



## **ETA: a win-win game** **There's no such thing as a trustworthy terrorist**

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The Basque terrorist organization ETA declared on Wednesday March 22nd, a "permanent cease-fire". Not more bombs, no more killings if some conditions are fulfilled by the Spanish government. Could you believe it? Well, it depends how much confidence you have in a terrorist. This is not the first time the Basque terrorists declare a cease-fire only to see them, some time later, shooting in the back again. Actually, the "permanent cease-fire" is a conditional one. ETA is exchanging peace for independence, and it will depend how eager the current socialist government in Madrid is willing to accept that that the "cease-fire" becomes really permanent.

In a war, victory comes only after one of the parties realizes that its goals are out of reach and gives up. Reading ETA

communiqué is quite obvious that the terrorists are not giving up. On the contrary. They reaffirm their goal of becoming a State independent from Spain. So, if their political objective is still being pursued, why the "permanent cease fire"? And why now?

The answer is blatantly simple: there is a declaration now because ETA believes it can obtain the same or better results leaving the weapons silenced for the time being. ETA has just left its violence aside but the terrorists did not say a word about giving up their weapons. There is no process of disarmament on sight because ETA leaders think is the government in Madrid the one to start making concessions, not them. The weapons will remain in their hands either as a tool during the talks, or, if there

is no final agreement, to be able to resume their criminal activities.

And ETA believes the time for a political process has come due to the new attitude found in the current prime minister, José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero. Zapatero has two qualities in the eyes of terrorism: first, he is an appeaser, as demonstrated by running from Iraq as the March-11 bombers demanded. As such he will be more open to accommodation and negotiated solutions than to fight ; secondly, he has given clear signals that he is willing to move from the Spain we know since 1492 (when the moors were expelled and the nation unified) to a Spain with a different shape. Moving actually from being one nation to a confederation of nations.

The ETA declaration arrives only hours after the socialist dominated Congress approved a new legal framework for Catalonia, declaring this region "a nation", and giving to it most of the competences of what we know as a nation state, including national symbols, a separated judiciary system, and foreign representation among other things. Even if the socialist government was desperate to get the cease-fire declared for pure tactical reasons, and has been announcing it since January last year time after time, ETA has waited till the very moment Catalonia has been granted the right to secede whenever Barcelona's regional government wants to.

So, this declaration is not neutral and doesn't come because ETA feels is losing, but because it sees that Zapatero's government is very weak, politically and psychologically, it is ideologically sensi-

tive to nationalistic forces in Spain, and thus it can be engaged in talks where to extract the right of secession for the Basque Country. ETA is not a nihilist organization that seeks terror for its own sake. It has a political agenda, and its violent activities are always politically motivated.

The socialist government tends to think that we are in a situation similar to Northern Ireland. But this is as false as a risky analogy. There are no Gerry Adams in the Basque Country. The leaders of HB, the political arm of ETA, the socialists are talking to have no real influence in ETA decisions. On the contrary, ETA governs their destinies. They are mere puppets. Unlike the IRA, ETA is not convinced that the terrorist violence is not an effective mean, so there is no rejection of it, there is no willingness to reject their past, and there is no willingness whatsoever to ask for pardon and forgiveness.

ETA is not even looking for some legitimacy since the current government, dying to get the cease fire, has been willing to accept as a normal political party HB simply because their leaders use it a different brand name, circumvallating, and eroding the legal system in Spain.

The socialist government wanted the declaration by ETA because their members believe that presenting to the Spaniards a process of pacification will give them a clear electoral advantage, breaking the stalemate that today all polls show. Zapatero is right in one thing, I must accept. The Spanish people has suffered more than 30 years of ETA killings, with 1000 dead and thousands of

victims and is looking for an end to violence, once and for all. But he is wrong when he thinks that because of all this suffering Spaniards are willing to pay any price to stop ETA. Dismembering Spain, what ETA is asking for, is a price too high.

So, if the current cease fire becomes permanent will be due to major concessions by the Madrid Government and the growing feeling among ETA members and supporters that Basque independence is irreversible and not far away. ETA will win and Spain will loose. But if the architecture set up by ETA fails, and the political talks did not produce an agreement on that, ETA will go back to its traditional policy of using

car-bombs and other means of intimidation. So for the terrorists is a win-win game.

Talking to terrorists entails too much to loose and very little, if anything, to gain. Zapatero, the accidental prime minister of Spain, has given up the only thing is important when dealing with terror: that the terrorists must feel they are losing, that they have no chance to obtain credit from their actions and their threats. He is willing to sell Spain for a temporary peace, when he should be striving for totally disbanding ETA. There is no terror when the terrorist organization doesn't exist any more. Not when the terrorists decide to say so.