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Press coverage of the Basque conflict (1975-2016): A compilation of attitudes and vicissitudes

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Introduction. This work carries out a wide analysis of the attitudes and vicissitudes which have surrounded the Basque and Spanish press coverage of the Basque conflict over the last four decades (1975-2016). **Methodology.** The methodology is eminently qualitative. Four techniques were used simultaneously: A direct observation study carried out by the researchers throughout their long professional and academic trajectory; two hemerographic studies (the first carried out between 1979 and 1996 and the second between 1998 and 2002); a content analysis of ten paradigmatic news items and a discussion group with experts on the subject (2016). **Results.** The authors distinguished four periods: The first (1975-1988) dominated by a lack of unified criteria; a second (1988-2000) marked by the unification/tension of and in the content; a third (2000-2011) determined by "Trench journalism" and lastly, the post-ETA period (2011-2016), in which the location where each newspaper is edited conditions (more than ever) the frame of the news. **Conclusions.** The authors consider that, in general, the press has not followed the UNESCO recommendations of 1978, which suggest that respect for the truth and the promotion of free expression of ideas contribute to conflict resolution.

Keywords: Basque conflict, press coverage, conflict resolution, ETA.

Translated by **Angela Jones**

1. Introduction

The so-called *Basque conflict* is possibly one of the most important political mega-events that has marked the agenda setting of the Basque and Spanish Media over the last half century. Despite the fact that, following the definitive end in October 2011 to the violence carried out by ETA, the presence of the Basque conflict in the press has decreased considerably, the *Basque problem* (both in a strictly political sense and in an exclusively violent one) has been the protagonist of thousands of daily front pages all over the world.

Our research begins in 1975, the year when the dictator Francisco Franco died, and ends in 2016, five years after ETA announced its definitive ceasefire. Following the IRA's decision to bring its activities to an end in 2005, ETA was, in 2011, the only armed clandestine group in Europe. According to figures provided by the Basque Government in 2013, the Basque conflict caused a total of 1,004 fatal victims between 1960-2013 [01], most of them (837) attributed to ETA and similar organisations [02] and others (167) carried out by State Security Forces or parapolice and extreme right wing groups [03]. Furthermore, there were a total of between 3,537 and 3,772 people wounded as follows: 2,365 - 2,600 attributed to ETA and similar organisations, 746 to State Security Forces and 426 to parapolice and extreme right wing groups. Another report commissioned by the Basque Government and carried out by the IVC (Basque Criminology Institute) of the University of the Basque Country in 2016, identified 4,009 victims of torture by State Security Forces in the same period.[04].

The attention paid to the Basque conflict by the Media has taken on a high level of relevance over the last four decades. There are two factors which could explain this macro presence: the dramatic consequences of the conflict itself, derived largely from its prolongation, and the political dimensions of this. It should not be forgotten that the Basque conflict affects something which is central to the Spanish State, that being its legal system, and moreover, it raises the question regarding the ultimate depository of its national sovereignty.

Throughout its long history, ETA assassinated three people directly related to the Media: the director of *Hoja del Lunes de Bilbao* and Chief Editor of *La Gaceta del Norte* José María Portell (28th June 1978), the columnist of the daily paper *El Mundo* and member of the *Foro de Ermua* [05] José Luis López de Lacalle (7th May 2000) and the Financial Director of *El Diario Vasco* Santiago Oleaga (5th May 2001). Moreover, as the journalist and researcher Ofa Bezunartea mentions in her book *Memorias de la violencia*, it is estimated that between 1992 and 2002 around 140 journalists were persecuted by ETA. For example, the director of the magazine *Cambio 16* Gorka Landaburu sustained serious injuries on the 15th May 2001 when an explosive device sent to his home exploded in his hands. ETA also carried out 32 direct attacks against the Media [06]. The most striking took place in Bilbao on the 30th December 2008 against the headquarters of EITB [07], the main Media group in the Basque Country, which suffered serious damage. In addition, around 50 journalists saw their lives endangered and required bodyguards for quite a number of years.

The violence has also affected journalists and Media close to the left wing independence movement. The GAL [08] murdered two journalists from the newspaper *Egin*: Javier Galdeano, a journalist for the paper in the French Basque Country (30th March 1985) and the journalist and representative of HB (Herri Batasuna-Unidad Popular) in the Spanish Congress, Josu Muguruza (20th November 1989). [09]. José María Aznar's government was responsible for the preventive closure of various Media sources close to the independence movement [10]: the daily paper *Egin* and the radio station *Egin Irratia* (both on the 15th July 1998), the investigative magazine *Ardi beltza* (in May 2001) and the only daily paper in Euskera, *Euskaldunon Egunkaria* (on 20th February 2003). As a result of these actions, dozens of people were arrested, among them the directors of both the aforementioned

publications. Some of them reported being tortured, such as the director of *Euskaldunon Egunkaria*, Martxelo Otamendi. The director of *Egin*, Jabier Salutregi, spent seven and a half years in prison as a supposed "member of an armed organisation". On the 22nd May 2009, the Supreme Court overturned the initial ruling relating to the declaration of illicit activities in *Egin*, but nothing could be done to re-open the paper. In the "*Egunkaria* case", all the accused were acquitted, but none of them received compensation from the State. Furthermore, parapolice and extreme right wing groups carried out 10 attacks against Media sources [11].

2. Aims

This work has four fundamental aims:

- To analyse, in general terms, the attitudes and vicissitudes which have surrounded the Basque and Spanish press coverage of the Basque conflict over the last four decades (1975-2016).
- To investigate whether there have been different phases in the evolution of that journalistic coverage, and in addition to assess how far the context of political events has also managed to determine how that news was reported.
- To examine how the press has followed the ethical and deontological recommendations of the UNESCO regarding the role of the Media in resolving conflicts.
- To establish how far the adverse vicissitudes that have surrounded the Media and journalists, especially in the Basque Country, have managed to influence their attitudes when dealing with the conflict.

3. Theoretical framework

3. 1. The function of the Media

The Mass Media in general, but particularly newspapers, have always been considered primary political actors in all social democracies (Borrat, 1989). On a daily basis, the press publishes news stories, features, reports, interviews, analysis, opinion columns and leading articles (in addition to other hybrid pieces difficult to categorise) through which a specific world vision is presented. They are ideological intermediaries. They fulfil their function of *agenda setting* through which they determine and condition the social, political, cultural and economic perception that society receives every day.

Among the various functions that the Media fulfils in a democratic society, the following should be highlighted (Idoiaga and Ramírez de la Piscina, 2002: 27):

- ✓ It describes and interprets events.
- ✓ It is a social mirror and creates public opinion.
- ✓ It establishes the agenda for subjects under discussion.
- ✓ It identifies and passes judgement on collective actors in general.
- ✓ It acts as spokesperson for the political system.

- ✓ It channels, expands or dilutes social and political demands, promoting or deactivating social participation.

As a consequence, it has become an institution central to the democratic game which hands out influence, amplifies certain values over others and can effect or limit freedom of expression. Just how it carries out these functions will largely determine the democratic health of the societies which that Media claims to serve.

3. 2. UNESCO recommendations

The vigilant function which the Media should fulfil in relation to political and economic power varies considerably from one state to the next. This can be seen especially in times of crisis or conflict. It is for this reason that the UNESCO, in the twentieth meeting of its General Congress in Paris on 22nd November 1978, established a document entitled “Declaration on Fundamental Principles concerning the contribution of the Mass Media to Strengthening Peace and International Understanding, to the Promotion of Human Rights and to Countering Racialism, apartheid and incitement to war”. Article II.i of this declaration states: "The exercise of freedom of opinion, expression and information, recognised as an integral part of human rights and fundamental freedoms, is a vital factor in the strengthening of peace and international understanding". It underlines that this Mass Media contribution to peace will be more effective if "the information reflects the different aspects of the subject dealt with". To this end, five years later the UNESCO itself adopted an International Code of Journalistic Ethics, which was signed in the Fourth Consultative Meeting of International and Regional Organisations of Journalists on the 20th November 1983 [12]. The first article of this declaration states the following (Idoiaga and Ramírez de la Piscina, 2002: 273):

People's right to true information: People and individuals have the right to acquire an objective picture of reality by means of accurate and comprehensive information as well as to express themselves freely through the various media of culture and communication.

The second section of the same document states:

The foremost task of the journalist is to serve the people's right to true and authentic information through an honest dedication to objective reality whereby facts are reported conscientiously in their proper context.

Other aspects of the declaration stress the social responsibility of the journalist and the need to respect people's privacy, the public interest and universal values.

4. More recent studies

Numerous academics and/or professionals of different ideologies from both inside and outside the Basque Country have studied the full extent of the Basque conflict or some aspects of it. Diverse methodological perspectives have been used and different results obtained. Among the most recent work are those by I. Armentia et. al (1997), P. Woodworth (2001), P. Idoiaga and T. Ramírez de la Piscina (2002); L. Mees (2003), B. Aretxaga (2005), C. Watson (2007), D. Muro (2008), E. Xicoy

(2008), I. Ahedo (2008), I. Merodio (2010), R. Alonso (2011 y 2013), J. M. Caminos et. al (2013), X. Mínguez (2013), L. De la Calle and I. Sánchez-Cuenca (2013), F. Letamendia (2013), T. Whitfield (2014), I. Murua (2014, 2015a), J. Zabalo and M. Saratxo (2015), G. Elejabarrieta (2015) and J. Videgain (2015).

In addition to academic works, a large group of journalists have referred to the subject in question from a professional point of view. Among these, there are two main groups. One group consists of those who analyse ETA more as a terrorist phenomenon rather than part of a political conflict, and includes, among others, the contributions of F. Domínguez, (2012) and A. Escrivá (2012). The second group of professionals is made up of those who interpret the end of ETA as a consequence of a multitude of factors, the political being the most significant, and includes the contributions of A. Batista (2001 and 2012); L. Rodríguez Aizpeolea (2011), J. F. Azurmendi, (2014) and I. Murua (2015b) among others.

Antoni Batista is perhaps the journalist from outside the Basque Country who has most written about the Basque conflict. He has had nine books published by such prestigious houses as Plaza & Janes and Random House Mondadori, related either directly or indirectly to the conflict. He is, without doubt, an expert on the subject. In 2001, he received the Ramon Barnils prize for his investigative work and in 2006 the Mañé i Flaquer award "for his professional trajectory in relation to the Basque conflict". The following quote from 2001 belongs to him, following a turbulent Basque electoral campaign in which two candidates stood out: the then president of the Basque Autonomous Community, Juan José Ibarretxe, of the Christian Democrat PNV (Basque Nationalist Party), and the then leader of the PP, the conservative Jaime Mayor Oreja. The campaign was exceptionally fierce. This led the Catalan journalist to reflect (Batista, 2001: 228):

“What the Media did in the last Basque electoral campaign was nauseating. They have transgressed every deontological code, stolen information, manipulated opinion, launched the worst accusations without a minimum of logical back up, criminalised democratic ideologies, played with identity and, in short, offered from the temples of objectivity the clumsiest partisan indictment. Is this the way to combat terrorism from the Media? I will repeat my vampire antivirus formula: against terrorism, democracy. Morally, one cannot be equidistant, but deontologically a journalist must be.”

Many things have happened over the last fifteen years, both in the Basque Country and in Catalonia and Spain. Batista was then editor of *La Vanguardia*. Later, this journalist and musicologist obtained a PhD in Communication and became a lecturer in the Autonomous University of Barcelona and in the University of Rovira i Virgili in Tarragona where he taught, among others, a subject entitled "Specialised conflict journalism". He continues to teach and research a variety of subjects.

5. Research hypothesis

Working from the aforementioned context and theoretical framework and considering the preset aims, this research uses the following hypotheses as its starting point:

H1: The press coverage of the Basque conflict has varied over time depending largely on the changing political context in both Basque and Spanish societies.

H2: The prolongation over time of a conflict of this kind has influenced the orientation and content of the news.

H3: Over the last four decades there has been a series of key events which have played a decisive role in influencing press coverage of the conflict.

H4: The UNESCO recommendations regarding respect of the truth and promotion of the free expression of ideas have not always been followed by the Basque and Spanish press when dealing with the Basque conflict.

H5: The vicissitudes that in one way or another have surrounded the Basque conflict and its professionals, have also determined Media attitudes to it.

H6: Where newspapers are edited has a noticeable influence on the slant and orientation given to the Basque conflict.

6. Methodology

The methodology developed in this research is highly qualitative. Four techniques were used simultaneously:

- Direct observational field study carried out by the researchers over their 35 years of professional and/or academic experience. Two of the three researchers worked as political news editors in different Basque Media sources in the 80s, 90s and 2000s. As Wimmer and Dominick (1996: 146) point out, "direct field observation is useful both for compiling data and formulating hypotheses and theories and, as with all qualitative techniques, is more concerned with description and explanation than with measuring and quantifying". Direct observation helps to establish contextualising information, which was fundamental for this research.
- Two hemerographic investigations – the first carried out between 1979 and 1996 and the second between 1998 and 2001. Two of the three authors of the present work took part in both these investigations. The first of these was coordinated by the Professor of Journalism José Ignacio Armentia and was entitled *Political criteria in the Media in Euskadi*. Its aim was to analyse the effect of the so-called "Ajuria Enea Pact" on the message transmitted by the Basque and Spanish press. To this end, a total of 1,619 items were analysed (Armentia, 1997:19), including news stories, editorials, opinion columns and letters to the editor in the following daily papers: *El Correo*, *El Diario Vasco*, *Egin*, *Deia*, *El País*, *Abc* and *El Mundo*, in addition to the magazines *Diario 16* and *Tiempo*. The aim of that research was to determine how far the content of the Ajuria Enea Pact was reflected in the Basque and Spanish press. The Ajuria Enea Pact was signed on the 12th January 1988 by the main Basque political parties, with the exception of HB (Herri Batasuna-Unidad Popular), and represented a milestone in the discrediting of ETA's violence. To do this, news and opinions published in the eight years prior to the pact (from 1979) were compared with others published in the eight years following it (up to 1996). The second research entitled *The role of the Mass Media in the Basque peace process (1998-2001)* was directed by the Professor of Audiovisual Communication in the University of the Basque Country, Petxo Idoiaga, and in which another of the authors of this present study also participated. The research took place between September 1998 and March 2000. In this period, ETA called a truce which appeared to be permanent. It lasted 439 days - from the 19th September 1998 to the 28th November 1999. The Basque Nationalist parties and sectors of the United Left joined together in a political pact which recognised the right of the Basque Country to decide its future. The research carried

out an exhaustive content analysis via the examination of 1,507 front pages and editorials of eleven daily papers: *El Correo*, *El Diario Vasco*, *Diario de Navarra*, *Euskaldunon Egunkaria*, *Deia*, *Euskadi Información-Gara*, *El País*, *Abc*, *El Mundo*, *La Vanguardia* and *La Voz de Galicia*. The main aim of this was to analyse the coverage given to the Basque conflict by the Basque and Spanish press.

- A content analysis of ten paradigmatic news items. This research analysed items of news which, for their context and meaning were considered premonitory and/or indicators of a change in tendency or exponents of an attitude. The ten news items are the following:
 1. The murder of a Guardia Civil police officer in Elorrio, Bizkaia (1980).
 2. The release of the prison officer José Antonio Ortega Lara (1997).
 3. The assassination of Miguel Ángel Blanco (1997).
 4. Autonomic elections (2001).
 5. The presentation of the Plan Ibarretxe in the Congreso de los Diputados (2005).
 6. The International Peace Conference of Aiete (2011).
 7. The announcement of a permanent ETA ceasefire (2011).
 8. A series of Rufi Etxeberria interviews in newspapers belonging to the Vocento group (2012).
 9. The legalisation of Sortu by the TC - Tribunal Constitucional (2012).
 10. The president of the Basque PP, Arantza Quiroga's proposal (2015)
- A discussion group with experts on the subject. The meeting took place on the 1st July 2016 as part of the summer courses run by the University of the Basque Country in San Sebastián. Four experienced professionals from Media sources of different orientations took part in the group meeting.

7. Results

This research looks at the press coverage of the Basque conflict following the death of Franco. The investigation of this phenomenon during the dictatorship would have required a completely different study. The direct observation of the subject being analysed allows for a distinction between four significant periods, the beginning and end of which coincide with important political agreements or decisions made by the protagonists.

- ✓ These are the four periods and their corresponding descriptions:
- ✓ 1975-1988: A lack of unified criteria.
- ✓ 1988-2000: Towards the unification/tension of and in the content.
- ✓ 2000-2011: “Trench journalism”.
- ✓ 2011-2016: Where the news is edited determines its frame.

7.1. 1975-1988: A lack of unified criteria

The first period begins with the death of Franco and ends on the 12th January 1988 when the Ajuria Enea Pact is signed, with the official title *Agreement for the Normalisation and Pacification of Euskadi*.

The press coverage of the Basque problem during the first years of the transition was full of doubts and uncertainties. They were very turbulent years, which were witnessed by the press. The dictatorship was not completely dead and democracy was still being born. There were arrests, attacks, the actions of parapolice groups and reports of torture.

The birth in 1977 of two nationalist daily papers, one on the left (*Egin*) and the other on the centre-right (*Deia*), provoked an important change in the agenda of the Basque press as a whole. The existent daily papers had lived with, and in many cases actively agreed with, the dictatorship and so were faced with a choice - re-invent themselves or die. They gradually began to introduce new things into their agendas, such as the release of political prisoners, the demand for democratic freedoms, autonomic ideas, etc... Those newspapers from the past that remained more faithful to their ideology would end up closing. This is what happened to *Arriba España*, which closed in 1975, *La Voz de España* and *Unidad* in 1980, *Norte Express* in 1982, *Hierro* in 1983 and *La Gaceta del Norte* in 1984 [13].

Some newspapers provided a wider coverage than others of the emergent subjects on the political agenda, depending, logically, on the ideological orientation of each one. Between 1975 and 1980, almost everything was yet to be defined or structured. Democratic political parties and trade unions had only just re-emerged from the dictatorship and the new institutions were starting to take their first steps. A non-conformism and lack of definition reigned on all levels – political, socio-labour and even in universities. That same lack of definition could be observed in the Basque and Spanish press.

As a consequence of this situation, things happened which, from a position of hindsight, are perplexing. During the end of the 70s and beginning of the 80s, the presence of the Basque conflict became so ordinary that objectively important events, such as a fatal attack on a Guardia Civil police officer for example, did not warrant highlighting as the main news of the day, even in newspapers in no way sympathetic to ETA's cause. An example of this is the first paradigmatic news story included in this analysis. It concerns a piece of news from the 15th January 1980 in the daily paper *El Correo* (at that time it didn't hide its complete name: *El Correo español-El pueblo vasco*). That day, the main news was the lightning visit of the then president Adolfo Suárez to the USA. The murder of a member of the Guardia Civil by ETA in the village of Elorrio on the previous day was considered of secondary newsworthiness. The headline and subheading were scant and informative: *Elorrio (Vizcaya): A Guardia Civil officer murdered. The perpetrators, two young men armed with pistols and submachine guns.*

The story was developed inside the paper, in which the journalist gave details about the victim's reputation:

“(...) for one sector of the village he was a nice man who had a good relationship with most of his neighbours, whilst others connected him to people known for their right-wing ideology. This latter group accused him of being aggressive with those who took part in a sit-in at the local church to demand amnesty.”

1st news item: The murder of a member of the Guardia Civil (1980).



Front page of *El Correo español* (15.01.1980).

This kind of comment would be unthinkable nowadays in a newspaper with a conservative editorial line such as this one, the flagship of the Vocento group, the main press group in Euskadi. The front page also reflects the tension of the time, briefly mentioning "Two new rapes at gunpoint" in two villages of the province of Gipuzkoa. It was the 1980s, a decade known as "the years of lead", full of political tensions, including an attempted military coup on the 23rd February 1981.

As the institutional structuring progressed, the political panorama became clearer and anti-ETA consensus became consolidated, especially after the signing of the Ajurian Enea Pact [14]. A short time before that agreement, and to some extent the incentive behind it, was the ETA bombing of the Hipercor supermarket in Barcelona on the 19th June 1987 in which 21 people died. The attack had an important repercussion on public opinion, since all the victims were civil. This resulted in a smoothing over of differences between political parties in terms of their positions regarding ETA. From that moment on, the Ajuria Enea Pact gradually conditioned the Media agenda, actively contributing to the establishment of a dichotomy that was the key to the discrediting of ETA – that which separated *democrats* from *the violent*. The thing was that very often the independentist left wing was included in the second category.

7.2. 1988-2000: Towards unification/tension of and in the content

There were two milestones which marked this period: at the beginning the aforementioned Ajuria Enea Pact, and at the end the *Agreement on Freedom and against Terrorism*, signed on the 8th December 2000 by the following political parties: PP, PSOE, CIU, CC and Partido Andalucista [15]. This agreement gave rise to the subsequent passing of the Party Law (2002), a legislation which led to the successive banning of different organisations close to the independentist left wing under the judicial premise that "everything is ETA".

During the decade of the 90s, ETA modified its *modus operandi*. Its main aim at that time was to bring the Spanish State to the negotiating table, taking advantage of the international impact of the 1992 Olympics in Barcelona. To this end, it intensified its car bomb attacks, together with attacks against public figures from the PP and PSOE. The Media responded by giving more column space to the attacks and strongly discrediting its actions. The exception was the Media closer to the independentist left wing, which reported ETA's actions in a merely descriptive way with no assessment either in favour or against. The diversity of informative criteria shown, above all, by the Basque press dissipated little by little, and the points of view of those sectors of the Media which were already against ETA became more unified. At the same time, editorial lines became blatantly more distanced and tense, and the Media was a reflection of the convulsion that existed at that time in Basque society. As the research carried out by the group Ehuki of the University of the Basque Country shows, the Media got used to a stage that closed doors on the thawing of tensions. It used, sometimes excessively, the suffering of those on both sides, which involved discrediting and deforming the political language to exploit black and white stereotypes to the max (Armentia et. al, 1997:149).

In July 1997, two events happened which are the key to understanding the evolution witnessed in the press coverage of the Basque conflict. On the 1st July in Arrasate-Mondragón (Gipuzkoa), the Guardia Civil set free the prison officer José Antonio Ortega Lara who had been held hostage by ETA for 532 days. With this action, ETA requested the removal of its imprisoned members to prisons in the Basque Country. An extremely tense situation was produced which was reflected on the front pages of the following day's newspapers. A special mention should go to the front pages of the daily papers *Egin* and *El Mundo*¹⁶].

2nd news item: Prison officer José Antonio Ortega Lara is set free (1997).



Front pages of the daily papers *Egin* and *El Mundo* (02.07.1997).

The first front page uses irony to show a clear contempt of the pain "of others". The second editorialises a news headline, blatantly charging it with rhetoric. It was a dramatic situation. However, from an ethical and deontological point of view, both headlines were a long way from the UNESCO guidelines for this kind of situation.

Eleven days after the release of Ortega Lara, the PP councillor for Ermua (Bizkaia), Miguel Ángel Blanco was assassinated. The special characteristics of this event took it to an international level [17]. It was a real turning point, which established the discrediting of ETA worldwide. From that point on, the Media dedicated much more column space to the attacks of this organisation as well as to their victims (Caminos, Armentia and Marin, 2013: 139-160). It truly was a *key event* as Kepplinger and Habermeier (1995) point out. These two very different front pages, from *El País* and *Diario 16* are just a sample of the outright rejection of this action.

3rd news item. The assassination of Miguel Ángel Blanco (1997).



Front pages of *El País* and *Diario 16* (13.07.1997)

Fourteen months after those events which shook Basque, Spanish and international public opinion, in September 1998 another important agreement was signed, this time within the Basque Country: the so-called Pacto de Lizarra [18]. A few days later, on the 16th September, ETA called an indefinite truce. During the fourteen months that the peace lasted (until December 1999), an unprecedented political polarisation occurred. The press edited in Madrid did not look kindly on such an agreement between nationalists, suspecting it of being a prelude to a possible independence for the Basque Country. In fact, one year later (December 2000) the aforementioned *Agreement on Freedoms and against Terrorism*, another determinant political pact in the agenda of the Basque conflict was signed.

7.3. 2000-2011: “Trench journalism”

During this third period, the tendencies outlined in the previous one intensify. This phase runs from the signing of the *Agreement on Freedoms and against Terrorism* in December 2000 to the 20th October 2011, the day on which ETA announced the definitive end of its activity. During those eleven years, far-reaching political events took place in one sense or another. These were: the most polarised electoral campaign ever in the Basque Autonomous Community (2001), the illegalisation of numerous organisations close to the independentist left (2003-2013), attacks against journalists and Media sources, the closure of *Euskaldunon Egunkaria* [19] (2003), the acceptance of the Plan Ibarretxe in the Basque Parliament (2004) and its rejection of the Spanish courts (2005), the conversations of Geneva and Loiola (2006-2007), the arrest of leaders of Batasuna (2009), the shift

at the heart of the independentist left wing (the approval of the report Zurik Euskal Herria, 2010), the Aiete Peace Conference (2011) and the aforementioned announcement from ETA (2011). All these events were reflected in the Media, being assessed in accordance with the editorial line of each one.

The political context in which the autonomous elections of the 13th May 2001 took place was truly exceptional. The Lizarra-Garazi Pact had been broken and ETA had returned to the armed struggle in a particularly gory manner. In some of the Media, above all those located in Madrid, a clear editorial line was established: *The PNV must be expelled from public institutions for reasons of democratic hygiene* (Batista, 2001). To this end, an alliance between the PP and PSOE parties was forged. The then *Lehendakari* (Basque president) was not forgiven for promoting the Lizarra agreement, nor for signing a legislative pact with *Euskal Herriarrok*, the party which at that time represented the ideology of the independentist left. At that moment, a palpable “criminalisation of democratic ideologies” (Batista 2001: 228), took place. The press took a decisive part in the campaign. Juan José Ibarretxe was the PNV-EA coalition candidate at that time. On the other side was the former Internal Affairs Minister, Jaime Mayor Oreja as candidate for the conservative PP-UA (Partido Popular-Unidad Alavesa) coalition. As minister, he declared himself clearly in favour of breaking off all contact with ETA and defended a hard line against the prisoners of this organisation. Furthermore, with the election campaign in full flow, Mayor Oreja received the support of the PSE-EE (Partido Socialista de Euskadi) candidate for *Lehendakari*, Nicolás Redondo. The Media portrayed that election as a duel between Ibarretxe and Mayor Oreja, as if they were the only candidates. The majority of the Media (above all those in Madrid and also those in Euskadi of the Vocento group) declared themselves clearly in favour of Mayor Oreja via the press, radio or television. Even the daily *El País* made its stance clear as can be seen from the front page of the 29th April 2001, in which it gave an account of the support given by the association of ETA victims “Basta ya” to the PP-PSOE coalition.

4th news item: Autonomic elections of 2001.



El País (29.04.2001).

Despite the clear imbalance in the mediatic support for one side or the other, the PNV-EA coalition won 604,222 votes - 33 seats – (an absolute majority was 38), while the PP-UA alliance, with the support of PSE-EE, gained 32 MPs [20].

A political tension was established which would last for years to come - a huge division which affected the Media and increased the original division between *democrats* and *the violent* which the Ajuria Enea Pact advocated, to a wider one between *those seeking sovereignty* (the Basques) and *constitutionalists* (the Spanish). This dichotomy was encouraged, to a large extent, by the anti-terrorist Pact signed in Madrid in 2000. Such division was illustrated when the Basque *Lehendakari* Juan José Ibarretxe defended his plan for sovereignty in the Congreso de los Diputados on the 1st February 2005. Newspapers such as *El Mundo*, *Abc* or *La Razón* did not hesitate to dismiss his plan as a *fanatical threat*.

5th news item (a): Presentation of the Plan Ibarretxe in the Congreso de los Diputados (2005).



Digital version of the news story published in *El Mundo*(02.02.2005).

The free daily paper *20 minutos*, with a large circulation at the time, strengthened this image of a *fanatical leader*, as the Basque president was portrayed in the press from Madrid.

5th news item (b): Presentation of the Plan Ibarretxe in the Congreso de los Diputados (2005).



Digital news in the free publication *20 Minutos* (02.02.2005).

In the following years, similar tendencies were detected among the Basque, Spanish and Catalan daily papers. The researcher I. Merodio (2010: 288) came to this conclusion in his analysis of the impact of the *Plan Ibarretxe* on the press:

“The Basque newspapers (Deia, El Correo and Gara) recognise the existence of a political conflict and [the advisability of adopting] measures of the same nature to solve it (except El Correo). The Catalan papers (El Periódico and La Vanguardia) expound the existence of a conflict of jurisdiction in the whole of the Spanish State, the Plan Ibarretxe being a sign of this, and they propose normative but also judicial and police solutions against violence. The newspapers from Madrid (El País and Abc) deny the existence of a political conflict and defend (together with El Correo) that the only possible solution is the Spanish State's fight against ETA.”

In this period between 2000 and 2011, *Trench Journalism* became more evident than ever (Salutregi, 2016). The atmosphere was already extremely strained following the events prior to the signing of the anti-terrorist pact in December 2000. In July 1998 the independentist newspaper *Egin* was closed, and in May 2000 the contributor on *El Mundo* José Luis López de Lacalle was murdered. Those events, and the subsequent attitudes of the directors of Basque newspapers to them, only served to deteriorate the atmosphere even further (Otamendi, 2016). In addition to the aforementioned events, and limiting ourselves to the period 2000-2011, other events happened which delved even deeper into the idea that the Media and journalists were not only witnesses to occurrences, but were also protagonists and victims of them. Such events were: the murder of the financial director of *El Diario Vasco*, Santiago Oleaga (2001); the closure of the only newspaper in Euskera, *Euskaldunon Egunkaria* (2003) and the consequences of this (professionals arrested and torture reported); the arrest of 35 people connected to *Egin* (2007); the ETA attacks on Basque Media and journalists (the most dramatic being the bomb attack against EITB in 2008); and the harassment of news professionals (50 journalists had to live all day every day with a police bodyguard). These events widened the distance between the two journalistic trenches even more - each opted to remain faithful to their ideology without showing too much interest in the suffering of "the other side". The Media became part of the conflict.

In that context, it became even more necessary than ever before to recall the advice given by the UNESCO in the 1978 meeting in Paris: *The exercise of freedom of opinion, expression and information is a vital factor in the strengthening of peace and international understanding*. The final recommendations which appear in our second hemerographic study are along the same lines (Idoiaga and Ramírez de la Piscina, 2002: 261-269):

- ✓ Respect and consideration for all victims of the conflict, regardless of which side they are on.
- ✓ To encourage the relaxing of tension and dialogue between the parties involved.
- ✓ To banish belligerent and reductionist language.
- ✓ To analyse events from a wide and deep perspective.
- ✓ To contribute to knowing the reality of the "other", that is those sectors which do not coincide with the editorial line of each newspaper.
- ✓ To guarantee the right to privacy of all citizens.
- ✓ To increase the autonomy of Media professionals.
- ✓ To demand exemplary behaviour, especially from public Media sources in accordance with their commitment to society.

Far from taking on board said recommendations, the majority of the Media followed the guidelines of a different doctrine: *mediatic anti-terrorism* (Marletti 1984, Soria 1987, Schelesinger 1991, Rodrigo 1991, Zallo and Ramírez de la Piscina 1999; Idoiaga 1999, Coulter 1999) as suggested by the Ministry of Internal Affairs (González 1999) [21]. This theory defended that both the editorial line and professional activity (converted into information policy) should be subordinate to the "national interest" and to State policy.

The trenches were also closing. At the end of this period, around 2010 and 2011, certain symptoms began to emerge which augured the end of an era: the new political strategy of the independentist left (2010), the partial ETA truce (2010), the Aiete International Peace Conference (2011) and the announcement from ETA of the end of its activity (2011).

The conservative press in Madrid's coverage of the Aiete Peace Conference, which took place on the 17th October 2011 [22] in the Palace of Aiete in San Sebastian, was an omen of what this new phase would be like – where the news was edited would determine its frame.

6th news item. Aiete Internatioanl Peace Conference (2011).



Front pages of *Abc*, *El Mundo* and *La Razón* (18.10.2011)

7.4. 2011-2016: Where the news is edited determines its frame

ETA's announcement on the 20th October 2011 regarding the definitive end of its activity had an international echo. It represented the beginning of a new era in the coverage of the Basque conflict. This stage goes up to the 1st July 2016, when the coverage of the Basque conflict was dealt with in a summer school course in the University of the Basque Country.

ETA's announcement of a permanent ceasefire came after the Aiete Conference.

7th news item: ETA permanent ceasefire (2011).



Front pages of *El Correo*, *Gara*, *Berria*, *El País*, *Abc*, *El Mundo* and *La Razón* (21.10.2011).

Everything appeared to indicate that this new period of peace would generate an appropriate context for a more impartial coverage of the conflict. It was not surprising that the editorials of the press in Madrid had always claimed that, "after the end of ETA we will be able to talk about everything; in the meantime, no". However this prophecy was never fulfilled, at least not in the case of the more conservative press published in the capital (*Abc*, *El Mundo* and *La Razón*) for whom the Basque conflict continued and continues to lack a political root, and therefore it was inappropriate to begin

inter-party conversations directed at a solution. This is shown in the analysis of news items 6 and 7 of this research.

The Aiete International Peace Conference took place while Lehendakari Patxi López (PSE-EE) was on an official trip to the USA. It was not a coincidence. The Basque Socialist leader was perfectly aware of the event but preferred not to afford it more importance by attending, despite the presence of world scale personalities in the palace in Donostia. The election of López as Lehendakari (with the votes of the PP) coincided with the illegalisation of the independentist left, which prevented it from standing in the elections. During López's three-year term of office (2009-2012), the leaders of the banned party who were not in prison made a great effort to organise semi-public acts bordering on illegal. It was not until 2012 that this political party was legalised, in the guise of Sortu (*Create in Euskera*). Prior to this, on the 28th February 2011, the Basque Parliament passed a proposal with the votes of PSE-EE, PP and UPyD in which it urged EITB “not to interview leaders of the illegal party Batasuna”. However, *Euskadi Irratia*, the public radio station in Euskera with the largest audience (part of the aforementioned public corporation) chose to prioritise freedom of expression and on the 15th March 2011 interviewed one of the few leaders of the extinct Batasuna not in prison, Rufi Etxeberria. Although at first this unleashed a political storm, it was confined to circles close to the parties; but this was not the case with Media professionals. The Mass Media began to realise that both the Aiete Conference and the subsequent ETA announcement augured a noticeable change in the political framework that had existed up to that point. The post-ETA phase was starting to become a reality.

One example of this paradigmatic shift occurred in 2012 when the two newspapers belonging to the Vocento group (market leader of the press published in Euskadi) –*El Correo* and *El Diario Vasco*– also decided to interview the aforementioned leader of the illegal Batasuna. It was the clearest example that an easing of earlier tensions was beginning to bear fruit (at least in the Basque press).

8th news item: A series of interviews with the independentist leader Rufi Etxeberria in newspapers belonging to the Vocento group (2012).



Newspapers of the Vocento group, *El Diario Vasco* and *El Correo*, interview the leader of Batasuna, Rufi Etxeberria on a Sunday (29.01.2012 and 03.06.2012, respectively).

Whilst it is only fair to underline the change in attitude shown by the *Vocento* group in the post-ETA phase, the distinctive role played by the nationalist press during these four decades must also be highlighted. In this sense, it is worth remembering some of the conclusions drawn from our second

piece of research (Idoiaga and Ramírez de la Piscina 2002:146 between 1998-2002), which are still valid:

“From their minority market position - 21% of total circulation – the Basque nationalist left wing newspapers have clearly shown their ideological dependence, but have avoided falling into the trap of unanimity and have always distanced themselves from the defensive principles of mediatic anti-terrorism. Furthermore, they have maintained their distinctive posture in relation to key questions, such as the violence of ETA, which has undoubtedly enriched their plurality. We believe that their attitude to the conflict has been more balanced and impartial. The data concerning sources and protagonists of the news demonstrate our claim. The nationalist press, with all its defects and virtues, constitutes a necessary counterpoint to the official version, 'the other side of the coin', to which citizens living in the rest of the State do not have access.”

To expand on this issue, it is worth highlighting the essential role played (since even before 2011) by the daily paper *Gara* when it comes to encouraging a strategic change within the independentist left (*the Gara factor*; Murua 2014: 186). We should not underestimate the role of moderation played by the newspapers of the group *Deia-Diario Noticias* (close to the Basque nationalism in power) or the part played by the papers *Euskaldunon Egunkaria-Berria*. They have always remained more distant with regard to the two extremes, including in their pages critical analysis of ETA and the Basque independentist left, and/or publishing the testimonies of victims from both sides.

Following the post-ETA period, the written press in Madrid (the most conservative more virulently) did everything they could to hinder the passage of the independentist left towards legality. This is reflected in the front pages which followed the Tribunal Constitucional's decision to legalise Sortu, the new party which represented that political sector; a party which, in its statutes expressly requested the "definitive and total disappearance of any kind of violence, especially that of ETA" (2011: 2).

9th news item. The TC, Tribunal Constitucional, legalises Sortu (2012).



Front pages of *Abc*, *El Mundo* and *La Razón* (21.06.2012)

This attitude continued throughout the following years. The role of the right wing Spanish press as a "political actor" was revealed in a curious way in 2015 when it managed to sever an attempt by the Basque PP to create opportunities for dialogue with the independentist left. The sequence of events was as follows: On the 1st October 2015 MPs of EHBildu (a coalition of independentist and sovereignty seeking sectors of the left wing) publish an opinion article in the newspaper *El Correo* in which, under the headline "Our decision, peace", they assert that "violence is always the worst path". Five days later, the president of the Basque PP, Arantza Quiroga, presents a proposal of dialogue including EHBildu in the Basque Parliament, something hitherto unheard of.

10th news item (a): President of the Basque PP Arantza Quiroga's proposal (2015).



eitb.eus, 2015.20.06.

The day after, sectors of the print and digital press in Madrid react angrily.

10th news item (b): Reactions to Quiroga's proposal (2015)



El Mundo and *Libertad digital* (07.10.2015)
El Mundo even appeals to the feelings of ETA's victims.

10th news item (c): Reactions to Quiroga's proposal (2015).



El Mundo (08.10.2015).

Six days later, after a symptomatic silence, the originator of the proposal presents her resignation. The conservative press in Madrid's bet pays off.

10th news item (d): The outcome of Quiroga's proposal (2015).



News in *El Mundo* and *Abc* (14.20.2010 and 15.10.2015).

Following the definitive ceasefire declared by ETA, the Basque conflict practically disappeared from the front pages of the newspapers published in Madrid. The gap it left was filled by the Catalan sovereignty process which, as with the Plan Ibarretxe in 2005, is systematically categorised as *defiance*.

Behind the Basque and Catalan disputes lies a latent debate that has been unresolved for decades, concerning the possibility of a change in the legal framework that would allow the historical nationalities that make up the Spanish State the right to decide. It is fanciful to imagine that a serene debate about the current *status quo* could be facilitated by mediatic power. Such debates, however, have taken place in the press in countries with a more established democratic tradition, such as the United Kingdom (the Scottish question) or Canada (the sovereignty of Quebec). Furthermore, there is a striking circumstance which exists in the Spanish case, that is the progressive shift to the right of the main written press entities in the Spanish State; something observed by *The New York Times* in 2015 [23]. According to this newspaper, the economic crisis that began in 2008, in addition to resulting in the loss of over 11,000 jobs in the sector, has also affected freedom of expression, given that financial sectors have taken over the main newspapers in the Spanish State. It provoked the replacement of the directors of *El País*, *Abc*, *El Mundo* and *La Vanguardia* and a noticeable shift to the right in their editorial lines.

8. Expert Group

On the 1st July 2016, within the framework of summer school courses run by the University of the Basque Country in San Sebastián, a discussion group was created made up of four veteran Basque journalists who are experts on the subject to hand and represent a wide editorial variety. Those who took part were: Luis Rodríguez Aizpeolea who worked on *El Diario Vasco* in San Sebastián during the 1980s, and from 1989 up to his retirement in 2012 on *El País* in charge of the National section to which he continues to contribute from time to time; Martxelo Otamendi, Dean of Directors of the Basque press, managing director of *Euskaldunon Egunkaria* from 1993 until its closure in 2003, and later director of *Berria* up to the present day; Jabier Salutregi, who worked on *Egin* from 1978 until its closure in 1998, when he was its director [24], and Elixabete Garmendia, a prestigious ETB journalist who has worked for the corporation since 1986 and is a frequent contributor to different

written Media sources in Euskera, such as the long-running weekly Basque publication *Argia* or the newspaper *Berria*. At the last minute, the director of *El Correo* José Miguel Santamaría was unable to attend. However, this work includes the opinions expressed by the former director of the same paper Juan Carlos Martínez in 2015 [25].

The participants in the session were asked the following questions: *how has the press covered the Basque conflict?* and *do you think it could have been done better?* There was a general consensus that the press was not up to the task in hand, although some important qualifications were made.

Main observations of Luis Rodríguez Aizpeolea (2016):

“My assessment of the press coverage of the Basque conflict is quite bad; it has been quite frankly deplorable. During the 1980s and 90s, ETA victims didn't exist in the Media. News of attacks were published which didn't even make the first pages. Later the opposite effect was produced: an excessive utilisation of the victims of ETA by the Media.

“Following the end of ETA, I have watched with puzzlement and annoyance how the Spanish political right wing and the conservative Media in Madrid (more talk show guests, ‘Savateres’ and the like) have waged three important battles (El País is excluded from these attitudes as I believe its position has been objectively different). The aim of the first was to render the legalisation of the Basque independentist left impossible; the second to impede the release of prisoners sentenced under the Parot doctrine following the decision of the European Court (which it also lost) and the third, the terrible campaign to try to politically disable Arnaldo Otegi.”

Points made by Elixabete Garmendia (2016):

“Reflecting on this subject leads us to some inglorious episodes in our past. Here both sides have been denied the word. And we have that on our conscience. The Ajuria Enea Pact of 1988 brought with it the implementation of a series of slogans. A new language was introduced based on the use and abuse of the term 'terrorist' or 'terrorism', and the independentist left was denied a voice and a presence in the Media (...). On the other hand, after the assassination of Yoyes (María Dolores González Katarain [26]), we organised a petition against the murder based on a written condemnation, and the directors of Egin refused to publish it. Here there was also a denial of the word.

“I don't know whether the situation would have been different if the newspapers had been run mainly by women. But I would like to quote from a letter written by Yoyes from her exile in Mexico: 'The great political, scientific, literary decisions etc... are not taken by women, and much less by pregnant women. How different would things be if they did take those decisions!'”

Reflections of Jabier Salútregi (2016):

“It was believed that there was a war on. There was a lot of tension on the street, social movements were very active and I think that the Mass Media acted like true mediatic brunetes [27]. War trenches were built from which to defend a bloc of political, economic interests etc... (...) with the aim of neutralising the adversary who was almost always seen as the enemy.

“Depending on whose hands it is in, the Media can be either a weapon to mould society as those in power wish, a weapon of mass destruction of ideas, a weapon to impose a hegemonic ideology which in a sibylline way directs the whole of society. (...) I am in favour of the setting up of an Independent Media Observatory, which would be able to control the excesses which are produced in newspaper offices.”

Key points expressed by Martxelo Otamendi (2016):

“In our specific case, I would make a distinction between two different levels. On a professional level, I think we got it right. We reported on all the victims to a greater or lesser extent. On a personal level I think we made mistakes and, what's more, were aware of it. For example, we didn't stand by the families of José Luis López de Lacalle or Santiago Oleaga when they suffered attacks [in 2000 and 2001].

“When Joxe Mari Korta (2000) and the headquarters of EITB (2008) were victims of attacks we did react and criticised them in the paper's editorial column. I even promoted a demonstration with directors of Basque-speaking Media in front of the EITB headquarters in Bilbao to say that what had happened was unacceptable.”

The participants in the group agreed, with some qualifications, that torture victims (at least 4,009 people between 1960 and 2013, according to Basque Government reports) had been notably absent from the Media, above all in newspapers with *constitutionalist* tendencies.

Although Juan Carlos Martínez, director of *El Correo* in 2015, did not take part in the Expert Group meeting, he made the following reflection a year earlier in the pages of *El País* (Rodríguez Aizpeolea, 2015):

“It is astounding now to look back at those front pages [the 1980s]. An assassination carried out by ETA was not the most relevant news. But the Basque press was a reflection of the society of the time, which looked on in puzzlement, if not with indifference at what was happening. The newspapers didn't know how to approach the reality with the necessary forcefulness, above all regarding the victims of terrorism. Journalism reflected the evolution of Basque society.

“The climate of confusion at the end of Franco's regime and in the Transition was evident. Political mistakes were made when dealing with terrorism, with abusive actions by the Security Forces. This added to the fear provoked by a very powerful ETA with considerable social support. The effect was paralysing.”

9. Discussion and conclusions

In order to understand the press coverage of the Basque conflict by the Basque and Spanish press during the period from 1975 to 2016, various factors must be taken into account:

- ✓ The political context of each moment.
- ✓ The evolution produced by ETA's actions.
- ✓ The place where each newspaper is edited.
- ✓ The editorial line of the Media source.

These four factors have interacted throughout the last four decades, sometimes fanning the flames of the conflict and on other fewer occasions promoting a stage for peace. For many years, misinformation, manipulation and the failure of ethical and deontological codes have been constant in the press coverage of the conflict. There is no getting away from the vicissitudes surrounding dozens of professionals, and the Media sources themselves, having lived through truly exceptional and hitherto unheard-of situations in Europe - suffering assassinations, threats and different types of attacks which hit out against freedom of expression. In such circumstances, reporting on the Basque conflict was extremely complicated, especially doing it in a calm and free manner.

All things considered, it could be said that the press coverage of the Basque conflict resembles a spherical polyhedron turning on its own axis - it only needs to be moved a few millimetres one way or the other for the perception which it projects to be different from the previous one.

After the death of Franco, the uncertainty present in Basque society was reflected in the press of the time. There was no unanimity of criteria when it came to dealing with ETA. Police violence, when it was reported, appeared in a biased way in most cases. It must be taken into account that the political parties as much as the trade unions, social agents and the public institutions themselves were all getting used to the new political situation. It would be a mistake typical of *historical presentism* to judge from a current vantage point the behaviour of the Media forty years ago without taking into account the context of the time.

Basque press coverage of the conflict evolved as ETA's actions intensified. It became more and more difficult to obtain information that was truthful, free, contrasted and critical of the conflict. Editorial lines became polarised to an extreme extent and "Trench journalism" was the norm as the new century began. There were many significant attacks in the history of ETA, but perhaps the *key event* par excellence was the assassination of Miguel Angel Blanco in 1997. From then on, the attitude of the press in general became much more belligerent both with ETA and with the independentist left wing.

When armed activities passed into the background (the Lizarra-Garazi truce in 1998-1999, for example) the artists of the political conflict emerged with immense clarity. Then, the place where each newspaper was edited and its editorial line took on a special relevance. In that sense, the attitude shown by the Basque press in the post-ETA phase (2011-2016) has been much more constructive than that of the conservative press in Madrid, whose postures are much more rooted in the past.

Throughout the last 41 years, the Basque and Spanish press have played a variety of roles: they have been witnesses, actors, agitators, victims and facilitators of the resolution of the conflict. Obviously, all these functions, which could be seen as contradictory, have not been developed by all the newspapers with the same intensity nor in the same period. However, what can be said is that the press in general has not followed the UNESCO recommendations relating to the role of the Media in times of conflict. Although there are reprehensible aspects to all the newspapers, the attitude of the press edited in Madrid has been the most misinforming and hindering to peace than that of the Basque press.

Notes

[01] Source: *Draft report on the Infringement of Human Rights in the Basque case (1960-2013)* commissioned by the General Secretary for Peace and Coexistence of the Basque Government. The number of fatal victims attributed to ETA varies depending on the source, and even today an exact figure cannot be given with complete certainty as at least 13 cases require further investigation.

[02] In this calculation, the Basque Government includes all the victims attributed to ETA in all its factions and/or divisions, the CCAA Comandos Autónomos Anticapitalistas, IK Iparretarrak, Iraultza and “other organisations”. It also erroneously includes one victim of the DRIL Directorio Revolucionario Ibérico de Liberación, an organisation totally unconnected to ETA. It was created in 1959 by Galician and Portuguese anti-Franco communists and libertarians, and was the recognised perpetrator of the unintentional death on the 27th June 1960 of Begoña Urroz, a 22 month old baby, in the station of Amara in San Sebastián (she was caught by the explosion of a bomb placed in the left-luggage office). The official historiography considers her to be the “first ETA victim”, even though later investigations all refute this and attribute it to the DRIL, just as the perpetrators admit (see the statement of Xurxo Martínez Crespo in the newspaper *Deia*, 21st February 2010).

[03] *Draft report on the Infringement of Human Rights in the Basque case (1960-2013)* attributes 94 deaths to State Security Forces (taking place in police stations, checkpoints, as a result of mix-ups, altercations, demonstrations etc...) and another 73 to parapolic and extreme right wing groups: 61 in attacks (committed by different organisations: GAL, BVE, GAE, ATE and Triple A), 4 following kidnappings, 3 in industrial action, 3 missing and two women raped and murdered by these groups.

[04] The report on the incidence of torture in the Basque Country between 1960 and 2013 was published on the 27th June 2016 by the Basque Criminology Institute (IVC) of the University of the Basque Country. Four thousand and nine people were identified as having suffered torture, although it is estimated that the number could be as many as 4,810 since some of them had been tortured on more than one occasion. In the analysed period, 9 condemnatory sentences have been handed out to the Policía Nacional and 12 to the Guardia Civil, which translates to 50 civil servants found guilty of crimes against 32 people (4 women and 28 men) arrested between 1979 and 1992. The alleged perpetrators were as follows: the Guardia Civil received 1,589 accusations, the Policía Nacional 1,561, the Ertzaintza 310, Policías Municipales 4, prison officers 19 and “others”, 39. Many incidents of torture went unreported out of fear of reprisals. In June, the first conclusions from the report were published. The final report will be published in December 2016.

Source: <http://www.eitb.eus/es/noticias/politica/detalle/4194366/informe-incidencia-tortura/> [Retrieved: 27.06.2016]

[05] The Foro de Ermua is a civic organisation started in 1998 following the assassination of Miguel Ángel Blanco by ETA in 1997. One of its main aims is to discredit the violence carried out by ETA.

[066] Source: *Draft report on the Infringement of Human Rights in the Basque case (1960-2013)* from the Basque Government.

[07] EITB is the Basque Public Radio and Television Corporation.

[08] Antiterrorist Liberation Groups, an organisation that carried out so-called “State terrorism”, active between 1983 and 1987 with at least 27 murders attributed to them.

[09] In their vindication, the GAL made no reference to the condition of these people as journalists, but instead to the status of political refugee in the case of the first, and in Muguruza's case, to his political relevance.

[10] Source: *Draft report on the Infringement of Human Rights in the Basque case (1960-2013)* from the Basque Government.

[11] Ibid.

[12] The following organisations took part: International Organization of Journalists (IOJ), International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), International Catholic Union of the Press (UCIP), Latin-American Federation of Journalists (FELAP), Latin-American Federation of Press Workers (FELATRAP), Union of African Journalists (UJA), Confederation of ASEAN Journalists (CAJ). Retrieved 27.06.2016 in: <http://www.academiaperiodismo.org.ar/etica/unesco1.html>

[13] Some of those that closed re-opened years later with new owners and a different editorial line. Such was the case of *La Gaceta del Norte* and *La Voz de Euskadi* (previously called *de España*). However, these also ended up closing in the face of competition from a market which had changed radically, largely as a result of the new political situation.

[14] The pact was signed in the Ajuria Enea palace, official residence of the then Lehendakari (President of the Basque Country) José Antonio Ardanza. Its signatories were the political parties PNV, PSE-EE, AP (the current PP), CDS Centro Democrático y Social, EE Euskadiko Ezkerra and EA Eusko Alkartasuna (a split off from the PNV 1985).

[15] The political parties IU, PNV, BNG, ERC, ICV, EA and CHA voted against, on the understanding that it violated fundamental democratic principles.

[16] It must be highlighted that the attitude of both papers was not always the same. As researchers Caminos, Armentia and Marin point out (2013:157), following the assassination of Miguel Ángel Blanco on 10th July 1997, the newspaper *Egin* gave more column space to opinions critical of Batasuna (the coalition which editorially dominated the paper). After the closure of *Egin* (a year later) came *Gara*, a paper with a similar ideological profile but with a different attitude in certain aspects. This new daily paper made an important contribution to the political strategy change in the independentist left (Murua, 2014:186-191). This happened between 2007 and 2011 and was what Murua calls “*The Gara factor*”. Likewise, the editorial attitude of *El Mundo* has historically had its ups and downs. Although it has always been against the theory of Basque sovereignty, it was curious to see how, during the ETA ceasefire of 1998-1999, this newspaper classified, on at least a couple of occasions, the Pacto de Estella-Lizarrá (declaration in favour of the Basque citizens' right to decide) as a “peace proposal” (Idoia and Ramirez de la Piscina, 2002: 80).

[17] ETA kidnapped Miguel Ángel Blanco on 10th July 1997 once again demanding the removal to nearer prisons of prisoners from the organisation, which were then (as now) dispersed throughout jails all over Spain and France. It gave the Government a 48-hour ultimatum. When that time elapsed, the hostage (a 29-year-old town councillor) was executed with two shots to the back of the head.

[18] The agreement was signed on the 12th September 1998 by all the nationalist parties in addition to the left-wing coalition IU/EB Izquierda Unida / Ezker Batua. The aim was to put an end to the Basque political conflict through lines of dialogue without exclusions. On the 2nd October of the same year, political and social agents of the French Basque Country joined the agreement in the town of Saint-Jean-Pied-de-Port / Donibane-Garazi. From then on, it became known as the *Lizarrá-Garazi Agreement*.

[19] It must be pointed out that the aforementioned closure of *Egin* had taken place previously, in July 1998, producing great social and political tension together with a deterioration in the relationships among the Basque Media.

[20] What didn't happen in 2001 did take place in 2009. At that time, the independentist left was banned and could not stand in the elections. In 2009, the PSE-EE and the PP won 25 and 13 seats respectively. The sum total gave them an absolute majority, more than those obtained by Juan José Ibarretxe (30) despite him being once again the most voted candidate. The coalition between PP and PSOE brought the Socialist candidate, Patxi López, to the presidency of the Basque Government.

[21] This theory supports various principles (Idoiaga and Ramirez de la Piscina, 2002: 143): *Terrorists cannot have a positive image, the usual journalistic principles cannot be applied to terrorism, and the ideology which sustains the terrorist phenomenon must be destroyed*. In 1999, the Ministry of Internal Affairs' communications advisor, Cayetano González, publicly transmitted his satisfaction with the press attitude towards the ETA phenomenon.

[22] The International Conference took place with the presence of international personalities from the area of politics and peacemaking, such as Kofi Annan (former UN General Secretary), Bertie Ahern (former Prime Minister of the Republic of Ireland), Gro Harlem Brundtland (former Norwegian Prime Minister), Pierre Joxe (French former Minister of Internal Affairs and Defence), Gerry Adams (leader of Irish Sinn Féin) and Jonathan Powell (advisor to Tony Blair). The International Peace Conference concluded with a declaration that urged ETA to permanently end its violent activity and pressed the Spanish and French governments to introduce measures directed at putting an end to the conflict.

[23] “Spain’s News Media Are Squeezed by Government and Debt” in *The New York Times*, 05.11.2015.

[24] Jabier Salutregi was sentenced to seven and a half years in prison by the Audiencia Nacional for being a supposed “member of ETA”. He was released on the 29th October 2015, at that time the only director of a European newspaper being held in prison.

[25] Said declarations appeared in a report published in *El País* on the 5th May 2015 entitled: “The Basque press has exercised some self-criticism concerning its attitude during the ETA years of lead”. Its author: Luis Rodríguez Aizpeolea.

[26] Former ETA leader who returned from exile, disobeying the orders of the organisation. She was assassinated on the 10th September 1986 in her home town of Ordizia by the organisation itself.

[27] A reference to the Security Division “Brunete” of the Spanish Army.

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