and Navarre. With 9 million inhabitants, these political and economic struggles in Catalonia are crucial for the central government. Catalonia has advanced farther than the Basque Country in negotiating a new Statute of Autonomy with the central government, so Basque citizens and politicians look to the process of political negotiation and debate there to test the central government's willingness to take similar steps in the Basque Country. The central government also knows this, and part of its firm commitment to following through a process of negotiation and agreement with the Catalan government stems from the larger implications of successfully broaching this issue. At the same time, the PSOE has suffered in the polls for putting so much political capital into these two regions, which cannot be spread mimetically in all other areas.

POLITICAL PROPOSALS

There are two political proposals currently on the table for how to move forward with the evolution of the legal relationship between the Basque Country and the rest of Spain—one by the Socialists and one by the PNV. Ramon Zallo, Economics professor and advisor to the Basque government, commented that “one project is that which is proposed by the Socialists, which is a reform of the Basque Statute. It seems to me an interesting text for our society, it has limitations but it's thought out as a reform of the existing Statute. Their statutory reform can be called asymmetric federalism or co-sovereignty. Even a statute that is 'soberanista' can still produce co-sovereignty as a result. Of course we'll always have to see what the world of Batasuna says about this project, someday they will propose something. Until now they have only defended self-determination, but at some point they will put forth their own program. It's possible that it will be a statute similar to what Ibarretxe put out, a program that opens the door through which the majority could create an opening for the possibility of independence, which at this point isn't possible. It's possible that Batasuna doesn't want any kind of statutory project, but what it certainly wants is a referendum on two options: first, about the relationship with the state beyond the Statute, and second, about independence or something similar. we don't know because they've never developed a party line with regards to this question.”

In October 2003, the Basque President and member of the PNV, Juan José Ibarretxe, put forth a proposal, which has since been called the Ibarretxe Plan. A long document, the proposal fundamentally outlines a free-associational relationship between the Basque Country and Spain in which neither can make unilateral decisions about the relationship to the other, but at the same time expecting that the Spanish government recognize the Basque people's right to self determination. Specifically, it allows for the devolution of a number of new competencies, would create an independent judiciary in the Basque Country, which could not be overruled by the Spanish Courts, and would allow for direct participation in European Union decision-making bodies.

This plan would have followed a political trajectory of first being passed by the Basque Parliament, then approved by the Spanish Parliament, then put to a referendum in the Basque Country. The plan was approved in the Basque Parliament by a narrow majority in which the representatives of Batasuna lent just enough votes to the plan to keep it from failing—it passed by one vote. In the Spanish Parliament, the proposal was fast tracked and voted against immediately and without debate, supported only by the regional nationalist parties of Catalonia and Galicia.

The PSOE has a philosophy of using the same political framework for all regions, while respecting the “historic nationalities” protected in the SC. What this means is that the PSOE supports a reform of the Senate, which was designed to be a body of territorial representation and has never been vested with any real power, thus allowing all ACs to have a role in federal policymaking that they currently do not enjoy. This policy is supported by most socialist regions in Spain but generally not in those areas with strong regional nationalisms, which believe that there are a number of reasons that historic and cultural factors make it impossible

to try to deal with all regions in the same political framework. The negotiations that would be necessary to bring about even these reforms could be hamstrung because it is unlikely that either Catalonia or the Basque Country would support creating a Senate that, fundamentally, limits their power and scope to that of all the other regions. Bilateral negotiations have worked well for these two regions historically, so the Socialists face a difficult strategy of reform, balanced between the demands of the regions and the perceived needs of the country as a whole. Recently, because of the perceived success of the Basques and Catalans in negotiating with the central government, many other regions, including Andalusia, have begun to explore legal avenues for achieving greater fiscal and political autonomy themselves.

Pedro Ibarra, Chair of Political Science at the University of the Basque Country, explains some of what lies behind the statutory reform processes that have developed in the Basque Country and Catalonia and his own perception of the ideal way forward: “as part of the first phase we should have as a principle that we exclude no one, I think this is a basic principle in order to get the process up and going. Civil society will have to participate in this process. If it can be compared to the process in Catalonia, that was a process that was defined by citizen participation. That was a procedure that took place with a foundation of direct surveys carried out by town halls, direct involvement by businesses and unions. One hundred percent broad participation, that the entire society participates, without exclusion, in the debate about competencies. They were fairly simple questions so that the society would not be left out, which was not at all how the Plan Ibarretxe was done. They collaborated with some social agents but with the text already elaborated, already written. You have to consider several central themes. For which institutions does this make sense? Why do you want, why do you need the ability to decide and in what sense is it beneficial for the community, and if it isn't, why not? What central theme have we not touched upon? A more open process. I don't know if this process I describe is already underway, but it would certainly be a different process from what happened with the Plan Ibarretxe. It wouldn't be a table of social groups, but a process of social participation elaborated through an assembly. That would be one possibility.”

Sabino Ormazabal, a journalist who works for Gara, the nationalist newspaper that supports the MLNV, explained that “our collective hoped to debate in broad sectors of society that the conflict had to be resolved with human means, peaceful and non-violent, as an alternative to the violence that we are living through now. We wanted to open a path so that we could get through to the people who are in disagreement with the current judicial-political framework in the Spanish state, to show them that we can take a non-violent path in our attempt to change this framework. Our experience came from previous struggles against the army and military service. There was a strong movement here for civil disobedience against inscription and we've learned from that experience. But here at the Joxemi Zumalabe Foundation we find ourselves cited and arrested for being members of the ETA, which is as absurd as saying that those Basques who were calling for a Basque National Soccer Selection were members of the ETA, which was also put forth by Judge Garzón [of the Audiencia Nacional].” Teresa Toda, former Editor of Egin before its closure and currently a representative of LAB, commented on the structure of multi-party talks saying that “the PP has a role to play in Basque politics. They don't want to participate in anything, they always play the sentimental card, always saying no, but they have to find a way to participate, everyone knows that eventually the PP has to come in.”

THE ROLE OF THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

During the course of the interview, respondents were asked what they felt the role of the international community should be. Though the answers were diverse, two points were echoed by all: first, that there was a role that the international community should and could play, but second, that fundamental compromises, dialogue, and healing had to be lead by members of Basque society itself. The following comments are representative of what most respondents shared:

Report on the basque conflict: keys to understanding the eta's permanent ceasefire

- **Teresa Toda:** "The international community has mostly been indifferent, but the European institutions should be involved, though not like Ireland with American support. [Former Spanish President] Aznar worked hard to push anti-terrorism in the EU, which makes it harder for negotiations to take place now. The [Spanish] government has hidden its dirty laundry, terrorism is all that shows internationally but we need international observers here. For example, the Spanish government claims that the ETA has a strategy of [falsely] claiming torture, so why is torture never claimed in France? Why do detainees admit and confess and name names in Spain but never in France? Why is Spain still on Amnesty International's list of countries that use torture? A few years ago there was a case in which people confessed in Spain and later the real perpetrators were captured in France. Why is that happening if we're making it all up? Judges and medics have to change their attitudes, people cannot be kept incommunicado for five days. We need cameras in jail cells. Right now there is total indifference on the part of the international community. Also, if we reach an agreement, how do we ensure its implementation and bring the people along, who are so disenchanted? Zapatero could use the support of the international community.

- **Xabier Anza:** The Basque Country doesn't have the capacity of the Irish to gather international support. We're a very small country. It is a good thing for conflicts to have international resonance, other people can offer their experiences with other conflicts and that is always enriching. I have to situate myself in the Basque sphere and say 'as a trade unionist, what do I have to give to help the peace process and the resolution of the political conflict?' the international unions are sensitive to what happens here, [the problem is that] they are internalizing the discourse of the Spanish and state-level unions, so we aren't being given a way to make ourselves heard.

- **Ramon Mújica:** I don't put much faith in the [intervention of the] international community because from their perspective (which is a perspective that matters here at the end of the day) their efforts here are seen as external interference. For example, attempts have been made on the part of very well intentioned people like Father Alec [Reid], who have come here to speak with the PP, but they've all failed. I don't have great hopes for international mediation, God willing I'm mistaken.

- **Gotzone Mora:** We have to work both at the local and international level and the two must be intertwined. I would have loved to have spoken about some of the things that have happened to us at the United Nations or in the European institutions that focus on human rights and torture. But we never hear from them, we don't know who they talk to, but we've never received a phone call.

- **Loli Garcia:** The first thing that the international community would need would be a bit of knowledge, in fact not just internationally but in the rest of Spain. All the help that comes is welcome, but the proposals have to come from here. So what the international community can do is stand behind a policy of openness, what the Spanish government is doing right now. And above all, that they try to see that Euskadi is different from the manipulated image that they've been given.

- **Joseba Aurrekoetxea:** There's an important role for the international community, a mediating role. Social actors, the Basque Catholic Church, professional negotiators [are all important]. The international frame of reference could be useful for understanding and helping the victims. The citizenry must be implicated in the process. Trust is growing again, but so many times we've come up short that we have to keep our nose to the grindstone.

- **Oskar Matute:** What can the international community do? It's complicated. I'd like them to play an active role in obligating and insisting that all parts maintain the commitment to peace. The international community must transmit a true vision of what's happening here. Not just the vision that the ETA has marketed abroad of its wonderful revolution, but neither the opposing view that the PP has created for so long that 'they are a gang of bin Laden's friends, they just want to create chaos and they're all rich.' There must be a point of equilibrium that has more to do with what's really happening here, a truer vision of what Euskadi is, what the ETA is, what we're asking for, what we're being given, and what we have.

- **Aintzane Ezenarro:** In Elkarri we've talked a lot about the question of the international community's role. The process, once it has gotten underway, can have international collaborators who share their experience and methodology, even perhaps [provide] a well-known mediator. But I think we have to start it here. Besides, we don't have an important presence in other countries. We don't have the lobby that the Irish have in the United States. This is not an important conflict on the international agenda, for the EU this is an internal issue for the Spanish state and they're not going to get involved.

ANALYSIS

Change is the central theme that has come out of this interview process: the need for change, the ways that Basque society has been changing, political changes in Spain that have impacted the possibilities for peace, the changes that have been brought about by social movements over the past fifteen years, internal changes amongst the different political formations in the Basque Country since the end of the dictatorship, and generational changes in the population itself.

One of the most important changes has been the willingness, or ability, of Basque society to absorb and cope with violence. Many of the respondents talked about the 1980s and 1990s, periods when the ETA assassinated someone nearly every week and major attacks such as the HiperCor supermarket bombing shook Basques to the core. It was a time, they said, when it seemed that Basque society was willing to accept anything. Despite assassinations that claimed the lives of non-military targets, Batasuna was at the height of its political support. But with time that support began to wither, not necessarily as a natural process, but because of the confluence of a number of events. The petering out of MLNs in other parts of the world, the increase and solidification of fiscal and political autonomy in the Basque region over time, the development of social movements like Elkarri, made up of Basque people who demanded an end to the violence and a normalization of the democratic process, the shock of the March 11th attacks in Madrid, and the accumulation of victims—whether prisoners whose families viewed them as victims, the many who suffered loss at the hands of the ETA, or the smaller number who lost family members to the state's paramilitary organizations—have all influenced the collective perception of this conflict as something that can no longer be endured.

Fundamentally, the world of Batasuna is changing. Many began to ask the question “what has violence gotten us?” Internal critics were not tolerated and began to leave the community that formed Batasuna. The political ideology of Batasuna is also radically leftist and many of those interviewed had grown tired of a national struggle that always trumped socio-economic concerns, leaving limited human capital for struggles broader than the national struggle for self-determination.

Aintzane Ezenarro, representative of Aralar in the Basque Parliament, explains why Aralar broke from Batasuna: “[Batasuna] has made two historic errors—not putting all their chips exclusively on political methods and trying to continue to monopolize all the working processes within the independentist movement. That is when those who didn't believe that things had to be that way said NO. One of the questions that has caused the greatest struggle for Aralar has been that, as participants in a process and being the minority, we wanted to assume internal democracy and stay within as a minority position. But the history is that processes within the leftist-independentist movement are not democratic. There doesn't exist the figure of a party member. The social base of the leftist-independentist movement is unknown, thought it sounds strange. Though there has always been this theory that we are pro-assembly and that it's the assemblies where those who want to participate go, and those who don't, don't go. But that's all very manipulatable because if you want a certain position to win in your local assembly, you just call all your cousins...you don't have to be a member or have a card or pay dues! You just go and vote and when they've seen any danger that a vote might not go their way, that's how they've always done things. Aralar or the sectors that wanted the possibility of being a majority option in the next assembly knew they would never be able to. The decisions are never democratic because there is no membership but also for one simple reason, which

Report on the basque conflict: keys to understanding the eta's permanent ceasefire

is that the ones who decide are not the ones that are in the assembly. I don't have to say more, do I? The decisions come made and they are made in a political-military structure where the military is above the political. Obviously in such a structure, it will never make sense for one tendency or sector to remain within because it will never have the option of becoming the majority position, even if it were. And it was during this process that the ceasefire broke with very violent and brutish acts. They killed workers and local representatives. August of 2000 was horrible, there were six or seven assassinations of workers, people just selling candy on the streets. That situation was unsustainable and there were some very daring and courageous people who set out on an adventure to start their own political party in the context of 21st century western democracy.”

The community of Batasuna is not the only group of people who have grown tired. The strategy of the PP for 8 years brought a great deal of strain to coexistence in the Basque Country, complementing the ETA's violence as a way to divide and damage Basque society, rather than strengthen it. Those Spaniards and Basques who did not believe in Basque nationalism but also embraced democracy and human rights began to question this strategy, as evidence of torture by the state security forces continued to reach the surface, Basque language newspapers were closed, and concerts by Basque musicians were boycotted by the PP. The extremism of the PP and, in particular, its unwillingness to sit at the table with other social actors to decide how to begin to negotiate a process for peace, has situated them in a difficult position after the declaration of the ceasefire. The vast majority of Basques believe in finding a negotiated settlement and in dialoguing with the ETA, a majority of Spaniards believes the same. Joseba Aurrekoetxea explained that “now, we need two things: political will—for example, the agreement in the Parliament in Madrid [authorizing negotiations with the ETA in the event of a ceasefire] is significant—and second, we must take on the task of regenerating trust here in Euskadi.”

As members of the police and national security forces explained, the PP's hard line strategy did produce certain results. There were fewer and fewer enclaves where supporters of the ETA could be safe and arrests and raids were constant. France has begun to participate actively in searching out members of the ETA in the French Basque Country and hundreds have been imprisoned in recent years. As Oskar Matute mentioned, there was a time when going to prison for the cause could be viewed as heroic, when major changes continued to be made in Basque political, linguistic, and economic autonomy. During the 1970s the ETA had been aligned with the movement for democratic opposition to the Franco regime and when the organization chose to continue its trajectory after the first democratic elections, many older members left the organization and reintegrated themselves into civil society. The options for members of the ETA are grim, their social support network is weakened—though it will never disappear—and they are unlikely to come out of prison and be welcomed home as heroes by most Basques. While this creates a dangerous tension for the ETA it also has created opportunities for negotiation that may not have existed previously. Illegalization has impacted the MLNV from a political perspective because their representatives have been unable to participate in decision-making. Many towns were governed by Batasuna and the political formation was very strong in a number of areas of the Basque Country. Removing this group from the political process has intensified the division and tension in Basque society but has also made communication outside of official channels even more important, which in some ways has encouraged dialogue.

Martxelo Otamendi, Editor of the only remaining Basque language daily, Berria, comments that “the step that the independentist-left has taken in recent years has been an important one. That the ETA does not negotiate in the name of the Basque people, the ETA negotiates the questions that are relative to it. It's important that the ETA has made a proposal that has been accepted by the entire direction of the independentist-left, not just the political wing, but also the military and trade union wing. It's good that the ETA admits that they can't negotiate in the name of the Basques. The discourse that has been developing about methodology referring to negotiations is an important one. All the activity that the Elkarri years have produced—that it must be a democratic process, without exclusions—I believe all of that is important and that there is an agreement

that has been accepted by all the politicians and that one day will have to materialize. One day that apple must fall from the tree and it will give fruit in the form of a new political pact.”

Over the past fifteen years, social movements have been born of the collective need for peace and political normalization in the Basque Country. Thousands of citizens have taken to the streets repeatedly to speak out against violence, against political exclusion, in favor of dialogue and negotiation, and for peace. Numerous organizations have been born of this collective need. The message received during the interview process, from a diversity of sources, was that Elkarrri’s work over the past decade has been in line with the needs of the Basque people and has also helped push Basque society towards a point where it can make a commitment to peace and political normalization. Most of the respondents expressed a feeling of balancing on a fine edge. Society has expressed what it wants in numerous ways—peace and functional coexistence. Everyone seems to be waiting on the politicians and political actors to figure out a way forward, and these seem to be moving—albeit hesitantly and with a great deal of uncertainty.

Generational change has also been important. Young people today grow up in a Basque Country with vigorous political debate about important issues, but they also grow up learning Euskera in school, with a nationalist party in power, and with a major investment being made in cultural and linguistic development. The Basque Country has been innovative in dealing with unemployment caused by the closure of mines and ports, and Basque public education and healthcare systems are some of the best in Spain. The level of oppression and curtailed civil rights that radicalized so many young Basques in the 1960s simply does not exist anymore. As those who remember the Civil War and the dictatorship pass away, the most extreme social divisions that existed will also fade from memory. The flipside of this generational change is that most respondents believed that the process of reconciliation could not begin until peace and political normalization had been achieved, and that even then it would be a long and arduous process that would require many years with no victims of any kind, many years to dull memory. The bitterness, political division, and violence that persist today have affected all Basques and the current moment is still one that, in some ways, must be recovered from at some point down the road. The need for peace is urgent.

The role of political power in shaping political action has also shifted roles in an interesting way. Juanma Idoiaga, foreign correspondent during the dictatorship for the New York Times, Le Monde, and France Press, and more recently a professor of journalism at the University of the Basque Country, outlines the current challenge: “what happens is this, to understand the conflict that exists today, you have to understand that there are corrupting elements that have been introduced [since franquismo]. I’ve lived through many diverse periods since the 1960s, but I would say that in that period when power was so far out of reach for those in the opposition, everyone was much more pure. [Politics] was much more sensitive to ideology then. There were opposing ideological tendencies—socialists, communists, anarchists, moderate nationalists, leftists—but since the transition, a corrupting element has been introduced and has broken that ideological struggle—romantic, sentimental—that carried forward the battle for a different society. That element is crucial, it’s the access to power, to a share of the power to govern which has been an issue for all of that range [of political tendencies] that brought about the transition, the responses to franquismo that provoked the change in regime. Do you know that saying that ‘with Franco we were all friends?’ we were friends because it was only an ideology that had to be defended, never interests. But in the moment that those interests enter the process, all the groups, and I mean all, from the right wing to the ETA, form part of a political community with access to the power to govern. That element in this moment is prevailing and creating a hindrance to the process of pacification. Why? Because there are sectors that want to pact, others that want to succeed as protagonists of the pact, why? Some want to pact to allow themselves to continue with the power they have already attained, others want to achieve that share of power that they could not achieve at the time of the democratic transition. This, for me, is a fundamental factor. It’s the one that creates the greatest difficulties for the resolution of the conflict because here each group is trying to swim without getting wet, to get results without taking any risks.”

CONCLUSION

A great deal of research and investigation has already been done in the arena of developing possible methodologies for a successful peace process. Most social, political, economic, and institutional actors have an informed opinion about the options currently being explored and the options that have been studied or attempted in other countries in recent years. Elkarri has produced a wealth of published material, which can be accessed on their website at www.elkarri.org, and which tackle these issues with the expertise and experience of those who have lived the conflict and studied it for many years, often drawing on both academic resources and the experiences of other peace processes in other parts of the world. The results of the Egino Table have been particularly meaningful, since a group of real Basque political actors from distinct, and even opposing political parties, sat down and conducted mock multi-party talks in order to see where difficulties and challenges might arise and where organizations like Elkarri could make a contribution. This report is limited to summing up the sense of hope and readiness perceived amongst the different respondents during the interview process.

It is important to recognize that Elkarri, the Basque government, debate forums such as the Plural Debate Table or the National Debate Forum, and students of conflict management have spent years working on the questions of what would be necessary in order to achieve and maintain peace in the Basque Country. During the interview process there were many proposals, many concerns, and many possibilities for moving forward. One of the steps that will be most difficult for all parties, but perhaps most crucial, will be moving forward in darkness. It will be impossible for everyone to wait for positive or adequate signs from others who are part of the negotiation process. It continues to be dangerous to presume to know precisely what each party will do in a given situation and therefore take no risks, believing that political behavior is a certainty and that parties cannot be expected to shift or change strategies and tactics. The benefit to expecting the unexpected can be seen clearly in the current situation, one in which most respondents said that the ETA would never declare a ceasefire with no guarantees from the Spanish government. Interestingly, it was only Aintzane Ezenarro who believed that the most intelligent political choice that the ETA could make would be to lay down arms of their own free will, with no promises nor guarantees, but as a strategic decision of their own making, and even she was doubtful that the MLNV was ready to take that step.

This is, indeed, a great moment of opportunity. Since the interviews were completed last summer, it is clear that some type of contact has been established between the ETA and the Spanish government, however tentative, slow, or informal. During the summer the ETA declared a partial ceasefire that everyone recognized as inadequate and, in some sense, ridiculous. But at the same time, it was not a step that escalated the level of confrontation but rather suggested the commencement of a process of standing down. The ETA has made a full commitment to this process by declaring a permanent and unconditional ceasefire in March of 2006.

Though perhaps one of the concepts most difficult to understand for those with little direct experience in the Basque Country, the existence of the ETA cannot be viewed as an anomaly, a historical accident, or an isolated and small group of cold-blooded terrorists. Most Basques engage their identity in the cultural, linguistic, and political sphere, albeit in different ways. Even though around a third of Basques are in favor of independence, support for the right to decide and the exercise of that right is much more widespread. The existence of oppression or the lack of political rights does not predetermine the need for or existence of violence as a tool for resistance, however, for many Basques and many Spaniards the two have been connected for many years. Maintaining peace will depend on a long-term good-faith commitment by all involved to use democratic means—in the fullest sense of the word. The process of political normalization also depends upon that commitment.

The interviews revealed how difficult it really is for the Basque Country and the many victims of this conflict to delve as deep as they must in order to make both the emotional and political compromises that are necessary for achieving peace and political normalization. Rosa Rodero Palacios told a personal story that captured

both the complexity of the lived experience in the Basque Country, and the hope that exists for Basque society to overcome the barriers to social reconciliation that still exist. Her husband was the first Ertzaintza assassinated by the ETA and had previously been a staff member of the PNV in exile during the dictatorship.

“When I was young, those committing crimes were the heads of the prisons, the politicians. In the jails, the torture that took place was tremendous. I’ve lived it because my husband suffered that torture and it is truly the worse that can happen to a person. When he was in exile in France, he knew all of those young men who were fighting for the ETA, they had guns and he did not but at that time they were part of the same struggle in some sense. All your life you are living with the challenge of leaving your house and never knowing what’s going to happen. I remember in the festival of Algorta, a little town near here, I went out with a little silk scarf that I’d been given as a gift. It was adorable and was red, green, and white. But at that time, I was just fourteen, I saw nothing more than a scarf I liked. Of course, a Guardia Civil came and stopped me and said ‘what are you wearing around your neck? Don’t you know what you’re wearing?’ and I had no idea at that time that those were the colors of the nationalist flag, of the Ikurriña. And he told me ‘put that away now or I’m going to take it.’ I think that my husband, after having the experience of being in prison, living through the abuse that he suffered, he always said that you can’t walk around full of hate. He said ‘look at everything that we’ve achieved.’ After leaving prison, without hatred, the decision to keep his eyes on the future and choose a certain trajectory, because of those choices we have our own Basque police unit today, and for people like me and my children those achievements are really important. He always said to his children that hatred takes you nowhere, all it does is create weakness. He said it was better to have a dialogue and he always gave a lot of importance to dialogue. He would visit and write letters to prisoners of the ETA in jail because he wanted them to know that there was a difference between what [the Ertzaintza] were about and what they were fighting against. He could spend hours and hours talking with people, he believed in talking with everyone. So what he did with our children was educate them with the idea that if he had cultivated a sense of hatred when he was a victim he wouldn’t have achieved anything. The Ertzaintza wouldn’t have been founded nor the Basque government formed if we had chosen to respond that way to the dictatorship. At that moment there were things that we just had to be willing to forget, and we allowed them to be forgotten and that is what has allowed this nation to achieve all that we have.”

Traditionally, the question of whether Basque society is “broken” has been politically loaded. Members of the MLNV defend the level of coexistence and community that exists in the Basque Country, while critics of Basque nationalism almost always speak of Basque society as broken and perhaps beyond repair. These interviews show evidence that the truth is, as usual, somewhere in between. In a society defined by political participation, associationalism, and social activism, violence and the lack of political normalization have deeply influenced social relations. But personal relationships in the Basque Country continue to transcend the conflict. One of the most ardent constitutionalists shared that her husband was a nationalist. A policeman described the debates he had with friends in Batasuna. Members of Batasuna spoke openly and candidly with Elkarri at a time of great public disagreement between the two organizations. All of the respondents were willing to put themselves into the shoes of those with fundamentally different beliefs in order to consider how to tackle the question of bringing peace to the Basque Country. Basque society is strained and has suffered greatly, but it is not broken, and it is precisely the tradition of civic participation and the desire to maintain a strong community that has instilled a commitment to pluralism and tolerance and is enabling a slow progress forward.

As can be seen in daily news coverage of the Basque conflict, the ceasefire declared by the ETA is not the golden key that will guarantee peace and solidify a process of dialogue and negotiation. But Basque society has demanded peace and the steps are being taken to make peace a reality. For over a decade, Basque social movements have been voicing the people’s need for peace and political normalization. Now, all the political formations in the Basque Country are beginning to work towards that goal. The ceasefire is neither the beginning nor the end of that process, but it is a crucial element that has untied the hands of several major political actors. The moment of opportunities perceived by so many has been transformed into the first stages of a process of peace and reconciliation in the Basque Country.

ANNEX 1

NAME	AFFILIATION	DATE INTERVIEWED	LOCATION OF INTERVIEW
Xabier Anza	Representative of ELA	July 12th, 2005	ELA headquarters, San Sebastián-Donostia
Jaime Arrese*	Director, Victim's Bureau of the Basque Government	July 5th, 2005	Offices of the Victim's Bureau, San Sebastián-Donostia
Sabino Arrieta	Businessman and member of the PNV	July 7th, 2005	Personal offices, Bilbao-Bilbo
Raul Arza	Representative of the UGT Euskadi	July 18th, 2005	UGT headquarters, Bilbao-Bilbo
Itziar Aspuru	Director of Gesto Por la Paz	July 21st, 2005	Elkarri office, Bilbao-Bilbo
Joseba Aurrekoetxea	Lawyer and PNV Official	July 7th, 2005	PNV headquarters, Bilbao-Bilbo
Alberto Buen*	Spanish Senator, PSOE	July 14th, 2005	Elkarri office, San Sebastián-Donostia
Aintzane Ezenarro	Basque Parliamentarian, Aralar	July 27th, 2005	Basque Parliament, Vitoria-Gasteiz
Jonan Fernandez	General Coordinator and founding member of Elkarri	August 11th, 2005	Elkarri headquarters, San Sebastián-Donostia
Josu Gago*	Clinical psychologist and educator	July 22nd, 2005	Elkarri office, Bilbao-Bilbo
Loli García	Secretary of Professional Formation and Employment, CCOO Euskadi	July 7th, 2005	CC.OO. headquarters, Bilbao-Bilbo
Pedro García	Press Advisor for the Spanish Government Delegation	July 20th, 2005	Sub-delegation of the Spanish Government, Bilbao-Bilbo
Gurasoak	Association of families of ETA prisoners	July 21st, 2005	Elkarri offices, Bilbao-Bilbo
Pedro Ibarra*	Chair of Political Science, UPV	July 20th, 2005	Private residence, Durango
Juanma Idoiaga	Professor of Journalism, UPV	August 1st, 2005	Elkarri office, Bilbao-Bilbo
Eduardo Madina	Spanish Parliamentarian, PSOE	July 22nd, 2005	Personal residence, Madrid
Oskar Matute	Basque Parliamentarian, Ezker Batua	July 13th, 2005	Headquarters of EB, Bilbao-Bilbo
Gotzone Mora	Professor, UPV and member of Basta Ya	July 13th, 2005	UPV Campus, Leioa
Ramon Múgica	Businessman and member of the PP Euskadi	July 11th, 2005	Personal offices, Bilbao-Bilbo
Sabino Ormazabal	Gara journalist and member of the Joxemi Zumalabe Foundation	July 28th, 2005	Gara headquarters, San Sebastián-Donostia
Martxelo Otamendi	Editor of Berria	July 14th, 2005	Offices of Berria, Andoain (sp?)
Enrique Portocarrero	Businessman and Chair of the Círculo de Empresarios Vascos	July 22nd, 2005	Personal offices, Bilbao-Bilbo
Rosa Rodero Palacios	Widow and activist for victim's rights	July 26th, 2005	Elkarri offices, Bilbao-Bilbo
Teo Santos	Ertzaintza	July 28th, 2005	Balmaseda
Teresa Toda	Representative of LAB	July 6th, 2005	Elkarri offices, San Sebastián-Donostia
Txema Urkijo	Former Director of the Human Rights Bureau of the Basque government	July 15th, 2005	Basque government offices, Bilbao-Bilbo
Roberto Urkitza	Journalist	July 11th, 2005	Elkarri office, Bilbao-Bilbo
Ramon Zallo*	Professor, University of Deusto	July 20th, 2005	Private residence, Durango

*These respondents were collaborators of various Elkarri projects at the time of the interview