



The Truce That Won't Come

The Spain Herald

November 24, 2005

Moncloa, the Spanish Prime Minister's official residence, continues to send out messages that a truce with ETA is imminent. The government delegation in the Basque Country has been waiting since summer for a fax that never seems to arrive. Mr. Lopez, Secretary General for the Basque Socialist Party (PSE), further humiliates himself proposing a shotgun wedding with Batasuna to "humanize" the conflict and recognizing the right to self-determination for which ETA has murdered close to a thousand innocent men and women.

Despite the gestures, dealings and embarrassment, the problem for Rodríguez Zapatero is not just that ETA refuses to announce the eagerly awaited truce, but that it is intensifying its terrorist actions. While it has yet to kill again, ETA keeps placing more and more bombs. The number of attacks classified as street terrorism has skyrocketed in the Basque Country over the past few months.

The result from this paradox –a government that talks about peace and a terrorist group that won't stop planting bombs, could not be more eloquent: the weakening of the State is the strengthening of ETA. The police, judicial, political

and social pressure applied to ETA under Jose Maria Aznar's leadership had driven the terrorists to their weakest moment. Both its political wing and its jailed members were starting to think terrorist activity was becoming more of a drag than a help to reaching its strategic objectives.

The panorama changed radically when the new socialist government decided to open a dialogue with the terrorists. The killers have now proven wrong those who doubted their criminal methods' effectiveness or legitimacy. The government's willingness to make concessions to terrorists tells them that bombs are the best path to achieving their goals

Rodríguez Zapatero is the only person responsible for ETA's current state of cohesion, optimism and strength. Under these circumstances, ETA might very well decide to send the government a cadaver, not a truce, if it doesn't surrender to the terrorists' demands. Then we'll just have to clench our teeth and hope.

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