

ADDRESSING SPAIN'S SECESSIONIST PROBLEM

AN INTERNAL STRUGGLE AGAINST WEAKNESS AND LIES

Jaime Mayor Oreja

FOUR centuries after the date that the majority of historians consider the birth of the Spanish nation, German Chancellor Otto Von Bismark said the following words about Spain: "I am firmly convinced that Spain is the strongest country of the world. Century after century trying to destroy herself and still no success."

Weeks before I entered José Maria Aznar's government as Minister of the Interior and just before the beginning of the demonstrations against ETA, I had an encounter with the president of the Basque Nationalist Party (PNV) Javier Arzalluz in front of the Bay of La Concha in San Sebastian. Arzalluz, who recently passed away, knowing about the responsibility I was about to assume, said to me "Make no mistake, Spain is not a nation like France, Germany, the UK, or Italy. It has never had, nor will it ever have, the necessary strength."

Jaime Mayor Oreja is a former Minister of the Interior of Spain.

Arzalluz, who came from a family with a markedly traditionalist background, had become the leader of the Basque Nationalist Party, and was therefore driven by an obsessive goal to weaken Spain.

The Basque Nationalist Party rose as a consequence of the defeat of the traditionalists in their fight against the liberals in the Carlist Wars of the nineteenth century. The traditionalists wanted a more traditional, religious, and conservative Spain, and the defeat led them to create a new and invented nation, *Euskadi*, based on a viscerally anti-Spanish sentiment.

The defeat of the Republicans and the Popular Front in the 1936 Civil War led to the birth of a political and social project with the aim of breaking Spain and the social order based on Christian foundations in the mid-1950s.



Photo: Guiliver Image

The aftermath of the 2006 ETA terrorist attack on the Barajas International Airport in Madrid

Thus, ETA was born, whose nature and reason for existence was not only anti-Francoism, nor was it only a terrorist organization, but its meaning was a project of rupture from the conviction that the Basque Nationalist Party would never be able to break Spain. This required a countercultural project.

ETA was the most criminal expression of the darkest of Spains, the Spain of hatred, resentment, and one born as a legacy of the civil wars, for which confrontation is the main objective.

Aiming to break Spain and its Christian social order, ETA imitated the most

abominable expression of Spain's worst image—a perverse paradox indeed.

We live in times of transition, decay, crisis, and weakness in Western society. While all our societies suffer from the same transition, the crisis manifests itself differently; notably as a crisis that affects the individual, a crisis of truth, and a lack of core values.

The United States is experiencing polarization and confrontation within its social base unlike anything seen since World War II. Europe is moving towards nothingness, and Spanish-

speaking America is moving towards totalitarian movements on the left.

Spain finds itself in a peculiar transition, stuck somewhere between nothingness and a creeping totalitarian tendency, moving from crime towards lies.

After suffering from the burdens of the Black Legend, which was inspired and driven by our former enemies, Spain locked us in, limited us, increased distrust in ourselves, made us feel inferior, and ultimately led us to the internal wars of the nineteenth century and the civil war in the twentieth.

Above all, with this transition from crime to lies, the country is hidden behind a dishonest narrative that is as far from truth as one can imagine. Here again, lies seem to prevail.

Our nation has been determined by violence in these 50 years of democracy, a period that we must know how to properly value and appreciate. But I use the concept of “determined,” not “threatened,” as is normally the case in the rest of European, and more broadly Western, countries.

There is a long list of facts that explain the methods by which terrorist violence has been carried out. But through a twisted transition, we have gone from determinative crime to twisted, but equally determinative, lies.

The lie from which we suffer today is not circumstantial, anecdotal, or episodic. Instead, it has become law, norm, and doctrine. Laws on gender, family diversity, education, sexual freedom, affirmative consent, animal welfare, and historical and democratic memory, among others, constitute the expression of the lie. The expansion of abortion and euthanasia laws fall within the realm of crime and lies.

The lesser evil, the lie, has replaced the greater evil, terrorist violence—just as the latter had been the heir and substitute of the civil war decades later, which is always the greatest of evils. But the lesser evil ends up consolidating the evil, and it is in no case a solid basis for a hopeful future.

The cause above all causes of this transition from a greater to a lesser evil—that is, from crime to lies—is the crisis of truth, the crisis of core principles (values), and the exaltation of lies.

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Throughout the years, I have been able to identify and pin-point the five basic lies of the process—wrongly called the “peace process”—that is frequently dubbed “conflict resolution.”

Before I briefly go through each of them, it is worth noting that the synthesis of this (incorrectly named) peace process always strives towards the same thing: peace in exchange for power to the terrorists. Some give up their weapons, and in exchange, sooner or later, the terrorists gain more power.

The first lie is that no peace process existed before. This is based on the assertion that there was no process driven by the Spanish Prime Minister José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero and ETA. This is not true. The process formally started in 2004, almost 20 years ago, once Rodríguez Zapatero

came to power after the March 11th, 2004 terrorist attack. It consisted of a framework agreement promoted by both parties: ETA stopped the killing, and Rodríguez Zapatero offered a project of Spain's transformation in the moral, social, and territorial aspects.

This framework agreement had two preambles, two previous explicit pacts between nationalists. The first preamble was the pact between Basque nationalists, partially staged in Estella on September 16th, 1998. In this agreement, ETA offered a cessation of violence—a truce that was in reality a trap—while the PNV incorporated secession as a political objective in the regional and national assemblies of its political formation, a modification that has never been revoked.

The second preamble was the Pact in the city of Perpignan on February 18th, 2004, in which ETA offered a truce for Catalonia. This truce, unlike the one offered in 1998, would be definitive in practice. While Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya embraced secession as its immediate and primary objective, ETA stopped the killing: an unprecedented leap in ETA's history in Catalonia.

The second big lie has been based on the assertion that Spaniards have defeated ETA. Obviously, this lie has been the most accepted, applauded, and thus the most difficult one to counter—which only time can do. As always, a half-truth is the worst of all lies. We did not defeat ETA. What the government of Rodríguez Zapatero did was an opaque, but real, negotiation around a process.

What we today identify as the acronym EH Bildu has never existed as a political organization independent from ETA. They are not heirs of ETA, they are ETA. All of this was and continues to be a fiction that is necessary for the viability of the process. The idea of Bildu and its leaders, who were opposed to ETA for peace, constitutes a required tweak of the script, narrative, and the standard conflict resolution project. The whole idea, nevertheless, remains very far from the truth.

The negotiation process was the political price paid by the government. This way, ETA was legalized, and subsequently, a path to its social legitimization was opened.

The third widespread lie consists of claims that Basque nationalism has been channeled or even resolved, unlike Catalan nationalism.

This is another lie, which rests on ignorance about the nature of the Basque nationalist movement.

As there is only one movement, there can be no Basque nationalist movement as an entity separate from the others. There are no Basque, Catalan, or Galician nationalist movements that operate independently from each other. There have always been, and continue to be, interconnections between them. What changes is the vanguard and the rear guard of the nationalist movement.

For many years, the vanguard of the movement was established in the Basque Country and ETA as its most visible element. Today, the vanguard is firmly entrenched in Catalan nationalism and Catalan institutions. In short, we must value and evaluate the whole of nationalism, which in my opinion has jointly reached three milestones:

The first milestone was to reach power through their respective autonomies, which the PNV and the Catalan nationalist Convergence and Union coalition achieved in the late 1970s.

The second milestone was reached a decade later, by solemnizing the objective of self-determination at the end

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of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s. This was achieved through two legislative motions in the Basque and Catalan parliaments, and formulated in unequivocal terms.

The third milestone, 10 years later, at the end of the 1990s, was the rupture, symbolized by the different agreements with ETA in Estella and Perpignan, and the entire nationalist front. What is happening with nationalism is a relay race in which the baton is being passed from one runner to another, but they are all in the same race.

In short, there are no individual Basque, Catalan, and Galician problems. There is a problem that has essentially consisted of an inferiority complex that all Spaniards have had, which is why the nationalist movement has known how to abuse it.

For all these reasons, the crisis in Spain is manifesting itself as the crisis of Spain. We have a crisis of values, which is expressed in the weakest point of our recent history: the nation and the deep meaning of Spain.

The fourth lie affirms that the popular, populist, and nationalist front, which governs us today, had been

buried by the historical tragedy of its evolution in the mid-1930s Spain, and that it therefore had no capacity or ability to emerge.

According to basic logic, if the process described above never existed, this would mean that the popular front of socialists, communists, and nationalists does not exist today and that it is, in fact, a fantasy. This is another lie and fallacy, because this front is the reality that has been brewing in Spain due to the process that we are living through.

Since the Popular Party of José María Aznar won an absolute majority in the 2000 elections, the Spanish left has undergone a metamorphosis and thus needs a process that will logically lead it to a broader front. Spain is not being led by a government, but by a process, as previously described. We are not governed by a political party, nor even a coalition of parties, nor even a “Frankenstein” government. The nature of a front is different; it is based on rupture, resentment, and revenge, all of which require a series of historical lies and in which ETA is acting as their commander-in-chief.

Establishing the diagnosis of the front and the process is the easy part,

even if it's not universally accepted. Doing the prognosis, on the other hand, is impossible.

The fifth lie, which is being developed today in certain economic and political circles, is that the front will not last long, that it will not leave serious consequences, and that nothing of impact will happen. This is another lie and another mistake. The front has been born to stay, much more than a political party or a coalition of parties. They have no moral, ethical, or democratic limits. The real objective of the front is the replacement, substitution, and destruction of the social order based on Christian foundations. This completes the series of lies that I wanted to highlight. They are enough to confirm the prevalence of lies over truth. Unfortunately, we are running away from the truth as if it were the plague.

Therefore, the most relevant and difficult task of today is to identify and start implementing an alternative to

the aforementioned process, the front, and the historical lies from which we are suffering. Such an alternative would be cultural, social, and political in its character. But above all, it would first and foremost require a change in personal attitude. It is the only thing we can affirm, demand, and promote: the

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urgency of finding an alternative that combats lies and strengthens Spain as a nation.

By constantly embracing the lesser evil, we will sooner or later find ourselves facing the greater evil. The cancer of such decisionmaking has been present in Spain for many years and has metastasized. But one must know how to distance oneself from the reverential fear of one's environment, resignation, and the feeling of defeat. The words of German Chancellor Otto Von Bismark ring truer than ever. They are our reality. The destructive obsessions of nationalist movements are clear. What is needed today is to formulate a project that strengthens Spain in its deepest sense and restores hope to millions of Spaniards. ●