

Fermin Lazkano - Interview

«They treated me well in comparison with the others, but I completely agree with Martxelo's accusations»

Fermín Lazkano was under arrest for seven days. For the first five he was kept in solitary confinement by the Guardia Civil, going on to spend the rest in Soto del Real prison because he didn't have the bail money. The following interview was published in *Egunero* on February 29.

You look pleased.

Yes, I'm pleased. I've seen people and friends that I hadn't seen for ages and I was really moved by the welcome they gave me. I arrived home yesterday at around one in the morning and, instead of getting into bed, started reading copies of EGUNERO, not stopping until I had read them all.

Considering the situation, you were ready for the worst.

No, we expected it, but we weren't ready for it. It's really serious and disproportionate when people like ourselves from the world of culture who have done nothing but write or help those who write, receive treatment of this kind, and it was as if underlying everything some kind of a terrible crime had been committed. You think that when the Guardia Civil is involved it's because something extremely serious has happened, but it's really difficult to make sense of what's happening when they take you before the judge and tell you the accusations.

Did you know that the operation was against EGUNKARIA?

Yes, I knew that right from the beginning. As soon as I was arrested they took me to Plazagune. Being in the office next to *Egunkaria* I could see the Guardia Civil going into and coming out of the building. On the warrant of arrest they also stipulated that I was being arrested for belonging to Egunkaria Sortzen and Egunkaria S.A. That's when you realise what the whole thing's about.

What conclusions did you draw from the interrogations?

The main accusation was as follows: *Egunkaria* was published thanks to various increases in capital and that, to invest in or keep the newspaper afloat, money had been requested of the people in the towns and villages. The police didn't believe that so much money had been collected from people's contributions. They were convinced that it wasn't true and that there had to be someone else behind the whole thing, and that that someone was ETA. As a result, the questions were: who did the money come from? Which members of *Egunkaria* belonged to ETA? To who did it have to account for the money received? And other questions along the same lines... The judge also mentioned various documents supposedly confiscated from ETA. He was absolutely convinced that *Egunkaria* belonged to ETA.

There has been torture, maltreatment and very serious accusations. How did they treat you?

They treated me fairly well. They didn't hit or push me; they insulted me a bit, but nothing too bad in comparison with what the others were put through.

You've met the other people arrested. What did they tell you?

You could hear noise, rumpus, cries, insults, maltreatment, and we could see the state in which our other companions were arriving: they were having difficulty breathing, were completely doubled over, etc.

You were there while Martxelo was in solitary confinement. How did he look?

I back Martxelo's accusations. Martxelo is telling the truth. I didn't actually see what they did to him because they took him somewhere else, but I did see the state he was in when he came back: bruised, bent over, in a bad way. Martxelo has suffered terribly, just as others have also been badly treated.

Now that you're out, you must feel sorry for those who were kept in prison.

Sorry for them and furious; it's incomprehensible that people are still in prison given the accusations. The idea that people can be imprisoned in Europe for publishing a newspaper is something you never imagine even in your worst nightmares.

Did you know what was happening to Pello Zubiria?

No. We knew that someone was banging his head against the wall, that he had a terrible time and that he disappeared on the third night. It could have been anyone, but someone said it was Pello.

When did you hear about *Egunero*?

On getting out. Well, in the prison another Basque prisoner told us that the mobilization was incredible and that *Egunkaria* was still being published. On getting out I read the various issues of *Egunero* published because my family had kept them for me. The reaction has been simply amazing. The thing is that we now have to create another newspaper. Well, in 1990 we had to start from nothing. But not today. We now have over a hundred people with experience, a strong team. There are no installations, computers... It won't be easy to get back to where we were, but it won't take thirteen years. This time we'll get there in far less time. Absolutely no doubt about it.