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ETA kills a former Spanish labour party councillor on the eve of the elections

Last Friday, less than 48 hours before opening the polls ETA shot dead a Spanish Labour Party member in the Basque town of Arrasate/Mondragon. Isaias Carrasco had been a local councillor until 2003 but didn't get re-elected in 2007. He had recently decided not use bodyguards.

Friday's killing has been ETA's first operation of this kind in the Basque Country since 2003. 5 years ago in the same way, ETA killed a Labour Party councillor in Orio. In the last couple of months ETA has also blown up two Spanish Labour Party offices in the Basque Country.

Last week ETA called Basques to boycott and abstain at the Spanish general elections. The armed organisation also warned of a new period of repression from the Spanish government which has already and will continue after the elections.

Pro-Spanish political parties called citizens to vote in mass after the ETA's attack. Hundreds of people took part in demonstrations against the attack and some tensions rose when the Spanish

right-wing Popular Party politicians came to show support.

In a statement released a few hours after the killing, Batasuna, the banned pro-independence party said that this death shows the crude political and armed conflict in the Basque Country. Batasuna said that this action shows that a resolution to the conflict needs to be a priority for all political organisations.

Batasuna emphasized the need to look at the causes of the conflict. It also highlighted that Batasuna has already made real and meaningful proposal to resolve the conflict. Batasuna also regretted that some others keep trying to deviate the focus of the issue.

Finally Batasuna reaffirmed their commitment to continue working for a situation where all rights of all Basque citizens will be respected.

ELECTIONS IN THE BASQUE COUNTRY

On election day, despite no political representation, the pro-independence movement manages to keep its strength and say stop to the state of exception imposed by the Spanish state.

- The victory of abstention from Basque pro independence voters,
- The victory of the Spanish labour party in the autonomous community of the Basque Country,
- And the failure of the Basque Nationalist party to maintain its seats are the key results of last weekend's elections.

A call for an active abstention from the part of the Basque pro-independence movement gave excellent results at the weekend.

All Basque pro-independence parties were banned from standing in last weekend's elections in the South of the Basque Country.

With no party to vote to, the pro-independence movement called on people for an active abstention which had excellent results.

About 2,5 million people had an opportunity to vote in last Sunday's general elections in the South of the Basque Country.

The 540,000 votes gained by the Spanish labour party and the 185,000 votes retained by the pro-independence movement, have made these two sectors the winners of the Southern Basque elections.

There were also losers. In a historic way, the Basque Nationalist Party has lost 25% of its vote which is 120,000 votes less, making the PNV the second strongest party after the Spanish Labour Party in the Basque Country. And the smaller parties have also been squeezed out.

As to the pro-independence movement, it has retained its strength against all odds. By refusing to cast their vote Basque citizens have said stop to the state of exception imposed of the Basque country and yes to a democratic solution of the political conflict. It can be said that there is a strong core of around 200,000 votes in the south of the Basque Country for the left pro-independence movement.

Despite the end of the ceasefire and the negotiation process last year, the increase of repression against the pro-independence movement and an anti abstention call from most political parties, the pro-independence movement has managed to keep its strength.

Reaction of pro-independence movement.

Marian Beitialarrangoitia, pro-independence candidate, who was prevented from standing in the election, said that the high percentage of abstention shows that these elections have not been normal elections. She went on to describe these elections as the most anti-democratic ones in the last while.

Election day was also marked by the killing of a former Labour Party Councilor by ETA on Friday. Political analysts would argue that the killing actually helped the Spanish Labour Party's vote out in the Basque Country.

Election day was also marked by protests, rallies and sabotages.

Although the media tried very hard to broadcast a normal election day, the reality was very different. Pickets, sabotages and different types of actions to protest against the state of exception imposed on the Basque Country were the reality.

The police presence was also significant in all protests and rallies. Basque citizens were threatened, attacked and over a dozens people were arrested. 225 Basques were also identified by the police in protests and rallies and 50 people may be charged with obstructing elections.

Protests and rallies were also attacked by the police and people were injured.

Hundreds of sabotages also took place throughout the Basque Country. Motorways closed, polling stations attacked, voting papers missing, boxes destroyed and many other protest actions were organized to prevent and protest against this anti democratic elections.

And in the North of the Basque Country, the pro independence movement has increased its vote in a spectacular way.

The local and municipal elections in the North of the Basque Country have been very positive for the pro-independence movement who increased his vote in a 41% making it up to an overall of 15% of the votes.

In a coalition of different Basque pro-independence parties, Euskal Herria Bai contested the elections in the North of the Basque Country.

The French authorities have not banned the pro-independence parties in the North of the Basque

country. This has allowed Batasuna alongside other Basque parties to stand on elections.

The pro independence parties under the Euskal Herria Bai ticket will therefore have an opportunity to be present in the second round of the elections this coming weekend.

Spanish Police attack marches organised for International Women's Day.

Last Saturday was International Women's Day and as every year demonstrations were called in the Basque Country. Thousands took to the street in lots of cities and towns across the Basque Country.

In the capital, Irunea/Pamplona, the demonstration was banned by authorities. It was therefore replaced by a popular dinner. At the end of the dinner 3,000 people gathered in a parade with music and street animation. It was then when the Spanish police appeared and charged brutally against women, men and children.

One woman had to be taken to hospital and a 15 year-old also got his nose broken.

The pro-independence movement denounced the hypocrisy of the authorities. While they allowed protests against ETA's killing they attacked peaceful parades in favour of women's rights.

The two young Basques arrested by the Basque Spanish police last week are released without charges.

Last week we informed you of the case of two young Basques who were arrested by the Basque-Spanish police. They were portrayed by the police authorities and the media as some of "the most wanted terrorists".

They were released without charges a few days after their arrest.

The two Basque youths were actually waiting for a date to present themselves at the Spanish Special Court in Madrid. The Court actually refused to hear them on 3 occasions. This when the media and the police criminalization started. The case shows once again the vicious work of the police and the press against Basques.

The anti-repression group Askatasuna denounced that these detentions came after the young Gorka Lupianez was brutally tortured last December.

-Three relatives of a Basque political prisoner had a **road accident** on their way to a visit in a prison in Madrid. The three passengers were taken to hospital. Thousands of friends and relatives travel hundreds of miles every weekend to see their loved ones. 730 Basque political prisoners are scattered in more than 100 jails across France and Spain.

-Once again last week, around 50 towns and cities in the Basque Country saw **vigils and picket lines** in support of the Basque political prisoners. The largest were in Gasteiz/Vitoria and (523 people), Irunea/Pamplona (310 people), Donostia/San Sebastian (230) and Hernani (200). These

are weekly gatherings and have been organised for more than 20 years.

The Association of European lawyers denounce the situation of Basque political prisoners.

More than 300 European lawyers met recently in the Italian city of Pisa to discuss the current situation in prisons throughout Europe, prisoners rights and alternatives to the current jail system.

The meeting was organised by the Association of Democratic European Democratic Lawyers and consisted of many different workshops and debates. The current situation in the Basque Country was brought to the attention of participants by many lawyers.

The President of the Committee for the Prevention of Torture of the Council of Europe asked the Spanish government to abolish the so called anti-terrorist legislation.

A member of the French Layers Union also denounced the situation of the Basque prisoners in the French and Spanish prisons.

A lawyer of the Catalan Association of Human Rights remembered the cases of the Basque political prisoner Inaki De Juana and many others. Inaki who has served over twenty years in prison saw his sentence extended by 12 more years for writing an opinion piece in a newspaper.

The Catalan lawyer highlighted the fact that the Spanish government is making up and opening new cases against Basque prisoners in order to prevent their release and to keep them in jail for life.

At the end of the Congress the president of the Association of European Democratic Lawyers denounced the ambiguity of the term terrorism. He also recalled the show trial case 18/98 against Basque political and social activists as an example of the misleading use of the term terrorism and its terrible consequences.

Last December, 42 well known pro-independence people were sentenced to up to 22 years in prison for their public and peaceful political work.