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AMBASSADE D'IRLANDE

The Secretary,
Department of Foreign Affairs,
DUBLIN

11th April 1984

SPAIN - SOME BACKGROUND NOTES

I enclose copies of background notes on Spanish politics and foreign policy, etc., prepared, essentially, for Ambassador's visit to Dublin to attend the Heads of Mission Conference. They may, however, be useful as general background material on Spain in the light of the likely increasing number of visits from/to Spain at official level in advance of, and during, our Presidency.

The notes attached are:

- (1) Spain - Note on the General Political Situation.
- (2) Spanish Foreign Policy.
- (3) Terrorism in Spain.
- (4) Summary Note on the Spanish Economy.
- (5) Spain and the EEC.

Pádraic Collins
Chargé d'Affaires a.i.

c.c. Mr. C. Murphy, Brussels.
Mr. E. Hutchinson, Dublin
Mr. J. Morahan, "
Anglo Irish Section (re. note no. 3).

TERRORISM IN SPAIN

1. The facts: The main terrorist organisation in Spain is ETA (Euskadi ta Azkatasuna - a Free Basque Homeland). It began terrorist activities in 1962, though its significant presence, in terrorist terms, dates from 1968. Since then, nearly 600 people have been killed by the organisation (37 of these killed "in error," according to ETA); 50 people have been kidnapped (4 of them later executed); it numbers among its victims Admiral Luis Carrero Blanco, President of the Spanish Government (1973) and 35 other military officers, including some of the most senior military officers in Spain and some members of the King's guard. In February 1984, the Socialist Senator, Enrique Casas, head of his party's electoral list in one of the Basque provinces, was shot just before the election for the Autonomous Basque Parliament and Government. The political party which supports ETA, Herri Batasuna, a party, of course, operative in the Basque Country only, obtained 160,000 votes in the autonomous election. In the general election of October 1982, 2 members of Herri Batasuna were elected to the national Congress of Deputies, but do not take their seats. Herri Batasuna has 11 members in the Basque Parliament* and it controls local government in some Basque Town Halls.

2. It will be clear from the above that ETA seeks Basque independence and has electoral support in the Basque Country, now an autonomous region governed by the nationalist/conservative PNV (Basque Nationalist Party). ETA was, ironically and tragically, a breakaway group from the PNV in the 1950's. Without going into Basque history, it should be noted that Basque nationalism, in its propagandist and cultural form, dates back to the last century and was, after a brief spell of autonomy during the Second Republic (1933-36), brutally repressed by the Franco regime. Today, the autonomous government is dedicated to the revival of Basque culture and the promotion of the Basque language (compulsorily). The Church, and especially the Jesuits, have been a formidable influence in Basque nationalism though to a decreasing extent. Many priests are members of ETA, though it is self-described as "leftist and a-confessional". There are few major Basque leaders, from the President of the autonomous Government downwards, who have not spent some years in a seminary. The Church, after some years of ambiguity, is moving away from ETA, though the hierarchy's position is not always reflected at the village level. The priests, as in many other parts of Spain, were, and are, the sons of small farmers/peasants and were by instinct inclined to take the "people's side", especially during the Francoist repression in the Basque Country. Consequently, in a village where ETA support is strong, the priest is likely to be an active part of that support. It is worth bearing this background in mind in attempting to understand the durability of ETA and its nucleus of support.

3. ETA became a factor in Spanish politics almost unnoticed. It began activities in Franco's Spain and was seen by non-Basques, who were, and are, notoriously ignorant of the history and traditions of the Basque Country, as a response to the repression of the dictatorial regime. Many democrats, who had seen ETA begin as a cultural/educational organisation from the Universities, saw it as a somewhat heroic struggle against the regime, a struggle which appeared even more heroic in the 1950's/early 60's when it became clear that the much expected "assistance" from the European democracies against the Franco regime was not forthcoming. The outbreak of terrorism in the 1960's, while not exclusively a Spanish phenomenon, was seen as "excusable" or "inevitable" in Spain since it was then obvious, despite the economic boom of tourism, etc., that the dictatorship was incapable of "evolving"

*Total number of seats is 75.

towards granting even minimal political liberties. ETA's exquisite care in confining its killings to the security forces, that is, the forces of repression, in the view of many, led to it being viewed as a kind of political "Robin Hood". This is over-simplification, but may be helpful in setting the background. Spanish democrats who, if they did not support it, had not condemned ETA, had always understood that once democracy had arrived ETA would become inactive. Violence would not be justified then in their eyes. But this was never realistic. Since 1964 ETA had been saying that its fight was against "Spanish" domination and had stated in its magazine Zutik (September 1964) that "Antifrancoism fights against Franco as if there were no Spanish oppression of the Basque Country. We fight against Spanish oppression of the Basque Country as if there were no Franco!"

4. ETA has its origins in a group founded by university students in 1952, for the study of Basque culture and politics. This group (EKIN) fused in 1956 with the youth wing of the conservative Basque Nationalist Party (PNV - at present in power in the autonomous government) and in 1959 a further breakaway group formed ETA. It was still an information/cultural group and not totally out of contact with the Basque Nationalist Party, though it sought to move away from the "confessionalism" of the latter. In 1961 it was describing itself as "a patriotic aconfessional movement". By late 1962, it had held its 1st assembly and had taken to describing itself as "a revolutionary aconfessional and anti-racist movement". At that stage too it has decided to adopt guerrilla tactics. In 1963/64 it broke away from the Basque Nationalist Party ("a bourgeois party") and is then describing itself as "anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist". ETA also in 1964/5 sets out its right to armed resistance on behalf of "a people whose territory is occupied by another foreign people". Between the late 1960's and 1974, various purges take place, mostly of those opposed to armed struggle (known as "españolistas" in ETA jargon). The pattern of ETA terrorism begins to be established, that is, action against the security forces primarily, bank robberies and subsequent flight to the French Basque Country which offers a safe sanctuary, probably due to a combination of French political refugee tradition and the aura of "fighters against dictatorship" which still surrounded ETA. There have been various purges since then, but the two main "currents" in ETA are ETA Militar (ETA m) dedicated exclusively to military action, and ETA político-militar (ETA p-m) dedicated to guerrilla activity and "mass action". Finally, in 1977, the electoral coalition Herri Batasuna, essentially a support group for ETA, was formed.

5. Today ETA terrorism is, together with the economy and military reform, the most serious issue facing the Spanish government. Its demands for independence and attacks on the armed forces have the capacity to rally the ultra-right and consequently to create the environment and motivation for a coup. If it were not for terrorism, one could rule out a coup as almost unthinkable. It is doubly dangerous to a Socialist government which, as Felipe Gonzalez has said, is always vulnerable to accusations of inability to maintain "public order" - the Spanish right is expert at fomenting "disorder" when such suits it. Terrorism is also the single most important irritant in the always prickly French-Spanish relations. In so far as the perception of the man in the street is concerned, the French refusal to extradite wanted ETA terrorists is way above its attitude on the EEC in the order of French "sins" against Spain. The existence of ETA is also a factor moving the Basque Nationalist Party away from the middle ground towards more "independentist" positions. For the moment, the move away from the middle of the road confines itself to demands for greater autonomy, a problem with a Socialist government which is notoriously "centralist" and conscious of the reputation of leftist governments in Spain (among right-wingers) of being unsound on national unity and patriotism. In brief, ETA terrorism is a serious destabilising factor in Spanish democracy.

6. The government view the problem as a security problem or, more accurately, one that can be resolved simply by the concession of extradition by France. In recent months an anti-ETA group has been engaged in assassinations of ETA members in the South of France. The group has been suspected of being formed by ex-Spanish policemen or current Spanish policemen, according to some Basque spokesmen. It is just as likely to be a group of organised criminals and/or ex-policemen financed by Basque businessmen who are subjected to the ever present threat of kidnapping and the so-called Revolutionary Tax (impuesto revolucionario), protection money collected by ETA from many Basque businessmen.

7. In the face of its impotence against ETA terrorism, the government seeks to pressure and/or make deals with France on extradition/curtailment of the rights of Basque refugees in France. It has had some success since the coming to power of the Socialist government in Spain. ETA terrorists in France have been deported and/or moved to the North of France. It seems to make little difference - every such major move against ETA is replied to by a spectacular assassination of a senior military figure or politician. The latest government move is to seek to "internationalise" the problem e.g. by seeking a meeting of Heads of Government of the Member States of the Council of Europe. Among many Basque experts and politicians there is talk of a political solution, though what that might be, given ETA's demand for self-determination, is difficult to say. In a country with a less trigger-happy military the matter might be put to a referendum in the Basque Country. A referendum on independence for the Basque Country would easily secure a "no" vote on the latest poll data - the percentage of people favouring independence has fallen from 26% in 1979 to 9% in 1983. However, 35% chose not to answer the question and 15% consider ETA to be "idealists". There is, it would appear, a fundamental political problem in the Basque Country which is unlikely to go away.

8. There is from time to time talk of contacts between the IRA and ETA and it seems clear that there has been some contact. Many IRA members have attended meetings, parades in the Basque country. The Spanish government is more and more inclined to look to London for advice on policing and containment and, we believe, on the information available to the Embassy, is encouraged to do so. The consequence of this understandable and legitimate Spanish action is to see Northern Ireland as the UK's Basque problem and to be out of sympathy, in so far as that is of any great importance, with our analysis and policy in relation to Northern Ireland.


Pádraic Collins
First Secretary

April 1984