

ETA: A Critical Look at the Evolution of Spain's #1 Terrorist Threat.

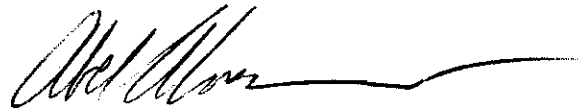
An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

By

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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Abel Alves', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

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Although this thesis is by far not my best work, it is my last for Ball State University, and I prefer to see it as a sign of how the learning process does not end here - it does (and will) go on.

Abstract:

As a result of events that occurred hundreds of years ago, affecting a people that have long prided themselves in being culturally impenetrable, nationalism has morphed into a seemingly unstoppable guerrilla-style force that has terrorized mainland Spain for over fifty years – ETA (Euskadi Ta Askatasuna).

Summary

ETA: A Critical Look at the Evolution of Spain's #1 Terrorist Threat.

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Section 1

Basque nationalism in Spain, from its inception to 1959

In order to comprehend the basis for Basque nationalism, one must have a workable knowledge of the history of the Basque country, or “el País Vasco”. (PNV website) Because the southern Basques had supported the Carlistsⁱ in order to preserve their “Fueros,” the Basque country was punished, ultimately by the abolishment of the beloved “Fueros.” This blatant disregard for the Basque medieval laws was seen by many as not only an insult, but an attack on the Basque way of life and its priorities, highlighted by the following phrase in Euskera, or Basque: “Jangoikoa et Legizarra” or “Dios y Fueros” in Spanish. (Payne 15)

Following the end of the Carlist wars, in a manner comparable to the way Spanish conquistadores attempted to impose their culture on the indigenous peoples of Latin America, the Spanish government descended upon the Basque country with new structures, rules, and regulations. (PNV website)

(PNV website) About half of the 2.1 million residents of the three provinces that make up the autonomous Basque region speak fluent Basque or understand some of the language. Basque nationalists include other areas with smaller Basque-speaking minorities, the Spanish province of Navarre, and three departments in southwest France in their vision of a Basque homeland.” (Payne 109)

In English, this title translates to the Basque Nationalist Party, and its founder, Sabino de Arana, was among the inciters of early Basque nationalism in Bilbao, Basque Country.

Since the death of Arana in the 1920s, other organizations like the ELA/SOV, a Basque nationalist workers' union, and the “batzokis” (centers where members could organize events) helped drive the PNV's ideology into perpetuity and allow the Party to be the foremost political presence in Basque Country. However, it must be noted that, unlike in earlier times when the Basques went virtually unaffected by the problems occurring elsewhere in Spain, the power struggle between those of the Second Spanish Republic and the impending Franco

regime directly and violently impacted the PNV and the Basque people. (PNV website)

As time progressed, the PNV restructured itself to reflect the changes that were occurring in and around the Basque Country. After the civil war that left Spain in shambles came to an end on 1939, this now-underground Basque nationalism prompted more and more Basques to join the PNV, with the intention to fight against the new Francoist regime. (PNV website)

ETA, 1959 to present

ETA, or Euzkadi ta Askatasuna, translates to “Basque Fatherland and Liberty” in English. Vaguely Marxist in nature, ETA had its origin in a nationalist group, EKIN, formed as a result of the moderate actions of the Partido Nacionalista Vasco (PNV, Basque Nationalist Party) during the Franco regime. EKIN was founded by young activists from Bizkaia and Gipuzkako, in País Vasco, (Basque Country), who felt that the PNV was not acting energetically enough to advance the Basque cause. ETA’s present demands include self-determination for the Basque homeland, or Euskadi, the integration of the Navarre region into said homeland, and the shifting of currently incarcerated ETA activists so that they may serve their sentences in the Basque region. ETA’s political arm, Herri Batasuna, has been instrumental in battling the general perception of ETA being a one-sided terrorist group, but their use of fear tactics and conspicuous methods of violence has led to the banning of Herri Batasuna’s activity, as well as the banning of several Basque-language newspapers that sympathize with ETA’s cause. ETA’s widespread infamy was useful in securing international cooperation with the Spanish government in arresting ETA operatives and dismantling future terrorist attacks. Their present-day influence is not what it was

decades ago, but they have left a past littered with their victims, and now the Spanish people call for peace.

Author's commentary:

“When in Rome, do as the Romans do.” Dissect this phrase and you may find that one meaning could be drawn from it - the individual must delve into the culture and interests of the majority before claiming to have fully experienced the host culture. In my study abroad experience in Segovia, Spain, I experienced first-hand both the sentiments and the historical background that contribute to the phenomenon of Spanish regional nationalism, as well as viewed first-hand the effects of long-term terrorist activity. Therefore, it seemed only fitting that I tackle in this project the ever-changing topic of Basque nationalism, its evolution, the formation of the Basque terrorist group ETA and its activity in the past fifty years, as well as the topic of public support for ETA and the current state of affairs this year, 2004.

Basque nationalism in Spain, from its inception to 1959

In order to comprehend the basis for Basque nationalism, one must have a workable knowledge of the history of the Basque country, or "el País Vasco". "The Basque people, formed as such since [the end of the last glacial epoch, approximately ten-thousand years ago], with its own culture and language, Euskera or Basque, possibly the oldest in Europe, has managed to survive, maintaining its own identity, while seeing other cultures, kingdoms, and empires that placed it in danger appear and disappear over the millennia. (e.g.: Celts, Iberians, Romans, Visigoths, and Arabs.)" This closed society, as discussed above, was able to conserve their own apolitical existence until "a common law system had been established in written form by the end of Middle Ages, into their respective jurisdictions, known as "Fueros".ⁱ These were their own constitutions, a set of basic rules that preserved their sovereignty and governed their co-existence."

Such was the individuality of the Basque Fueros that the mere act of being born in Basque Country guaranteed noble status and women had legal status separate from men. Paying taxes to the Spanish crown was not an obligation for Basque-folk and their local government had a more democratic twist, in the form of public elections, than the reigning authoritarian government in existence in Spain. Overall, there was a marked progressiveness and distinctiveness in the way the Basque Country governed itself, which lent itself to the upcoming nationalism. (PNV website) (Sullivan 4)

Other factors that prompted the impending separatist/nationalist attitudes on the part of the Basque people were entwined with the political developments that occurred over the course of nineteenth century. After the Carlist warsⁱⁱ culminated in the late 1800s, those who supported the Carlists, who had lost, were punished. Because the southern Basques had supported the Carlistsⁱⁱⁱ in order to preserve their "Fueros," the Basque country was punished, ultimately by the abolishment of the beloved "Fueros." This blatant disregard for the Basque medieval laws was seen by many as not only an insult, but an attack on the Basque way of life and its priorities, highlighted by the following phrase in Euskera, or Basque: "Jangoikoa et Legizarra" or "Dios y Fueros" in Spanish. In other words, God and laws. This indicates the root of the resentment of the rest of the Spanish nation. (Payne 15)

Following the end of the Carlist wars, in a manner comparable to the way Spanish conquistadores attempted to impose their culture on the indigenous peoples of Latin America, the Spanish government descended upon the Basque country with new structures, rules, and regulations. For example, there was a new imposed suffrage based on the ownership of property or tax assessment, which limited the numbers that attained suffrage under the old system. Furthermore, in regards to youth, many were forced to do military service with the Spanish armed forces, without being able to understand the language of their commanders. For those even younger children still in school, Spanish teachers

with no knowledge of their students took over their education and took to punishing the children for their own lack of comprehension. (PNV website)

These changes and many others were complemented by a wave of industrialization that seized the Basque Country, as well as Catalonia, Madrid, and other select areas of Spain. This industrialization, which dealt primarily with mining and steel production, brought about an upsurge in employment opportunities that attracted other Spanish nationals to the Basque Country from as far south as Andalucía. This wave of “immigrants” was not welcomed by many of the Basques and fed into the anti-Spanish sentiment that was already growing in that part of the Iberian Peninsula. (PNV website) (Ministry of Interior website)

The following quote by George Bernard Shaw best embodies the socio-political situation facing Spain and the Basque Country at this time: “A healthy nation is unaware of its nationality, like a healthy man is unaware of his bones. But if you fracture the nationality of a nation, it will not think of anything else except repairing it. It will not listen to any reformer, nor philosopher, nor preacher, until they grant it its demand for nationality. It will not attend to any human business, however essential it might be, except that of its unification and freedom...”

To summarize, “The Basques are a linguistically and culturally distinct Christian group that has lived since the Stone Age in the mountainous region that

straddles the border between modern-day Spain and France. The Basques have never had their own independent state, but they have enjoyed varying degrees of autonomy over the centuries under Spanish and French rule. About half of the 2.1 million residents of the three provinces that make up the autonomous Basque region speak fluent Basque or understand some of the language. Basque nationalists include other areas with smaller Basque-speaking minorities, the Spanish province of Navarre, and three departments in southwest France in their vision of a Basque homeland.” (www.terrorismanswers.com)

Acclaimed scholar and professor Stanley Payne wrote, “El País Vasco jamás había sido una parte <<normal>> o <<regular>> de España, como había sido Castilla, León, o La Mancha.” (This roughly translates to, ‘The Basque Country has never been a normal or ordinary part of Spain in the same way that Castille, Leon, or La Mancha have.’) (Payne 109)

In the political realm, where such nationalism has been most prevalent since its inception in the nineteenth century, there was a central development in 1895, with the founding of “EAJ-PNV (Euzko Alderdi Jeltzalea)”, or “El Partido Nacionalista Vasco”. In English, this title translates to the Basque Nationalist Party, and its founder, Sabino de Arana, was among the inciters of early Basque nationalism in Bilbao, Basque Country.

The Basque Nationalist Party, or the PNV, as it will be referred to from now on, served as a way of merging the various approaches to Basque

nationalism that were emerging during the turn of the century, particularly those more extremist viewpoints that threatened to alienate the nationalist cause from the moderates in the region. Following its inception in 1895, founder Sabino de Arana was able to cultivate enough popular support for the Basque Nationalist Party to extend its presence to all Basque territories. According to the PNV website, Arana was "influenced by the formulation of the principle of nationalities in Italy and by the creation of the German State," and Stanley Payne cites that "Sabino de Arana y Goiri, el creador de la ideología nacionalista vasca, y el fundador del movimiento, fue al tiempo producto del tradicionalismo y de la industrialización." (Arana, the creator of the Basque nationalist ideology and founder of the movement, was at the same time a product of both traditionalism and industrialization.) (Payne 111)

Over time, the PNV grew to encompass not only political problems but also social and cultural concerns. Since the death of Arana in the 1920s, other organizations like the ELA/SOV, a Basque nationalist workers' union, and the "batzokis" (centers where members could organize events) helped drive the PNV's ideology into perpetuity and allow the Party to be the foremost political presence in Basque Country. However, it must be noted that, unlike in earlier times when the Basques went virtually unaffected by the problems occurring elsewhere in Spain, the power struggle between those of the Second Spanish Republic and the impending Franco regime directly and violently impacted the PNV and the Basque people. One well-known example is the bombing of

Gernika, a small town in Basque Country, by Nazi airplanes who were allied with Franco; it was an event that became a tragic symbol of the effects of war, hence Picasso's famous painting, "Guernica". The PNV website goes on to cite "persecution and indiscriminate slaughter" as some of the offense committed by the rebels (those who sided with General Franco) during the 1930s.

The authors of the site (who remain nameless) go on to mention that the resistance to the Francoists came in the form of a leader named José Antonio Aguirre, who incited an extremist form of nationalism in the Basques, particularly those who had been exiled during the civil war. "A new period of uncertainty opened up before the PNV. It had previously lived through 'clandestinity' and persecution, but now the greater part of the nationality organization structure had to be set up outside Euskadi [Basque land]."

(PNV website)

As time progressed, the PNV restructured itself to reflect the changes that were occurring in and around the Basque Country. The PNV site quotes the so-called "Resistance" as the "incipient, clandestine network for the PNV in the Iberian Peninsula" arranged by Basque nationalists during this uncertain time.

After the civil war that left Spain in shambles came to an end on 1939, this now-underground Basque nationalism prompted more and more Basques to join the PNV, with the intention to fight against the new Francoist regime. Some

were more fanatic than others, and those extremists within the ranks soon manifested themselves in the form of "E.T.A.". (PNV website)

ETA

ETA, or Euzkadi ta Askatasuna, translates to “Basque Fatherland and Liberty” in English. Organized in 1959, this group of radical separatists was founded with the aim of creating an independent homeland in Spain's Basque region and uses terrorism as a primary method of working towards that goal. Vaguely Marxist in nature, ETA had its origin in a nationalist group, EKIN, formed as a result of the moderate actions of the Partido Nacionalista Vasco (PNV, Basque Nationalist Party) during the Franco regime. EKIN was founded by young activists from Bizkaia and Gipuzkao, in País Vasco, or Basque Country, who felt that the PNV was not acting energetically enough to advance the Basque cause. (International Policy Institute of Counter-Terrorism website)

According to the ICT, ETA's present demands include self-determination for the Basque homeland, or Euskadi, the integration of the Navarre region into said homeland, and the shifting of currently incarcerated ETA activists so that they may serve their sentences in the Basque region. These demands have yet to be met, and the Spanish government, lead by the conservative Popular Party, headed until the recent 2004 election by Prime Minister José María Aznar, has taken a hard-line approach to dealing with ETA. In other words: no dialogue, no negotiation.

ETA's attacks, which are largely bombings, affect both military and civilian targets, but the focus has largely been individuals or places that they associate with the Spanish government. Their violent campaign began with an attempt to

derail a train carrying Civil War veterans in 1961. This plan was foiled by Spanish law enforcement, but the message was clear – ETA was willing to resort to violence, and this was reinforced by their first murder. The victim was Meliton Manzanas, a secret police chief in San Sebastian. This would be the first of many deaths attributed to ETA activity, and the victims would be both Basque and non-Basque.

In regards to the Spanish government's position on ETA's criminal status, the Ministry of the Interior's website quotes the highest Spanish court's statement on ETA:

“ETA has transformed selective murder, indiscriminate acts, kidnapping, and extortion into a daily means of imposing its ideological postulates through the threat of terror thus created. Therefore, approving subliminally, but meaningfully – the presence of arms in the political fight and the televised consecration of these as an ‘argument for support’ of the ‘peace proposal’ is considered a crime.”

ETA's targets of preference are mostly national and regional officials and government buildings in Spain, but these preferences have evolved. They are responsible for the death of Franco's successor as well as numerous Basque officials, and have even targeted former Prime Minister José Aznar and King Juan Carlos. However, they have developed a taste for less strategic targets. In more recent times, civilians, both young and old, have been killed in ETA attacks. One of the worst attacks occurred in an HIPERCOR shopping center in

Barcelona on June 19, 1987. Over 20 people were killed and more than 40 were injured. (Ministry of Interior website)

Over the past fifty years, ETA has spearheaded the underground separatist movement, with the help of similar-minded groups, and Xavier Mas De Xaxas, US correspondent for the Spanish newspaper La Vanguardia, notes that there isn't as much support for ETA as one might think. When asked, "...how many people support [ETA]?" he answered, "Well, you really couldn't tell. But if you look at the results of the last elections [in 2000], HB and the radical nationalist movement, the one who is supporting the violence in order to gain independence, got around 200,000 votes...there are 3 million Basques, around 2 million voting, you do the math." (Mann 1)

These figures illustrate that ETA evidently does not boast of full acceptance in the Basque Region, and these sentiments are echoed even among ETA's ranks. A 1997 article in the New Statesman contains a brief conversation between the interviewer and a young couple, both of whom were members of ETA. When asked about the July 1997 murder of local Basque politician Miguel Angel Blanco, the female, Amaia, said, "I'm scared." Later in the piece, an older Basque male was quoted to have said, "I've always voted HB (Herri Batasuna), but we can't watch television pictures of all Spain in the streets night after night and remain immune. It's time to end the violence." (Lamb 1,2)

One general perception of ETA is that it is a one-sided terrorist group. According to ISLAMIC ONLINE – SPAIN contributor Nawal Al-Sibaa, it is actually a multi-faceted terrorist organization that has three major sections: the legal political institution, the executive military institution, and the technical institution. Each sector has its own purpose and responsibilities, and particularly the legal political institution plays a prominent role in the unfortunate success of ETA attacks thus far.

Within the legal political aspect of ETA is the concept that ETA is represented in by a recognized political coalition founded in 1978 – Herri Batasuna^{iv}. Many leaders of the Basque region accuse the HB radical left party of being the political wing of the armed separatists. The HB managed to win seats in the Spanish Parliament in the past, and there is a lingering presence of ETA within the Spanish government. Some of ETA's operatives have succeeded in taking advantage of the great amount of publicity to advance ETA's objectives. (Ministry of the Interior website)

Party Board member Arkotxa denied this allegation and made the following comment: "I am born somehow in this war. My sons and daughters are still in the same war, and I have two grandchildren, (and) I don't want them to be involved in this war." However, Arkotxa, when questions about what the major issues were in this 'war', criticized the government's handling of the situation by

saying, "If you don't go to the roots of the problem, this problem is never going to be solved. And there's going to be more killings."(Goodman 3)

This odd juxtaposition of sentiments reflects the conflict felt by some active separatists. It is important to note, however, that most Basques, even the nationalists, are against terrorism in all its forms. (Mann 2)

While HB representatives sought to advance the ideals of Basque separatism, in many cases, they neither opposed nor praised ETA's terrorist activity. Furthermore, although Herri Batasuna was banned by judicial order of the Spanish government, they've had the capacity to reincarnate into differently-named organizations, such as Batasuna and Euskal Herritarrok. Herri Batasuna was able to play on the sympathies of the Basque people and this pseudo-neutrality offered the organization a certain amount of freedom within the public arena. (Al-Sibaa 3)

Additionally, which the national government ordered HB offices in the Basque region closed, its message is still broadcast through Basque-language newspapers like Euskaldunon Egunkaria. An article in the New Statesman discusses the not-exactly-legal anti-ETA campaign launched by the government, and cites that the aforementioned newspaper has been shut down by the federal government and its owner arrested and abused while in custody. "Martxelo Otamendi, current editor of Egunkaria, told a press conference upon his release: "The treatment was merciless, brutal." (Yusuf 1) This activity demonstrates the

lengths to which the Spanish government is willing to go in order to eliminate ETA.

The other facets of ETA consist of the technical and executive organization, which mainly deal with the formation of military-style strategy, raising funds for ETA activities (through illegal activities like bank robbery and kidnappings for ransom), and covering ETA-operatives' tracks by providing fake documents. Although this strategic planning has worked for some time now, both national and international efforts to foil these plans have taken a toll on ETA's success rate. For example, the cooperation between Spain and France, long an ETA refuge, has helped in the detainment of several operatives. Furthermore, there are the judicial rulings of the Spanish Parliament that limit the activity of Herri Batasuna-like groups.

Since September 11th, ETA has been "quieter than usual," but experts say that this is not because of any moral epiphany that ETA has had, but rather, because of increased pressure from Spanish law enforcement. However, the Spanish government has not always played by the rules. A secret organization called GAL was formed by the senior security men in the government. It carries out terrorist acts against ETA and although there have been outward attempts at cleansing governments of such corruption in the 1990's, there is still a certain population that believes in fighting 'fire with fire.' (Al-Sibaa 4)

The problem of separatism is not unique to Spain, as can be seen in ETA's similarity to groups like the IRA (Irish Republican Army) in Ireland. The Basques have taken their cues from the Irish experience, and outwardly, even their organizational structure seems the same – ETA had Herri Batasuna, IRA has/had Sinn Fein, their political arm. Also, when the IRA declared a cease-fire in 1994, ETA followed suit in 1998, although their truce did not hold; ETA broke the cease-fire only fourteen months later. It's interesting to note the comment of Spanish historian Anthony Gooch, of the London School of Economics: "The Basques take what they like of the Irish experience...and they leave what [they] don't like, so they're very selective...so you can't say Basques have followed the Sinn Fein model or ETA has followed the IRA model." (Daniels 1)

Historian J.L Sullivan points out that although "both [IRA and ETA] grew out of a deeply Catholic culture in societies deeply divided into rival communities...the greatest difference between ETA and the IRA arises from the nature of the ethnic groups upon which they are based." He sites that ETA draws its support from a much more privileged community than does that IRA. (Sullivan 278)

When Sinn Fein reached a turning point in terms of negotiations with the British government, it seemed as though the IRA was getting what they wanted, but ETA wasn't. It is important to understand that while British Prime Minister Tony Blair's strategy was related to more open-dialogue, Spanish Former Prime Minister José Aznar's prerogative was to limit any dialogue with the Basque government, and open dialogue with ETA was not an option. His hard-line

approach was a slap in the face to many Basque separatists, and many took this to be a sign of the irreconcilability of the conflict. "The IRA had been their (ETA's) big brother in terms of ideology... now they feel really isolated."

(Richburg 2)

Such comparisons are inevitable, given that ETA activity has gained international attention. ETA's activity, which over that past forty-six years has yielded over eight-hundred deaths and thousands of surviving victims, has garnered world-wide criticism, and resulted in the branding of ETA as a criminal organization by several international political entities, including the United Nations and the European Union. This global notoriety was long in coming, but useful in securing international cooperation with the Spanish government in arresting ETA operatives and dismantling future terrorist attacks. For example, the Council on Foreign Relations cites that following the September 11 attacks in New York City, the United States and the European Union froze ETA assets. However, some ETA rebels are known to have trained in terrorist havens such as Algeria, Libya, Lebanon, and Nicaragua. Cuba and several South American countries have also been known to harbor ETA fugitives.

Ever since the bombings that took place on March 11, 2004 in Madrid, which Spaniards have dubbed "11-M", ETA's current state of affairs remains in turmoil. Already, thanks in part to the Spanish government's anti-terrorist activities, ETA has been weakened, and the immediate reaction was to blame

them for the 11-M happenings, although later evidence showed that the act was perpetrated by Islamic extremists, namely Al-Qaeda. (Goodspeed 1, 3)

According to an article by the Europa Press written exactly one month after the Madrid bombings, ETA was very much affected by said events, and Josu Erkoreka of the PNV remarked that 'this is an excellent moment for ETA to lay down their arms.' He went on to say, however, that the Basque government would not enter in any anti-terrorist pact with the Spanish government because it went against Basque nationalist interests. (Europa Press 1)

By the same token, it was reported by BBC News on April 11, 2004 that the banned political party Batasuna^v wanted to start talks with the new Spanish government, led by José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, of PSOE (Socialist Party). Batasuna leader said to Deia newspaper, "Their [Zapatero's government] latest statements, taking a clear position towards the new government of Spain to sit down and talk, point in that direction."

Note: While there were rumors of a possible truce by ETA, there is no hard evidence as of yet to support said rumors.

To conclude, ETA is an organization that has proved capable of violence, but seems to fervently believe to be an almost sacred cause – to free the Basque Country from the control of Spain. Through extensive research and after talking to numerous Spaniards in a series of informal conversations, I have found that about ninety percent of Spaniards want an end to the violence that ETA has

brought upon the nation for the past five decades. While some may agree with the nationalism behind the terrorism, one of the most prevalent reasons for opposing the secession of the Basque Country is simply the domino-effect theory – once one section of Spain breaks away, others will follow. (Please note that separatist movements also exist within Spain, in Catalonia, Galicia, and Canarias.)

While I do not feel myself to be sufficiently knowledgeable on Spanish life and politics to judge whether the Basque Country should be independent, I do agree with the majority of Spaniards that ETA is not the way to do it. The fact that ETA has resorted to violence in order to get the Spanish government's attention does, however, demonstrate the fallibility of the past government's no-dialogue strategy. If in fact ETA wants to follow the model of the IRA, and if in fact the Spanish government wants at least the possibility of yielding a similar result to that of Sinn Fein's negotiations with the British government, then it is imperative that the lines of communication remain open. This is not to say that there ought to be immediate concessions on the part of the government either, but I feel that to cut off communication with the Basque government, be they nationalist or not, is an error that has perpetuated the terrorism activities for some time. With the new administration that has come into power in Spain this year, it will be interesting to see how the government's strategy will change towards an already weakened ETA and a harried PNV.

ⁱ Such laws were imposed upon each reigning monarch, even to the point of making the new king or queen swear to respect the existing Fueros upon assuming power.

ⁱⁱ The Carlist Wars occurred between the Carlists, those who wanted the heir to the Spanish throne to be a descendent of "Los Habsburgos", the Hapsburgs, and those who wanted the new dynasty "Los Borbones", the Bourbons, to inherit the throne.

ⁱⁱⁱ The Carlists were later renamed the "Traditionalists" for their penchant for a traditional, authoritarian government structure and adherence to "los Fueros", the Catholic religion, and an agrarian existence.

^{iv} In English, Herri Batasuna translates to "People Unity."

^v Correspondents say that Batasuna has renamed itself the Patriotic Socialists.

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