

Basque Patriotic Left: 50 Years of Political and Terrorist Acronyms

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Abstract: In the last two decades, the Basque Patriotic Left has been a monolithic movement with relatively few fissures that has followed the line marked by ETA in an orthodox way. But it has not always been that way. During Franco's regime and in the first years of democracy, the Basque Patriotic Left was formed by a plurality of organizations that had a common project but differed in strategies, terms and nuances, and in the importance given to the contents of the common project. In this work, we will examine the various political and armed organizations that have formed the Basque Patriotic Left from its foundation to the present day.

Keywords: ETA, Basque patriotic left, Basque country, ethnic terrorism, Spain

Resumen: En las últimas dos décadas la izquierda abertzale ha sido un movimiento prácticamente monolítico sin apenas fisuras que ha seguido de manera ortodoxa la línea que marcaba ETA. Pero no siempre fue así. Durante el franquismo, y hasta bien entrada la democracia, la izquierda abertzale mantuvo en su seno una pluralidad de organizaciones que si bien tenían un proyecto común diferían en estrategias, plazos, y matices y en la importancia que se diera a los contenidos del proyecto común. En este trabajo se pretende hacer un recorrido por las diferentes organizaciones políticas y armadas que han constituido la izquierda abertzale desde su fundación hasta nuestros días

Palabras clave: ETA, izquierda abertzale, País Vasco, terrorismo étnico, España

Introduction: Terminological Clarifications

If we take a look at the Basque political map, the self-designated MNLV (*Movimiento de Liberación Nacional Vasco*, Basque National Liberation Movement) or *Izquierda Abertzale* (Basque Patriotic Left) is the political space where the greatest number of acronyms has emerged. Since the founding of ETA (*Euskadi ta Askatasuna*, Basque Homeland and Freedom) in 1959, until 2014, the year in which this article is written, there have been more than 10 armed organizations and more than 20 political acronyms that could be ascribed to this space. Some have lasted a very short time, while others have lasted for decades and still exist today. Faced with the tremendous number of acronyms that have emerged over these past 50 years, the purpose of this work is basically to construct a sort of 'map' of this political space in

which each one of these acronyms are clearly identified, attempting to briefly describe their origin, their development and their end. To do so, we have prepared a figure that can be referred to at the end of this article (see appendix), a figure for which this article aims to provide an explanation.

Analysts have been using different names to refer to this political space, the three most commonly used names being: radical Basque nationalism, Basque Patriotic Left and MLNV.¹ And although in the majority of cases, the three terms may have been equivalent, they do not exactly mean the same thing. Radical Basque nationalism is the broadest term and refers to an independence-seeking ultra-nationalism that does not necessarily have to do with ETA or even with the left (Fernández 2007: 817-818). Clear examples of this would be splits from the PNV (*Partido Nacionalista Vasco*, Basque Nationalist Party) such as *Aberrri* (Homeland) or *Jagi-Jagi* (Standing) during the first three decades of the 20th century. Even the first nationalism could fit within this description (De la Granja 1995: 17), but it is not necessary to go back to the past. EA (*Eusko Alkartasuna*, Basque Solidarity) has claimed the term for itself on several occasions and some sectors of the current PNV could even be considered as radical nationalists. Although it can be claimed that these other radical nationalisms only share the fact that their goals (independence) but not their means (the use of violence), are shared with ETA, it still remains true that some of these sectors related to the PNV (the ruptures that occurred before the Spanish civil war or EGI, *Eusko Gastedi*, Basque Youth, its youth, under Francoism) had a certain relationship with the use of arms (Juaristi 1997: 283-284).

The term 'Basque Patriotic Left' is more specific and refers to the nationalist project that arises in the 1950s at the left of the PNV. Initially, the only organization of the Basque Patriotic Left is ETA, but over the course of time—especially during the transition—it would start to diversify, at some times becoming a real medley of acronyms. What all of the organizations of the Basque Patriotic Left have in common is that their origins trace back to ETA, to one of its branches or to an organization that was associated or is associated with the terrorist organization. Although they share the same goals (independence and socialism), not all of the Basque Patriotic Left has always shared the same methods nor has it had cohesion at all times. The differences have essentially been based on two major issues (Llera et al. 1993: 113): The first of these issues would be the use of violence: either because, although there may be agreement on the legitimacy of using violence to achieve political objectives, they did not

1. Although analysts have been taking the three as equivalents, we must point out the argument by Casquete (2010), dismissing the name of Basque Patriotic Left as it is a political space in which the niches of vote and political discourse have very little to do with the traditional left. Casquete explicitly advocates the term radical Basque nationalism.

agree on the way of going about it or the priorities set for the use of such violence; or because the concept of violence itself is what separated them. The second issue would be the discussion on whether to tip the balance of the fight towards the left or towards *abertzalismo* (patriotism).

Finally, the most restrictive term is that of MLNV, which refers to the sociopolitical network that came about during the transition towards ETA-military (ETAm) and still exists to this present day. The MLNV is a complex movement that groups one or more political forces, labor unions and groups associated with various social issues (environmental, feminist, students, youth, pro-amnesty groups, etc.) whose common denominator is ETA's patriotic and socialist project, which is at the heart of the movement (Casquete 2006: 51, Mata 1993: 105). That is, in addition to the objectives shared with the rest of the Basque Patriotic Left, the common denominator of the organizations of the MLNV has been the implicit or explicit support of the violence used by ETA (ETAm initially, and later simply ETA). According to Llera (1992), it is a secret army that leads a social movement.² The MLNV has been organizing itself in concentric circles, depending on the degree of involvement of its individual members (Aulestia 1998: 137-141). Thus, the very core of the movement would be militancy in ETA, whereas the outer circle—those less involved—would consist of sympathizers who could be mobilized only in major events. The sum of all of the circles, from the most to the least militant, has formed a parallel society in the Basque Country, with its own rituals, means of communication, socialization and leisure networks, and even with a distinct aesthetic (Aulestia 1998: 137-141, Casquete 2006: 51).

In this paper, we generally use the term Basque Patriotic Left, given that the wide period covered by the subject of our study does not allow us to use the other two terms. As we mentioned previously, radical nationalism is a term that also encompasses other realities and it would not be entirely accurate for us to use MLNV to refer to the reality of the world of ETA during the Franco dictatorship, given that it is a political reality that appears in transition.³

Once these clarifications have been made, in the following sections of this work, we will take a closer look at the different political and armed organizations that have existed within the Basque Patriotic Left since the foundation of ETA in 1959 up to the present day. We will see how a small group basically consisting of students who come from a similar sociopolitical class (nationalist middle class) gradually became

2. For an in-depth study of the MLNV from different perspectives, see Aulestia (1998), Bullain (2011), Casquete (2009), Llera et al. (1993), Mata (1993), Mansvelt Beck (2005), Mees (2003), Muro (2008), or Sullivan (1988).

3. Although it is true that since the beginning ETA defined itself as a Basque movement for national liberation, it is only as of the transition when this aspect becomes reality, given that during the dictatorship ETA (and the organizations that stem from it) was a clandestine group.

a more and more heterogeneous organization, with a mosaic of currents that first coexist in its core and then separate into numerous divisions. The decisive moment of this heterogeneity of tendencies is the transition, a point after which monolithism gradually becomes more apparent. The only exception was the appearance of Aralar in the 2000s but this little heterogeneity finished in 2011, when the two branches of the Basque Patriotic Left joined again for the Spanish elections of that year.

From *Ekin* to ETA: First Assemblies and Formation of Currents

In 1952, a group of young nationalists founded *Ekin* (meaning ‘to do’ or ‘to make’), a study group whose aim was to rediscover nationalism, based on an analysis of the Basque history, culture and language (Garmendia 2000: 93-94). These youth, the majority of whom were students, did not intend to break away from traditional nationalism; not only that, they showed support for the PNV and the Basque Government from the very outset, which would lead to the first contacts and subsequent fusion with EGI in 1956 (Jáuregui 2000: 181). However, the PNV’s attempt to control the new movement led to EGI’s rupture and pull-out in 1958. One year later, the members of *Ekin* and some militants of EGI who had not obeyed PNV’s order founded ETA. According to Jáuregui (2000: 184), the rupture was strategic not ideological; it was simply a means of pressure so that nationalism changed its approach, an approach that these youth considered to be too passive considering the Franco dictatorship. For Jáuregui (2000: 171), essentially there are two factors that influenced the birth of ETA: the Arana’s vision of Euskadi as an occupied country and Francoism, which in the opinion of those young nationalists made this occupation real. ETA was founded on these premises, an ETA which, from its origins, would be characterized by two recurring ideas, until today, in the most basic ideology of the organization; that is, the independence of Euskadi as the ultimate objective and resorting to the exercise of violent activism (Aranzadi 1994: 209).

Since its foundation, ETA has had a branch in charge of military actions, which was very moderate at that time (Letamendia 1975: 298), but whose mere existence is what distinguished ETA from the PNV. It was a nationalism with armed ambitions, defined in its first assembly (1962) as ‘a revolutionary Basque movement for national liberation, created in the patriotic resistance’ (Jáuregui 2000: 206), in addition to declaring Basque as the only official language in the future and showing dislike towards any type of dictatorship, whether fascist or communist (Sullivan 1988: 47-48). Although it did not declare itself to be socialist, and for Jáuregui (2000: 207) its revolutionary nature only referred to the national liberation and not to radical changes in the social or economic structure, it is true that ETA clamored at the ‘principles’ approved at this assembly for a certain social change, advocating ‘a deep trans-

formation of the status of property' or 'socialization of the resources in industries in the basic sectors of the economy' (Bruni 1987: 42). In sum, with all of the nuances that were to come about 50 years later, it was proposed to continue with the legacy of Sabino Arana, something that, according to them, the PNV had rejected (Jáuregui 2000: 206), but with a leftist slant that would continue to grow larger over time.

Before this first assembly was even held, ETA had already carried out its first violent attack. It was against a train full of Franco supporters and which, despite its failed attempt, resulted in a major wave of repression and the first exiles to France (Zirakzadeh 2002: 73-74). It is precisely in this country where these youth felt the echoes of a left that searched for new symbols of identity in third-worldism and its colonial revolutions. In effect, the colonial revolutions determined the nature of the nationalist movements that emerged during that time, which were much more sensitive to the Marxist theories (Conversi 1993: 253). These ideas, absorbed by the first exiles, helped them to reconcile their original nationalism with the recent Marxist influence of the average anti-Francoist youth with whom they had been in contact in Spain (Unzueta 1994: 246). Anti-colonialism and Marxism, in addition to nationalism, will be the key concepts around which the tendencies that coexist within the core of ETA would revolve during the initial years of its existence, given that in addition to the old founding guard that was exclusively nationalist and pro-European (ethnolinguists, ethnonationalists or culturalists),⁴ there were those who aimed to engage in a national and a social revolution, with an emphasis on the former (anti-colonialists or third-worldists) and those that wanted to engage in a social revolution, either exclusively or combining it with national liberation but with the latter always subordinate to the interests of the working class (leftists or pro-workers).

These tendencies that we have just described would be the three main ones, but ETA was even more plural. In the early 1960s, members of ETA included social democrats, communists, Maoists, Catholics, admirers of the guerrillas in the third world, unionists, pacifists inspired by Gandhi, members of cooperatives and defenders of Basque culture (Zirakzadeh 2002: 72). According to Jáuregui, 'during this period, it is very difficult to determine what the official doctrine of ETA is... given the number of diverging positions and even opposing positions that exist within its core' (Jáuregui 2000: 216). In any case, the preeminence of the leftist factor (whether in the pro-workers or in the third-worldist tendency) results in ETA embracing the progressive tendency of the nationalisms of that time period (Conversi 1993: 253-257).

4. This tendency was 'not much a supporter of liberation wars, rather it was in favor of the creation of a Basque state framed within the People's Europe and sustained in the Basque ethnic group' (Jáuregui 2000: 236).

In the early 1960s, at the heat of the resurgence of the workers' strikes in 1962, ETA discovered the importance of the working class, outlining the idea of associating its struggle with that of nationalism (Jáuregui 2000: 215-216). On the other hand, a leftist current was formed from the very beginning, viewed suspiciously by the rest of the organization as it was considered to be more leftist than nationalist. The leftists were separated from the second assembly (1963), in which the old guard from *Ekin* was predominant, and in which the principles of the revolutionary war were made official (Letamendia 1975: 305-306). At this assembly, a workers' front was created for the first time, as a consequence of the greater concern for the social issue (Garmendia 2000: 109-111). It is at this second assembly that for the first time ETA defines itself as being socialist (Bruni 1987: 44).

At the third assembly (1964), it went more in-depth on the third-worldist line and definitively broke with the PNV, whose nationalism was defined as 'bourgeois' in contrast with the workers' nationalism of ETA (Garmendia 1980: 133-139). It is as of the third assembly when the placement of Basque flags and those painted were substituted by what Garmendia calls 'micro-terrorism'; that is, accusations by 'snitches' and the subsequent marginalization and boycott of their businesses, the battering of falangist teachers or the collections of money among well-to-do nationalists (Garmendia 2000: 113-114).

At the fourth assembly (1965), two postulates were approved. The first, 'Theoretical grounds of the revolutionary war' marked the official beginning of action-repression-action. The second, 'Letter to the intellectuals', was the last attempt at ideological homogenization of the various tendencies that existed within the core of ETA before their definitive rupture. Of the three main tendencies, only two, the pro-workers line and the third-worldist, appeared with real intensity (and in balance), given that the third, the ethnolinguistic tendency, was diluted into the second, although there continued to be a certain tension between Europeanism and third-worldism. With this postulate, the national and social problems were carefully examined and considered to be two sides of the same coin (Jáuregui 2000: 228-232).

After the fourth assembly, the leadership of ETA began to veer towards one side of the coin: the social issue. Thus, the *Zutik!* (a periodic publication that became the official agency of ETA) at that time began to focus increasingly more on social and employment-related issues, on criticizing bourgeois nationalism and on defending the unity of the whole working class in connection with the Workers' Commissions, and all of this from a Spanish global perspective and with less and less advocacy for the revolutionary war (Jáuregui 2000: 235-238). This, combined with actions such as the intention to present candidates at the union elections of 1966, led the majority of the organization to rebel against the leadership, accusing it of being 'pro-Spanish',

some from the perspective of anti-Marxism (culturalists) and others from the revolutionary Marxist perspective (third-worldists), who considered that, in addition to being pro-Spanish, the Marxism of the political wing was in fact reactionary (Garmendia 1980a: 201-215). Both groups allied and founded the publication *Branka* (Prow) in order to mitigate the influence of *Zutik!*, an organ controlled by the leadership (Jáuregui 2000: 239-240).

From the Fifth Assembly to Transition: The First Divisions

Up until that point, the three tendencies had remained within ETA, although not without large disputes, but the celebration of the fifth assembly ended up separating them. In the first part of the assembly (1966), the union of culturalists and third-worldists managed to expel those considered to be 'pro-Spanish' from ETA. This expulsion led to the first division, given that the group in favor of the leadership founded ETA-Berri (New ETA), an organization that would continue its activities, focused on working-class activism, without resorting to armed struggle.⁵ In 1969, it adopted the name *Komunistak* (Communists). The evolution of the group led it towards the Maoist version of Marxism-Leninism from its initial Trotskyism (Leta-mendia 1975: 350), and in 1971, after merging with various small groups in the rest of Spain, it founded the MCE (Communist Movement of Spain), which in Euskadi would take on the name of EMK (*Euskadiko Mugimendu Komunista*, Communist Movement of Euskadi) in 1976 (Bruni 1987: 81-84).

The predominant tendency in this first part of the fifth assembly was the third-worldist tendency, which would be confirmed in the second part of the assembly (1967). No new ideological changes were introduced, returning to the resolutions of the fourth assembly, with the binomial of national-social liberation as objectives to be achieved through armed struggle, although with a clear predominance of the former (Garmendia 1980b: 13). Despite this objective, the ethnolinguistic tendency abandoned the organization for two primary reasons. The first reason would be ETA's intention to initiate a large-scale armed campaign that would set the principle of action-repression-action into motion, which is something that the culturalists did not approve (they were in favor of a more political struggle). The second reason would have to do with delving into Marxism as a source of inspiration. Thus, four of the founders of ETA wrote a letter justifying their abandonment of the organization, alleging that ETA 'had ceased to be a movement of diverse tendencies, and

5. The issue of violence was another one of the reasons for its expulsion. In addition to being referred to as *españolistas* (pro-Spain), another adjective used to describe them was *liquidacionistas* (liquidationists) due to their view of abandoning armed struggle (Sullivan 1988: 65-66).

had instead progressively become a party with a clearly Marxist-Leninist tendency' (Garmendia 2000: 130). After they left ETA, they joined together in connection with the publication *Branka*, which was going to become a pressure group with a certain influence in the development of the political activity related to ETA, trying to push it towards nationalism and distancing it from the leftist leaning (Fernández 2009: 98).

The beginning of armed activism occurred in 1968, with the deaths of two members of the security forces at the hands of ETA, which led to an unprecedented wave of repression that practically left the organization without any operating capacity and left its leadership dismantled. The new leadership, without opposing armed struggle, proposed the need to describe the workers' front as being vanguard, comparing the importance of the priority national liberation with the socialist struggle at that time and affirming the need to build a Leninist political organization. This leadership policy by ETA was contested by two groups in exile and the third-worldist line from within. The first is that of the so-called Red Cells, Marxist study groups that had formed in exile. The Red Cells and the leadership both shared the idea of transforming ETA into the party of the proletariat, but had disputes due to being against armed struggle and the idea of a national front with other nationalist forces (Jáuregui 2000: 255-257). For the Red Cells, the members of leadership were a few little bourgeois without any Marxist or working-class ideology (Bruni 1987: 99-103). On the other hand, opposite the leadership there was the group of so-called 'milis' (militarists) who were also in exile. Just nationalists and not very much in favor of theoretical discourse, they considered armed activity to be the driving force of the Basque resistance. The 'milis', who did not recognize the leadership of ETA and who were already taking matters into their own hands, accused the leadership of having abandoned the armed struggle for the liberation of Euskadi and to succumb to being 'pro-Spanish' (Bruni 1987: 104). The leadership received similar criticism from the third-worldist line, which continued to maintain the theses of the fifth assembly. For Garmendia, this division would be summarized into two large tendencies: those who fundamentally advocated the direct action (milis and third-worldists), and those who advocated political action in groups and who viewed activism as a major obstacle for mobilization (leadership and Red Cells) (Garmendia 1980: 46). Generally speaking, these positions reflected the deep contradiction between nationalism and socialism.

Therefore, in the summer of 1970, when the sixth assembly was held, we can perceive four tendencies in the core of ETA: Red Cells, leadership, third-worldists and 'milis'. In addition to these tendencies, we must add the group *Branka*, which was ideologically aligned with the latter two and would act as a pressure group for the defense of patriotic purism; and secondly, the Association Anai-Artea (Among Brothers), dedicated to assisting refugees and with views similar to those of *Branka*

(Jáuregui 2000: 255-258). During the assembly, the Red Cells left ETA due to discrepancies with the leadership and joined together afterwards in relation to the theoretical publication *Saioak*, in order to evolve towards anti-nationalist positions. The assembly went on without them, and at this assembly independence was abandoned as the ultimate goal and it was replaced with self-determination; the path towards defining a state framework for the revolution was opened, and there was discussion about armed struggle being something to examine very critically (Garmendia 2000: 152).

Neither the ‘milis’ nor the third-worldists attended the sixth assembly (they just sent one representative), and a few days later five representatives of both tendencies published a letter in which they denied the legitimacy of the assembly that was just recently held and called for a political line different from the one that has been carried out (pro-Spanish and liquidationist) (Garmendia 1980b: 98-102). This led to another rupture between those who defended the legitimacy of the sixth assembly and those sectors that did not recognize the legitimacy of it and who considered themselves to be the heirs of the resolutions adopted during the fifth assembly. The division was confirmed in the first months of 1971, calling the first ETA-VI and the second ETA-V (Jáuregui 2000: 258).

Although ETA-VI was majority at the time of the rupture, its subsequent evolution condemned it to being marginalized. Thus, ETA-VI abandoned nationalism a few months after the assembly was held, and thereafter did not try to sustain itself on the native workers and *patriots* alone, but on the entire working class of Euskadi. However, ETA’s social base continued to be nationalist, which explains the continual transfer of militants from ETA-VI to ETA-V, which was already taking place since the summer of 1971 (Garmendia 1980: 109). The other element that explains the failure of ETA-VI is the progressive abandonment of the armed struggle, whereas those of ETA-V—starting with the abduction of the German consul in San Sebastián—began increasing their activism, which would give them great prestige (Garmendia 2000: 158-163). The leadership of ETA-VI, which was outside of Spain, was moving closer towards Trotskyism, which led to a new division given that the reaction of the militants in Spain was contrary to that evolution, not so much due to disagreement with the ideology itself but because, according to Garmendia, they were not willing to discuss either permanent revolution or in stages, nor Maoism or Trotskyism. Therefore, two-second parts of the VI assembly were held in 1972: on the one hand, the minority or ‘*minos*’, majority in the organization but minority in the BT (Small Assembly), hence the name. The ‘*minos*’ dissolved within a year and their militants went on to fill up the lines of the PCE (Communist Party of Spain) and of various parties on the far left. On the other hand, the majority or ‘*mayos*’ (minorities really) held their

second part of the sixth assembly a few months later (at the end of 1972) and decided, along with the recently created LCR (Revolutionary Communist League), to shape the Spanish section of the Fourth International (Garmendia 1980b: 137-140). Thus, the fusion would culminate at the end of 1973, creating LCR-ETA (VI), which maintained this name until 1976, and as of that year it would only be called LRC in the rest of Spain, whereas in Euskadi and Navarra it would take on the name of LKI (*Liga Komunista Iraultzailea*, Revolutionary Communist League) (Rincón 1985: 15).

The increasing disrepute of ETA-VI, which was devoted to theoretical discourse, whereas ETA-V supported armed activism, led the latter to make away with the organization's acronym to be called just ETA. It is during this time that a qualitative leap took place. If up until that point ETA had been a political organization (with arms, but basically political), from that point forward it would be a strictly military organization. Between 1971 and 1973, there was a major wave of activism, possibly due to this 'militarization' of ETA and to the affluence of new militants: on the one hand, those disenchanted with the ultra-leftist and opposed to the armed struggle line of ETA-VI; and on the other hand, those coming from EGI-*Batasuna*, a sector of the youth of the PNV, inclined in large part towards the postulates of ETA that were integrated into ETA in 1972. This fusion was the most important, given that both organizations provided what the other was lacking: those of EGI, militants, and those of ETA, arms (Garmendia 2000: 164-166). This new ETA, self-defined as 'socialist, revolutionary, Basque and for national liberation that fights for the reunification of north and south Euskadi as one socialist Basque state without classes and independent of the French and Spanish states' (Letamendia 1975: 390), was far from being a unitary organization and had many tendencies within its core, which is why it remained united only until 1974, when it suffered two ruptures.

The first was led by the Workers' Front, because the escalated activism prevented its consolidation and thus undermined its capacity to compete with the union options on the far left (Fernández 2007: 819). The tensions between the Workers' Front and the Military Front broke out after the violent attack against the head of government, Carrero Blanco, given that the former criticized the attack, considering it to be the biggest mistake in the history of ETA, and decided to begin operating on its own (Garmendia 1980: 178). However, the rupture was not confirmed until May 1974, when the Workers' Front abandoned the organization to form a communist Basque party: LAIA (*Langile Abertzale Iraultzaileen Alderdia*, Patriotic Revolutionary Worker's Party). LAIA proposed giving priority to the mass struggle in benefit of the interests of the Basque working class, allowing the armed struggle to move into the background. Initially, there was limited funding for the party, although it was not denied at the theoretical level (Bruni 1987: 207). The new party, however,

did not have a unitary strategy and was divided between a Marxist and a libertarian tendency that advocated a system for the assembly of workers as an alternative to the labor unions (Sullivan 1988: 246).

The second rupture was more significant, its main innovation being the fact that it was not the result of an ideological debate⁶ but a discrepancy about the organizational model. The discussion focused on how to structure the organization in view of the new times that were approaching, the underlying problem being the same as it always has been: how to reconcile the armed struggle with the mass struggle (Jáuregui 2000: 263). Thus, at the end of 1974, ETA split into two.

The leadership of ETA concluded that the structuring in fronts led to the division of the organization into tight compartments and led to the predominance of the military front. Thus, they wanted to convert ETA into a political-military organization, capable of confronting military action and of mobilizing and organizing the masses. And although there was to be a separation on the basis of the activities related with the armed struggle and the mass struggle, these would be coordinated at an area level, which meant that both struggles were controlled from the same command (Jáuregui 2000: 263). The objective was to unify the decision-making and achieve a unique dynamic in which the political aspects and those derived from armed struggle were not in constant contradiction (Garmendia 1980b: 179). On the other hand, the *bereziak* (special) commands were created for rather full-scale armed operations (Llera et al. 1993: 118). This tendency, majority at that time, would be known as political-military ETA (ETApm).

Facing this scheme, a minority sector linked to the military front believed that Francoism was crumbling and that the organizational and tactical model had to be changed in order to adapt it to the new times. They thought that a political-military model brought about repression and thus made it impossible to create stable organizations of masses, which made it essential to separate both struggles clearly, creating on the one hand organizations of masses that operated in the democratic legality that was approaching, and on the other hand a strictly military organization that operates entirely underground and whose objective was to guarantee the political conquests obtained by the organizations of the masses (Jáuregui 2000: 263-264). This sector would form the minority, at that time, military ETA (ETA_m).

The idea of clear separation of the political and the military sectors had a lot of influence (Fernández 2010a: 74) on the emergence of a new political party in September 1974: EAS (*Euskal Alderdi Sozialista*, Basque Socialist Party), which merged one

6. The concurrence on objectives was vast given that both branches were in favor of an independent, socialist and Basque-speaking Euskadi, and viewed a revolution by the people as the means to achieve these objectives (Llera et al. 1993: 117).

year later with the French Basque group HAS⁷ (*Herriko Alderdi Sozialista*, People's Socialist Party) ending up with EHAS (*Euskal Herriko Alderdi Sozialista*, Socialist Party of the Basque Country), a party that was proposed for operating on both sides of the border and that immediately fell under the influence of ETAm (Fernández 2009: 100). Thus, when the transition towards democracy got underway, we find two terrorist groups in the Basque Patriotic Left (ETApM and ETAm), two political parties (LAIA and EHAS) and another two parties that, although framed within the Spanish far left at that time, MCE and LCR-ETA (VI), came from two ruptures of ETA and would soon lean towards the postulates of the Basque Patriotic Left. With the transition underway, there would be an even greater number of organizations.

Transition and Democratic Consolidation: From the Organizational Explosion to Homogenization

With the onset of the transition process, the Basque Patriotic Left was basically divided into two large blocks, led respectively by ETApM and ETAm. Both shared objectives (independence, socialism) and methods (armed struggle), but as the democratic process moved forward, they moved further away from each other. Whereas the 'military' faction did not change postulates, the political-military faction was progressively scorning both the armed struggle as well as the maximalist objectives, showing itself to be in favor of autonomy and moving closer and closer towards moderate leftist positions. What the two tendencies do have in common, however, is a similar organizational trajectory: from a beginning with a lot of internal plurality with diverse organizations that appear, disappear, merge or integrate into others, to an increasingly greater homogeneity. In the case of ETAm, this tendency would make it to the present date, although in the case of ETApM, it would gradually lose strength due to the constant occurrence of ruptures and veering of militants towards the other tendency.

With respect to ETApM, it celebrated its seventh assembly in September 1976, in which it completely reconsidered its former strategy due to the intense repression suffered. Faced with the impossibility of carrying out a simultaneous activity in the political and military areas, it opted to split the functions with two different organizations for each area (Jáuregui 2000: 265-266). It was, in essence, the same scheme as ETAm but with a substantial difference: the Leninist party was in charge of leading the movement, leaving the armed group as its subordinate rearguard; that is, those who were going to lead the movement were going to be the 'politicians' and not the 'military' (Fernández 2010a: 76). The *bereziak* commands did not accept this

7. The majority of the founders of this party were former members of *Enbata* (violent storm), a nationalist organization of the French Basque Country that had been outlawed a few months prior (Mansvelt Beck 2005: 100-102).

organizational scheme and quickly split in May of the following year, proclaiming themselves to be the only existing ETApM. However, their lone expedition did not last long and in September 1977 they announced their fusion with ETAm, to which it brought a significant volume of militancy as well as a large quantity of arms (Domínguez 1998: 40). The fusion of the two resulted in a powerful organization that would acquire the size necessary in order to tackle political reform (Domínguez 2000: 282).

Therefore, the two terrorist groups would have two distinct notions: that of ETApM would be a rearguard struggle, guaranteeing the popular achievements, whereas that of the ETAm would be a vanguard struggle taking on the State in a war of attrition to force the State to accept its objectives. However, a third strategy soon appeared, that of the Autonomous Anti-Capitalist Commands (CAA). For these, the armed actions had to be the result of the civil war fought between the working-class assembly self-organization and the bourgeoisie that nationally exploits and oppresses the working class (Letamendia 1994a: 124). The date of its foundation is not very clear, but it would be between 1976 and 1978 (date of its first public appearance). For Sullivan (1988: 246), their origin would be in the division of LAIA,⁸ and they gained momentum after the incorporation of a couple dozen *bereziak* militants who were against entrance of their organization into ETAm due to its dirigisme. The Commands shared similar objectives with the two branches of ETA, but what separated them was the fact that, due to their anti-authoritarianism, they rejected the concept of vanguard (whether armed or political) advocated by both organizations (Bruni 1987: 273-276). They disappeared in the mid to end of the 1980s, although the exact date is unknown given that there was no official notification of dissolution. Finally, a fourth strategy would have to be discussed, although this appeared a little afterwards (in 1981) and its importance was far less compared with the other three. Connected with EMK (Mata 1993: 26), the organization *Iraultza* (Revolution) stood out due to the attacks it launched, although without any bloodshed (except one victim whose death was an accident). These normally consisted of bombs against Spanish, North American or French companies, official organizations and factories in conflict, with the organization continuing its activities until 1989 (Letamendia 1994b: 278).

Faced with the announcement of general elections in 1977, the Basque Patriotic Left was divided between those in favor participating and those who were opposed. We have already mentioned that ETApM decided to create a party in order to compete in the incipient democratic system; thus emerged EIA (*Euskal Iraultzarako*

8. LAIA split in mid-1976 due to the signing of the 'KAS Alternative'. The faction LAIA (bai) (LAIA yes) signed it, whereas the faction LAIA (ez) (LAIA no) did not sign it because it considered it to be anti-revolutionary (Fernández 2007: 829). It is from this latter faction (anarchist and against traditional trade unions, that in 1977 would change its name to LAIAK, k of *komunista*) from which the autonomous groups would emerge.

Alderdia, Party for the Basque Revolution) in April 1977. In its presentation, EIA identified itself with pro-independence and Marxism-Leninism, given that ‘in Euskadi, to fight against capitalism is to fight for independence’ (EIA 1977). After a lot of internal debate about what to do with regard to the announcement of elections (Fernández 2007: 831), the pm block decided to participate. Thus, EIA joined forces with the EMK as part of the EE coalition (*Euskadiko Ezkerra* or Basque Left), obtaining a representative in congress and a senator. However, the agreement was short lived given that the EMK accused EIA of making EE hegemonic. On the other hand, the issue of violence also divided both parties. The EMK pressured the EE to publicly condemn violence, and the EIA refused. After the rupture, the EMK (and the MC in Spain) began a tactical pivot that initially meant minimizing criticism of ETA, and meanwhile moving closer toward HB and ETAm. In 1983, the EMK broke on friendly terms with the MC to renew itself as nationalist and to try to become part of HB, which it was unsuccessful in doing (Rincón 1985: 15). An example of moving closer is the joint homage organized by HB and the EMK to Domingo Iturbe, one of the leaders of ETA in the 1980s, after his death (Casquete 2009: 279) or the petition to vote for HB (along with LKI) at the end of the 1980s. Before completely shifting towards HB, however, it would support a failed attempt at creating a new Basque Patriotic Left, which we will discuss later.

On the other hand, within the Basque Patriotic Left, there were another two parties which contested elections, one historic and another newly formed party: ANV (*Acción Nacionalista Vasca*, Basque Nationalist Action) and ESB (*Euskal Sozialista Biltzarrea*, Basque Socialist Assembly). Although the former was framed within the heterodox current of Basque nationalism, it would immediately enter into the orbit of ETAm.⁹ In turn, ESB was founded in 1976 and consists of two groups: a small split from ELA (nationalist labor union) and the group *Branka*, which had split from ETA in 1967 (Fernández 2009: 101). ESB defended an ambiguous socialism, combining it with a xenophobic attitude and with the defense of neo-foralism and ethnonationalism. Both parties failed electorally, obtaining 0.6% and 3.5% of the votes in the Basque Country respectively, after which they shifted towards radicalization, both making themselves more leftist and rejecting an autonomous way that they had reticently supported (Fernández 2010a: 80-85).

Finally, the parties of the Basque Patriotic Left closest to ETAm (LAIA and EHAS) refused to participate in the elections and advocated an abstentionist boycott. However, the percentage of abstention was only one and a half points higher in Euskadi than in the rest of Spain (in Navarra, it was 3 and a half points lower), which

9. For a complete view of the trajectory of ANV, see De la Granja (2008).

proved the electoral failure of these political forces. This failure, combined with the relative success of EE, caused ETAm to reconsider its strategy of not participating in the new democratic transition (Fernández 2007: 840). The first thing to do was to search for a political arm (like EIA with ETAm), and therefore, it took control of the recently created HASI (*Herriko Alderdi Sozialista Iraultzailea*, Socialist Revolutionary Popular Party), which is the result of the fusion of EHAS,¹⁰ ES¹¹ and independents close to ETAm (Fernández 2010a: 76-77, 94-95).

The four political forces that had failed in the 1977 elections decided to join forces in order to compete with the EE at the ballot boxes. In October 1977, the Table of Alsasua was formed as, among other things, the nucleus of a possible unitary voting coalition of the Basque Patriotic Left for the municipal elections. EIA also attended the meeting, although it quickly showed its opposition towards the project that was being outlined, as it was too radical, and it abandoned the table a few months later. The table continued with the other four parties (HASI, LAIA, ESB and ANV), which in April 1978 rebaptized the table as HB (*Herri Batasuna*, People's Unity), to which a series of independents would soon join (some very close to ETAm) as the path to an electoral alliance for the municipal elections. Initially, HB was independent from ETAm (although close), but soon the latter controlled it through HASI and the independents. ETAm did not want institutional participation; on the other hand, ANV, LAIA and ESB were open to that. However, the change of position of ANV left LAIA and ESB isolated, and they abandoned the coalition in 1980, thus making the control of HB by ETAm irreversible (Fernández 2010a: 85-88). ESB disappeared in 1980, whereas LAIA, as we will now see, participated in an attempt to reshape a new space of the Basque Patriotic Left between EE and HB. HASI continued in HB until it became dissolved in 1992, and ANV continued within HB as a party with hardly any militants, resurfacing in 2007 as a convenient acronym for the outlawed Basque Patriotic Left.

Shortly before ETA declared a truce in 1998, HB became EH (*Euskal Herritarrok*, We the Basques), which included some sectors of the Basque Patriotic Left that had been distancing themselves due to their increasing more radical position with respect

10. However, in the French Basque Country, EHAS did not become HASI and remained in existence until its disappearance in 1981 (Mansvelt Beck 2005: 102).

11. *Eusko Sozialistak* (Basque Socialists), a small non-nationalist socialist party that emerged from the USO (Unión Sindical Obrera or Syndicalist Workers' Union) trade union. It would not take long for its party members to abandon HASI due to this party's alliance with the positions of ETAm. On the other hand, after HASI's first congress in May 1978 (in which ETAm obtained control), a sector of its party members in favor of 'making policy', the losers of the congress, formed the group EKIA (*Euskal Kideko Iraultze Abertzalea* or Basque Patriotic Revolutionary Group) and announced that they were leaving HASI and joining EIA.

to violence.¹² Although it has been described the possibility that the founding of EH was a type of rebirth with respect to the new period that was approaching (Mees 2001: 823), according to Arnaldo Otegi, spokesperson for EH at the time, the reason was far more technical: it was decided that a change of acronym was to be adopted in anticipation of a possible illegalization of HB (Iriondo and Sola 2005: 63). After the breaking of the truce, EH was dissolved and a new party, *Batasuna* (Unity), was formed in 2001, whose change in situation was that it was going to operate in Euskadi and Navarra as well as in the French Basque Country. A sector broke away from this project and founded Aralar in 2001, a political party that from within the Basque Patriotic Left would reject the violence perpetrated by ETA. In February 2011, right in the middle of ETA' truce, *Batasuna* presented some new statutes, thus changing its name to *Sortu* (To Create). Although *Sortu* was illegalized, the Basque Patriotic Left could participate in the municipal elections of 2011 through *Bildu* (To Join), a coalition between independents close to *Batasuna/Sortu*, EA and *Alternatiba* (Alternative, a small party schism of the Basque section of IU, United Left). At the end of 2011 the Basque Patriotic Left joined together again in Amaiur (the name of a place in Navarre),¹³ a coalition between Bildu and Aralar, for the Spanish elections of that year. At that time, ETA announced its renounce to violence, making the Basque Patriotic Left, for the first time in 50 years, an only political movement. Finally, to contest into the autonomic Basque elections of 2012 Amaiur transformed itself into Euskal Herria Bildu (EHB, To Join Basque Country).

This organizational plurality in the transition was not exclusive patrimony of the 'mili' sector of the Basque Patriotic Left. The 'poli-mili' sector would also suffer ruptures, both in the political sector as well as in the military sector. ETApM had continued with its armed campaign, guaranteeing social advances and self-government with much less intensity than ETAm.¹⁴ After the coup d'état of 1981, ETApM decided to declare a truce and one year later, with the truce still in effect, the eighth assembly of the organization took place, during which a sector defended the return to armed struggle, whereas another defended the abandonment of it. The first sector obtained the majority and ETApM broke the truce, justifying such rupture as due to the government's leaning to the right and the democratic and autonomous cutbacks. The decision divided the organization in two. Those who broke away, called 'sevenths', for

12. In 1995, HB approved the Oldartzen thesis, which advocated the 'socialization of suffering'. For more information about this tactic and its consequences, see Domínguez (2003: 218-225).

13. The name comes from the fortress of Amaiur in Navarre, which was one of the last Navarrese strongholds during the Castilian conquest of Iberian Navarre.

14. The year with the highest number of deaths caused by ETApM was 1979, with 10 deaths, much less than the 65 deaths caused by ETAm that same year (De la Calle and Sánchez-Cuenca 2004: 62).

not recognizing the legality of the eighth assembly, announced maintaining the truce because, although the pending demands had been a failure, the truce had enabled the consolidation of EE, enabling it to get out of the situation of political siege in which it found itself due to violence. The 'sevenths' announced their dissolution at a press conference in September 1982, and resorted to the policies of reinsertion negotiated between EE and the Government of Spain (Fernández 2010b: 87).

On the other hand, those in favor of breaking the truce, whose organization was going to be called ETAp_m eighth assembly or 'eighths' from that point forward, did not remain united for very long. The main debate was between those in favor of continuing as an autonomous group and those who aimed to become part of ETAm. At the beginning of 1983, this latter sector broke away to form ETAp_m eighth assembly pro-KAS, a small group of about 20 militants also known as 'milikis'. They requested to form part of ETAm, but this organization imposed two conditions on them: continue one year with the armed struggle to prove that they had a minimum infrastructure and that inclusion in the organization would be militant to militant, without merging organizations. Thus, in 1984, the majority of militants of this faction entered into ETAm after self-criticizing the political and military strategy that it had followed up to that point. As for the 'eighths', they continued using violence, but the police actions shut down the organization. The few leaders who remained began to lean towards ETAm in the mid-1980s and began to request the vote for HB. The last remnants of ETAp_m were formally integrated into ETAm in 1992, although it was an organization that had actually ceased to exist many years prior (Domínguez 1998: 40-42). Therefore, it can be said that for the end of the 1980s (although it was officially at the beginning of the 1990s) all of the different armed organizations that had emerged from the common trunk of ETA, they either disappeared (a sector of ETAp_m, CAA and *Iraultza*) or they returned to their core given that the majority 'polimili' ended up integrated in the current ETAm which, as of that date, would be the only ETA in existence.

As for the political sector of the 'polimili' branch, it must be pointed out that EIA progressively distanced itself from violence and took on an increasingly more institutional aspect. In the summer of 1979, EIA reported a bomb campaign by ETAp_m and a year later it criticized the death of a leader of UCD at the hands of ETAp_m (Sullivan 1988: 282-296). In 1980, the distancing of EIA from ETAp_m was parallel to the draw closer to EPK (*Euskadiko Partidu Komunista*, the Basque section of the PCE), part of whose leaders came from 'minorities', one of the groups in which ETA-VI split. For the end of 1980, criticism towards ETAp_m would not have to do with criticizing incoherencies with that agreed in the seventh assembly of ETAp_m, but that it was changing to an explicit rejection of armed struggle. In June 1981, EIA dissol-

ved itself in order to make way for a new organization that would go by the name of EE, merging with EPK in January 1982 to form EE-Left for Socialism. The ideology of the new party stood out due to its clear rejection of violence and for its defense of the constitutional democratic process (Letamendia 1994a: 476). In this manner, EE clearly distanced itself from the Basque Patriotic Left to become a party framed within what De la Granja calls 'heterodox nationalism' (De la Granja 1995: 20).¹⁵

However, within the new party, there was the 'New Left' current which opposed these two characteristics of the ideology. This controversy was a reflection of a greater significance, that which confronted the leadership of EE, which sought the disappearance of ETApM, and the majority sector of ETApM, which sought to resume armed activity and to ensure its survival (which would later be the ETApM eighth assembly) (Fernández 2010b: 90-91). The New Left (NI) split at the end of 1982, and along with LKI and LAIA, it tried to promote a new tendency within the Basque Patriotic Left. Thus, in 1983, these three parties founded *Auzolan* (community work), which presented itself at the regional elections of Navarra in 1983 and at the Basque autonomous elections in 1984, in which it relied on the support of the EMK. In its public presentation, *Auzolan* separated its image from any armed organization but also said that it would never participate 'in forms of isolation and confrontation with these organizations' (Letamendia 1994b: 44). However, the very low number of votes cast caused the project to fail, and on May 1, 1986, *Auzolan* announced its dissolution, although the branch in Navarra renamed itself *Batzarre* (assembly) in 1987. *Batzarre* was an integral part of the EH coalition, but abandoned it after the breaking of the ETA truce in 1999. After joining the Basque nationalist coalition NaBai (*Nafarroa Bai*, Navarra Yes) in 2003, it left this coalition in mid-2010.

LAIA and NI disappeared with *Auzolan*, whereas EMK and LKI continued to exist. As we mentioned previously, they drew progressively closer to HB, up to the point of requesting the vote for this coalition at the end of the 1980s. In 1991, both organizations united to form *Zutik* (Standing) and in the 1990s, they continued to request the vote for HB. In 1998, they went on to form part of the EH coalition, and abandoned it after the breaking of the truce by ETA one year later. In the general elections of 2004, they formed a coalition with Aralar, and in 2008, they stepped down from their public activity as a political party in order to focus their efforts on supporting related social movements.

15. EE merged with PSE (Basque Socialist Party) in 1993 to create PSE-EE. One year before EE had split into two different parties: EE and EuE (Basque Left). EuE disappeared in 1995.

Conclusions

Thus, in this brief journey through the more than 50 years of organizational history of the Basque Patriotic Left, we have been able to see how the great heterogeneity—initially ideological, and later, organizational—that characterized the Basque Patriotic Left gradually disappeared until it was reduced down to ETA as the armed wing and HB/EH/Batasuna (now EHBildu) as the political wing. A summary of all that we have said in this work can be found in Figure 1 of the appendix. In the figure, one is able to clearly observe how from a single organization, ETA, many others have emerged until arriving at the transition towards democracy, which coincides with the central part of the Figure, in which a great proliferation of organizations can be observed. This great organizational heterogeneity, however, is gradually reduced, which can be observed in the few number of acronyms that appear in the right-hand part of the image. In effect, only one armed organization remains, ETA, and a political organization, Batasuna (or now Sortu or EHB), given that both EHAK and ANV, although legally independent parties, were ‘dormant’ acronyms that were used by Batasuna to present itself at elections (in 2005 and 2007 respectively) and mock the fact that it had been outlawed as a political party so it can be considered that they were ‘the same’ as Batasuna.

What about its future? After the farewell to the weapons given by ETA it seems that the duality between political and armed organizations has no place in the future strategy of the Basque Patriotic Left. After its electoral success in 2011 and 2012 (when it became the second political force in the Basque Country), ETA can be an obstacle for the consolidation as an (only political) alternative to centre-right nationalism represented by the PNV. Besides, it is not clear which would be the structure that the Basque Patriotic Left will adopt in the next years, but it seems that it will maintain its current format: a coalition formed by four parties joined together with just one voice in all the institutions where they got representatives. There are two main reasons for this reasoning: the difficulty for EA, Aralar and Alternatiba to get any representatives by their own means and, for Sortu, the advantage that means keeping possible rivals out of the electoral career.

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Appendix

Figure 1. Basque Patriotic Left: Armed and Political Organizations

