

## **Pello Zubiria - Interview**

### **"This is just a complete lie"**

Pello Zubiria was the first editor of Egunkaria in 1991. He was arrested because of that, and sent to prison some days later. In between he spent a couple of days in the Civil Guard Headquarters however he remembers nothing of his time there. He knows, though, that he was on the verge of dying, so doctors have told him.

Since he was released last tuesday (March 18th), Pello is amazed at how many unknown people stop him in the street. "Hernani is a very supportive town, and I am very thankful".

#### **You were arrested for being the first editor of Egunkaria and as a result you have been to prison. The judge says that ETA appointed you.**

As I told the judge and the Civil Guards this is just a complete lie. They say that there are some ETA documents, but we know how Egunkaria was created. In Argia (Basque weekly magazine, Zubiria's previous job before moving to Egunkaria and after) we had bought a printing machine, and as Egunkaria's project was about to come to light, we started discussing whether we should buy new premises. Inma Gomila (arrested during the same operation and later released) and I were appointed for that: buying premises, organising the mortgage with two flats to be the surety... The entire process was crystal clear. And meanwhile, we had to choose the editor.

I have to point out one thing: during the difficult early days, some of us were braver than others. I don't mean that about myself, but about you and some others (Egunero's interviewer, was involved from the beginning in Egunkaria, like most of the staff in Argia). The political situation was harder then, but things had to be done. Some years later came those alleged ETA documents.

#### **And the story has been told in a different way...**

At that time too I also said that they were lies, and so I say it again now. I don't know all the elements behind that lie, but it is and was obviously a lie. I remember well I had a conversation about that with Martin Ugalde (writer, journalist, honorary president of Egunkaria and former minister of the Basque Government in exile) and I told him: "Martin, there is something that keeps me calm: you have witnessed how we have been doing things, and I don't bloody care if someone says that it has been done in a different way".

#### **Judge Juan del Olmo may have asked you about this?**

The magistrate even asked me how Egunkaria Sortzen raised the money: I'm wondering should I explain to him that in Hernani we put some giant newspapers in the street and advertisements were put on them? He would laugh! But things were like that!

#### **What understanding do you have about the operation?**

I can not accept that Egunkaria has been closed down. It is closed, but something has to be done. I know how much some people have invested to create it. We can't throw all that work in the dustbin. I can accept that for some time we will have to do it another way. But how on earth can we leave Egunkaria's capital? I say this in a humble way, because I don't know how legal issues are, but that is what I am pushed to say.

#### **Do you mean that instead of creating a new one we should stick to the one we had before?**

I am not saying that a new newspaper should not be made. But I want to point out: Do you have to

take Egunkaria from me because somebody has said that ETA wrote this and that? Is that a reason to close Egunkaria? No, I can't accept that. Just because somebody has said on a piece of paper that it belonged to them? That is not true. It didn't and it doesn't belong to them.

**When did you realise that you were arrested in connection with Egunkaria?**

After searching my home, by the time they brought me to Argia for more searching, I realised that because of the questions. But the judge's representative told me that the issue was my connection to ETA. I was completely astonished. My articles are there!

**Do you mean that your articles and being a member of ETA are not compatible?**

All the people who have read my columns and heard me in the radio talk-shows know that.

**What can you remember about your stay in the Civil Guard premises?**

I still need more time to fit the pieces of the puzzle together. The support from those who were also arrested is helping me. I can remember a few things, but get very confused. I was sore, anxious, freezing and distressed. I was forced to stand up, beside a bed... The situation was inhumane: I don't think that anybody has to be forced to go up and down some stairs, blindfolded and with their heads bent. I complained because of that. It is not easy for me to bend my head, because of my serious back problems. I think I was interrogated once. I became more and more nervous, and my mind was spinning...

**Did you lose your mind at any time?**

I could hear horrendous screams. I thought I heard when Iñaki Uria was brought back (to the cells), sobbing after being beaten up, and I started to shout. Next thing I can remember, was Inma Gomila. I must have gone totally mad, because I am normally very well-behaved with the authorities. I have always co-operated during police checks, because I am afraid.

**You have been told that you faced the civil guards**

Yes, I raised a racket, or so I was told. "Iñaki, have you been beaten up?" I shouted at him, in Spanish. And it seems that they came back to me and told me that "here we don't beat up anybody", and I started arguing... I can't see myself in that role... my memories of those days are still hazy and unclear.