

**Interview with Josu Urrutikoetxea on BERRIA
(Basque Country), 14-12-2020, Paris**

English version

JOSU URRUTIKOETXEA (former ETA delegate)

**"Is it a terrorist crime
to negotiate peace?
It doesn't make sense"**

Since last July, Josu Urrutikoetxea is on conditional release, and he lives in Paris. He has been delegate of ETA at two peace talks. Paris will judge him for that.

Madrid wants him extradited to Spain. The former basque prisoner told he has worked for peace and resolution.

Enekoitz Esnaola (BERRIA), Paris



(Josu Urrutikoetxea, Paris, 14-12-2020)

The interview was held at an hotel in Paris with the former representative of ETA on Monday 14. He speaks passionately, gives information, and reflects. It was three hours of conversation.

Journalist: You were arrested on May 16 last year. You were in the French Alps.

Josu Urrutikoetxea: In those places that are magical to me. I've always loved the mountain. Thanks to the solidarity I found there, I had no problem integrating myself into local life. I was lucky to get up in the morning and see the first thing I saw was the Mont Blanc range.

Journalist: Hospitals are obliged to give the names of patients by jihadist protocol.

Josu Urrutikoetxea: I gave another name. The one he used was *Bruno Marti*. He didn't have any papers at hand and [at the hospital they asked me] why not. [I answered] the usual: that I went to the Emergency Room and those who go to the Emergency Room sometimes forget everything.

Journalist: Were you going to have surgery that day?

Josu Urrutikoetxea: Yes. A few days before I went to the doctor because I had a health problem. He had me run some tests and I went to do them two days before my arrest. Right away he told me that it was a serious problem and that I should go to the hospital. I went to the Emergency Room and they treated me pretty quickly. I went back two days later. It was 7 hours in the morning: I had an appointment a quarter of an hour later to prepare for the operation. They stopped me in front of the hospital door.

Journalist: What happened at the time of your arrest?

Josu Urrutikoetxea: It wasn't violent.

Journalist: Were there only French policemen?

Josu Urrutikoetxea: Yes. Half a dozen, no more.

Journalist: The Civil Guard says that they were also present, that a female guard addressed you.

Josu Urrutikoetxea: That is silly. The person who took me [to the hospital], Gerard, is a high mountain guide. At that time I was in a cabin in the mountains. I went to the hospital with Gerard, by car; he left me, went out, then me, and the policemen appeared suddenly coming out of various corners, but not quickly, but slowly. They identified themselves as policemen. One said "Easy, easy"; he added "Josu."

Journalist: Then they knew it was you.

Josu Urrutikoetxea: Yes. Maybe they realized when they saw me.

Journalist: Not before?

Josu Urrutikoetxea: I would be surprised if it was before. When they have data, a clue or something referring to someone, the system used up to now by the French Police - and the Spanish - is the following: photographs are previously taken, images of the sites are taken ... They always make a montage. However, back then there was nothing about me.

Journalist: Was it a police operation?

Josu Urrutikoetxea: Yes, but from that moment.

Journalist: They had already tried to arrested you before: in 2011, in 2013 ...

Josu Urrutikoetxea: When someone is arrested, photographs always appear sooner rather than later ...

Journalist: ...and photographs of you were published in 2013.

Josu Urrutikoetxea: I know where they got them, because I realized. A few days before, I already knew they were there. I realized right away.

Journalist: And you ran away. Two years earlier, around Mont Blanc, you fled with someone else. There is a story about it: they say he received a phone call from Kenya.

Josu Urrutikoetxea: They know well that it is a circus. That call has another story and I learned it later by chance: they must have called a friend of mine who was involved in smuggling and they said "we canceled this appointment." The assembly thread comes from there. A circus. They also tried to arrest me in 2004, in the North of Euskal Herria. Also in 1987, in Senpere [Lapurdi, Northern Basque Country].

Journalist: You can see that Madrid considers you a symbol in ETA's trajectory.

Josu Urrutikoetxea: It's something they make of me. I got away for the first time in 1971, when they surrounded Sollube village. The story may come from there. With the help of media power, our fight is full of montages made by them. "We have arrested the top". After two months, the same. It seems that we should go back to the times of the Visigoths, when they wrote that of *Domuit Vascones*. It is a copy of that. So they go on.



Journalist: Spain wants you at its mercy and last year it sent two Euro-orders and two extradition requests to Paris. What do you foresee?

Josu Urrutikoetxea: To tell the truth, a black future. The attitude of the Spanish state towards me is the same as it had with many others. There are two Euroorders and as many extradition requests, because they have not invented or mounted more. When I was in jail between 1996 and 2000, they tried to incriminate me for Zaragoza attack [1987]. The point is, there was nothing. I passed the judge [Baltasar] Garzón several times before ... And not only for that case; Those years opened twenty or I don't know how many cases against me.

Journalist: The Civil Guard says that you were a member of the ETA leadership at that time and that, therefore, the attack on the Zaragoza barracks also had your approval.

Josu Urrutikoetxea: With that argument, why didn't they prosecute me between the years 1996 to 2000? I was in her hands, in prison. That indicates that there is something else. So I had a face to face with [Juan Manuel Soares] Gamboa at the National Court; Garzón asked him why he was aware of my involvement and he replied that

he did not know it directly, but that was said in the environment. He did not provide a single piece of evidence.

Journalist: At that time, were you in the "international group" of ETA?

Josu Urrutikoetxea: That's right.

Journalist: Alain Ortega, chief of operations of the French Information Services, says that it was the *Argala Command* who did the Zaragoza attack and that only the ETA military chief knew about them.

Josu Urrutikoetxea: Always, in the [ETA] organization, and that was a security measure, there were very few who knew who the members of the commandos were, what they were doing and where they were.

Journalist: In that December 1987 attack, ETA murdered 11 people; five of them children. What causes that? Does it look different now?

Josu Urrutikoetxea: From a distance things always look different. Violence has never been an objective of the ETA organization for me, because it was a political organization that used the armed struggle as a political instrument. Using violence has never been an objective. Whoever uses it already knows - the enemy too - that it can cause damage, and the organization has always tried to avoid such collateral damage. And that is very difficult. Irreversible damage is serious for everyone. I have always been concerned about that, and I have felt it deep inside me. And secondly, since we are talking about barracks, the organization clearly said more than once in the 1980s that it would not only target them [the civil guards], but also the barracks, with all that it supposed. What happened happened, what nobody wanted it.

Journalist: ETA made a qualitative leap in the 1980s: car bombs. To cause collateral damage, increased risk ...

Josu Urrutikoetxea: That's right. When you use this type of material the risk is doubled or tripled. It is difficult to control.

Journalist: There are people who say that it was then that the loss of social support for ETA began to accelerate, because the dead were also civilians.

Josu Urrutikoetxea: More than people, this is one of the arguments used in the media. The organization would have long since disappeared if it had not had solidarity, support and involvement in the Basque Country and abroad. They immediately take out all the batteries against what they call *terrorism*. The word *terrorism* is a big bag in which you can put anything. No one has used it as much as the state.

Journalist: They tried to kill you in 1975, committing an attack.

Josu Urrutikoetxea: Before that they planted explosives in the places where the fugitives were moving, in front of some houses ... Before the GAL, we were the ones who took care of the safety of the fugitives. Mine happened on June 5, 1975, in a neighborhood of Biarritz [Lapurdi, Northern Basque Country]. A friend left the car for me. [Son] Egoitz was one year old and [daughter] Irati had just been born, and we had to go to the doctor. While I was writing a letter to a prisoner at home, that car exploded.

Journalist: You went underground in 2002, due to the case of Zaragoza.

Josu Urrutikoetxea: The whole montage was done in 2001: they took the matter to the Supreme Court and they implicated me. I'd like to see how many pages were written that year. I also had to experience certain moments in the Parliament of Vitoria, because sometimes they would not let me speak. There was a lot of dust, and I had no guarantees. I decided not to appear in the Supreme Court, and to go back into hiding.



Journalist: When you went underground, what was the goal?

Josu Urrutikoetxea: I had my doubts about Lizarra-Garazi [Estella's Pact, 1998]: «What the hell happened here?». The question was, how did we turn that around? I was fortunate that the members of the organization that I met and others who moved around it had that perspective: how to embark on a path that ended in negotiation. The organization took steps and at the same time - I found out later - Arnaldo [Otegi] had a long-standing relationship with Jesús Eiguren. The drop, even if it falls on the stone, makes a hole.

Journalist: What happened in Lizarra-Garazi?

Josu Urrutikoetxea: I did not directly experience Lizarra-Garazi; I was in jail. The truth is, I didn't understand why it broke up, maybe because it hadn't followed anything before. But, for me, the step was huge: we went in search of a popular front, we succeeded ... Then it seems that the PNV does not comply and we broke the process ... But we have always known what the PNV is like. I have always thought, in the world of diplomacy, that if you sit down with someone and that someone is a State or a political force like the PNV, you have to know that the day after signing something, the person in front of you will not comply. You have to prepare the people for that. You have to tell the people: this will happen, and you have to take

the witness. That is what was not done in Lizarra-Garazi, nor in 2005.

Journalist: What work did you do to get to the 2005-2006 process and also during the process itself?

Josu Urrutikoetxea: The first job has to be done at home. Gerry Adams often says that internal problems are more difficult for him to solve than external ones. In 2005 I ran into these problems, because that logic of 2005 was not that of 2002, 2003 or 2004. It is an enormous step backwards in the confrontation with the State. Work is in many ways; on the one hand, the trajectory they had in Txillarre [Elgoibar, Gipuzkoa, South of Euskal Herria] (note: the conversations led by Otegi and Eiguren) and, on our part, the same. When I say *ours*, I am not just referring to the organization; it is broader than that: civil society.

Journalist: Before that process, ETA contacted the Swiss

Josu Urrutikoetxea: I remember that a colleague of mine told me that a member of Henri Dunant got in contact in Bizkaia [South of Euskal Herria] with some members of the Abertzale left. He had always taken a certain distance with these types of institutions, because they move based on certain interests of some states. They live by and of it. Little by little we related to them, we spoke clearly, they taught us what it was, how it came about, what people there were, where they have been, with whom, how ... Things were taking shape in 2004. In this context, the attacks and the Madrid elections [March 2004]. The attacks that took place in Madrid demonstrate what terrorism is or what states have done: massacres without looking anywhere.

Journalist: There was a freedom of movement in that process. It is said that you had some telephones.

Josu Urrutikoetxea: We arrived in Geneva in June 2005; those of Henri Dunant took us from the French state to Switzerland. The Swiss government is federal and the one in charge of this is the Ministry of Justice. The Henri Dunant center was in contact with some government officials. They knew what the HD were doing, even if the government did not know it officially. There were people in the government who knew what we were going for and that we depended on HD. Days later, those at the center said we had an

appointment the following week, with Jesús Egiguren. I told them I knew him from Parliament. We met for the first time in a hotel by Lake Geneva.

Journalist: At the President Wilson Hotel.

Josu Urrutikoetxea: Also other times later. As well as outside Geneva, in many places: in the mountains ... The first meeting was to define simple things, but they are the first steps to take in all conversations: how we conducted the initial conversations. Before that there was one basic thing: how was our safety guaranteed? To do this, those in the center told us that there was no problem in Switzerland, but we said that if we wanted to go to the French state, we couldn't; that Egiguren could call [Alfredo Pérez] Rubalcaba [the then Spanish Interior Minister], but that we couldn't make calls. We needed guarantees, and Egiguren would ask Rubalcaba for them, the latter from the Spanish services, the latter from the French, and they gave us two phone numbers at the next meeting.

Journalist: The phone numbers of Víctor García Hidalgo, general director of the Spanish National Police, and Christian Lambert, a trusted member of Nicolas Sarkozy, right?

Josu Urrutikoetxea: That's right. But then we didn't know whose they were. That became known when Ion Iurrebaso was arrested in 2006, in March: the police began to look and realized that those telephones were theirs. They provided them to us in case of having problems with the French Police to call one; and in case of having problems with the Spanish, to call the other.

Journalist: How did you move with those guarantees?

Josu Urrutikoetxea: I didn't have to use those phones. The people who moved us were from HD. There was some support because Switzerland, France and Spain knew it.

Journalist: On June 21, 2005, the first ETA-Madrid meeting took place in Geneva. How did you participate?

Josu Urrutikoetxea: As a representative chosen by the ETA organization to speak with the representative of the Spanish Government.

Journalist: And then the decisions were made by the ETA leadership.

Josu Urrutikoetxea: Yes, of course. There was a general objective, within which the consensual statements should move.

Journalist: Were you a member of the ETA leadership?

Josu Urrutikoetxea: No, no, no.

Journalist: Neither does a confidential report from the French Police consider you a member of ETA; but representative.

Josu Urrutikoetxea: It clearly says so.

Journalist: In interviews you gave to some French media last October, you said that they had also had many contacts with agents from the Basque Country.

Josu Urrutikoetxea: With different agents. Also with people from outside. The first person we met was the Norwegian ambassador, who lived in Geneva and invited us to his house for an aperitif. We knew that Norway was behind the process. Weeks later, Norway itself requested that the agreement, the formalities, be made in Norway.

Journalist: What did you have in mind?

Josu Urrutikoetxea: I had figured out how everything should be. I remember that in the hotel where we held the first meeting there were some large sheets and I said to Jesus - in Spanish, because there was a person from the center who was in charge of writing everything down -: "I'll tell you what our opinions are." I explained it to him on one of those pages, and Jesus was surprised: "You have done a great job, I think it's good to take those steps." He did some appraisals, but generally we build on that. That sheet will also be stored somewhere. So we started, step by step, and when it was almost finished, which was already quite defined, they took us to Norway. We didn't know where we were going; Yes we were going to Norway, but not just where. There, at the airport, we went out the back door, without showing any documents; there were a dozen police cars. They took us to a hotel.

Journalist: Was there a good relationship between the Madrid and ETA delegations?

Josu Urrutikoetxea: The objective of our group was to work out the consequences of the conflict, to resolve it, with what that meant. Prisoners, victims, arsenals, escapees ... It is a very complex world. To get there, a consensus had to be reached: which statement was going to be made by the organization and which [José Luis Rodríguez] Zapatero [the president of the Spanish Government]. All that had to be debated: who was going to do it before, in what terms, how, when Zapatero was going to do it, in what context ... Everything, point by point. And it was debated.

Journalist: The first round of meetings ended on July 14, 2005. Were you happy?

Josu Urrutikoetxea: I believed in it, I saw that there was an opportunity. That belief was shattered by something that a member of the organization's leadership told me before going there; I realized that the idea that this person had about the negotiation and the one that I had were very different from each other. Then I realized that something had happened inside the organization.

Journalist: When was that meeting?

Josu Urrutikoetxea: One day in June we took the car to go to Geneva; Well, the eve of going, in a meeting with the management. The fact is that I participated in those debates in the first phase, because I had precisely internalized a vision about the negotiation: an internalized route in the direction of the organization. What happens? That in that period of time the members of the organization who made those decisions fell little by little. Then we learned that the direction was controlled from top to bottom. It was not just about avoiding a process, but causing an implosion within the organization. That was the objective of the Police.

Journalist: Did people from another line take over at ETA?

Josu Urrutikoetxea: Yes, as it turned out. I realized that something had happened, I didn't know what, but something, and I said: "I'm wrong; there the communication has been interrupted ». He thought he had the sword of Damocles [on him].

Journalist: Did you see the Government of Spain willing to agree?

Josu Urrutikoetxea: If that went to hell, it wasn't just because of Madrid's attitude. If you don't feel like entering a negotiation and you don't believe, what are you going to do? And if you still think that with that kind of fight you are going to defeat the enemy in front of you, you're wrong.



Journalist: At the beginning of December 2005, you reached the Oslo preliminary agreement. Did you stay at ease?

Josu Urrutikoetxea: Of course it is. I think the management did not believe that we [the representatives] would get anything. That was the first surprise. When I arrived with the paper, they said: "Hosts, has this been achieved?"

Journalist: But in February 2006 ETA made some modifications to the Oslo agreement. Important?

Josu Urrutikoetxea: There were some clarifications.

Journalist: Weren't you optimistic at the time?

Josu Urrutikoetxea: No, but internally it told me to see if we could turn that atmosphere around.

Journalist: ETA declared a ceasefire at the end of March.

Josu Urrutikoetxea: Because I was involved in a dynamic.

Journalist: Zapatero said in his June 2006 statement that he would respect the decision of the Basques. Did you agree to that in Oslo?

Josu Urrutikoetxea: Yes. Also the organization's truce statement. On the other hand, it is true that the declaration that was agreed was not the one made by Zapatero. What we agreed on was clear. Simply, the objective was to say that the Spanish State would accept what the Basques democratically decide on its future. And that was the first phase. The second would start later: between agents and the *technical* [table], of conclusions.

Journalist: When you spoke with the Basque agents, what did you perceive?

Josu Urrutikoetxea: They were waiting for you. Also those of the nationalist left, because some steps were taken. A scheme of two tables was proposed and each one would have its development.

Journalist: Batasuna's proposal in Anoeta should be located there (11-14-2004).

Josu Urrutikoetxea: It had its significance, but not only in Euskal Herria, also abroad. Foreign agents saw it very clearly. They saw that this route was feasible.

Journalist: ETA made an assessment of Zapatero's statement, and Batas another, more optimistic.

Josu Urrutikoetxea: That's right.

Journalist: Was the first step for that scheme taken in 1995 in the whole of the nationalist left, after ETA published the Democratic Alternative?

Josu Urrutikoetxea: It was then that the organization began to trace that path. However, already at the time of KAS, I told those in charge that the chestnuts should be taken out of the fire by the people, and that the achievement of political objectives would not be thanks to the armed struggle, but to the work and pressure of the people. But this change in mentality began to occur later. Anyway, I would say that this has yet to be achieved, but I am saying it from a distance, because now I am not in the Basque Country.

Journalist: If ETA had to participate in the *technical* lane, why did you negotiate Zapatero's statement?

Josu Urrutikoetxea: Because the declaration was key when opening two processes, two tables. The first phase of the talks consisted of doing that. In the second phase, concrete questions are put on the table.

Journalist: Your last meetings, were they in September 2006?

Josu Urrutikoetxea: I left Oslo in the summer.

Journalist: José Manuel Gómez Benítez, one of the representatives of Spain, declared in Berria in 2017 that your first meetings were on September 26, 27 and 28, 2006, and that you left then, which were your last.

Josu Urrutikoetxea: So it will be. I have forgotten some things, on purpose or something.

Journalist: The Civil Guard says their last meeting was on December 15.

Josu Urrutikoetxea: No, surely not.

Journalist: Did you leave the table on your own?

Josu Urrutikoetxea: Yes.

Journalist: Did you inform the representatives of Madrid?

Josu Urrutikoetxea: I didn't say anything to them.

Journalist: Who did you tell?

Josu Urrutikoetxea: At the center Henri Dunant. I told them that he had personal problems. They wouldn't believe it, but ...

Journalist: Was it in those meetings that Xabier López Peña joined the ETA delegation for the first time?

Josu Urrutikoetxea: Yes.

Journalist: Was that also a sign of change at the table?

Josu Urrutikoetxea: Yes, he did not believe in the process.

Journalist: In September 2006, on the 20th, Batasuna, PSE-EE and PNV began to speak in Loiola [Azpeitia, Gipuzkoa, South of Euskal Herria]. Did you hear about those meetings?

Josu Urrutikoetxea: No. I cut everything.

Journalist: Earlier, in mid-August, ETA said in a statement that if the "attacks" in Madrid continued, it would "respond." He committed the attack in December, in Madrid, on T4. Two dead, civilians.

Josu Urrutikoetxea: I thought the truce was going to be broken, but not with an action with the current truce. Because if an organization is in truce, taking an action has neither head nor tail. In Euskal Herria enormous importance has been given to the word of the organization. With T4, something was broken among the Basque citizens, and people did not understand it.

Journalist: Was the 2005-2006 process the last train of a comprehensive solution?

Josu Urrutikoetxea: At that time it couldn't be said. Now that several years have passed, it can be said.

Journalist: Why didn't the process continue?

Josu Urrutikoetxea: The organization entered like a bull to the rag put by the State, and that is what you have to avoid in a negotiation. If you believe in a negotiation, you should know that the state will

cheat thousands. In order to reach the people, one has to work with the cadres and bases of the nationalist left, so that they are aware of how the State is going to act; and, on the other hand, it was necessary to convey that the organization was going to be dissolved and that the bases had to be fought. If that is not conveyed, disappointment arises, because there is no top-down communication.

Journalist: The nationalist left did not have it easy then, being outlawed.

Josu Urrutikoetxea: It made that job difficult, but just like other things were done, they could do that too. At that time, the priority was the survival of the Abertzale left, but it also had to do with that situation.

Journalist: You were preparing the Algiers dialogue process (1989), right?

Josu Urrutikoetxea: Yes.

Journalist: Did you go to Algeria?

Josu Urrutikoetxea: Many times.

Journalist: As a member of the international group of ETA?

Josu Urrutikoetxea: Yes.

Journalist: That was the first official dialogue table between ETA and Madrid.

Josu Urrutikoetxea: That was a tremendous step, not for the organization, but for the struggle that Euskal Herria was carrying out. Algeria welcomed ETA as the representative of Euskal Herria and in front was the representation of a State: that of Spain.

Journalist: That process also failed.

Josu Urrutikoetxea: The organization came with the KAS alternative: the south of Euskal Herria decided its future, autonomy to four [provinces] ... It was a tactical minimum. But the process entered an impasse. Madrid wanted to put a thermometer to see how far we wanted to go.

Journalist: ETA, in March 1989, appointed you to join the dialogue table.

Josu Urrutikoetxea: I found out when I was in jail in France. I remember that Julen Madariaga was in prison with us and he told me that they would take me out soon. Madariaga said that because he found out that ETA wanted me at the dialogue table, but I didn't know it ... In 1999 something similar also happened to me: I was in the Alcalá-Meco prison, and I read the news in the newspaper, who had been chosen for the second board meeting ...

Journalist: Speaking of Algiers, what was the difference compared to the 2005-2006 process?

Josu Urrutikoetxea: At the table in Algiers they wanted to discuss everything. In 2005 the organization did not present itself as in Algiers as a representative of the people, and wanted to leave the future in the hands of the political representatives of our country.

Journalist: What did you do after 2007?

Josu Urrutikoetxea: My own life. In a town in the Pyrenees, in France: Durban-sur-Arize. I was integrated. Almost every day first thing in the morning I went to play sports, then had breakfast, then helped the landlords in the neighborhood, went to the mountains to make firewood, to the garden ... Farm work! I got along well with them.

Journalist: What did they know about you?

Josu Urrutikoetxea: Nothing.

Journalist:.: You were there ...

Josu Urrutikoetxea: *Daniel Martin*. Spanish origin, who had lived in France and had studied in Paris.

Journalist: Was it not related to the nationalist left?

Josu Urrutikoetxea: No. I didn't even connect to the Internet. The only relationship I had was with my family, very sporadically.

Journalist: Did you feel the police close by?

Josu Urrutikoetxea: Then no.

Journalist: After the breakdown of the talks in May 2007, the nationalist left took the path to change strategy more quickly.

Josu Urrutikoetxea: I found out later, because when I received the visitors they passed me information from a whole year on a USB: newspaper articles, reports from the nationalist left ... I knew it, but without more.

Journalist: Was the change necessary?

Josu Urrutikoetxea: Yes, of course.

Journalist: Did they ask you for any input?

Josu Urrutikoetxea: No, even if they had asked me, I wouldn't have done it.

Journalist: In 2011-2013 you were in Oslo, after the cessation of ETA's armed activity, in your team of representatives.

Josu Urrutikoetxea: At first I didn't feel like anything.

Journalist: So why was it?

Josu Urrutikoetxea: Foreign non-governmental organizations asked me to be in Oslo, because it was a kind of guarantee for them. The governments involved also wanted it to be someone with a certain background. That's why they convinced me. From the beginning my concern was whether the representatives of the organization that I was going to meet there had changed their chip or were still following a militaristic scheme. Then they told me that they were militants who had been making the turn of 2009 [change of strategy], etc. Agree.

Journalist: ETA announced on October 20, 2011 the definitive cessation of its armed activity. When did they ask you to go to Oslo?

Josu Urrutikoetxea: Two or three months before. They told me that they were in contact with Madrid, through Henri Dunant, that they were working on a road map on the consequences of the conflict, and that the Aiete conference would be held ... I saw that it was taking shape.

Journalist: How did you go to Oslo?

Josu Urrutikoetxea: I was summoned to a village in Ariège [France]. They took me by car to Paris. There they put us in the [Norwegian] embassy, we slept, and the next day we took the same car and traveled 22-23 hours to get to a hotel where members of ETA David [Pla] and Iratxe [Sorzabal] were staying. I knew that hotel, because it was where we had reached the agreement; it is about an hour and a bit from Oslo, in a small town.

Journalist: Madrid did not show up at the Oslo table.

Josu Urrutikoetxea: No.

Journalist: Didn't you make a gesture to go?

Josu Urrutikoetxea: At the end of 2012, a senior Vatican official appeared at a meeting saying that the Spanish Interior Minister, [Jorge] Fernández Díaz, had called him and that he had gone to Oslo with a question. The question was whether we were willing to talk. We do, of course, we have been waiting for Spain for a year. He received our reply and told us that he would forward it to Madrid. Then there was no other answer. I do not know what happened. In the PP government, who controlled everything was [Jorge] Moragas, and perhaps it would come to him that the Minister of the Interior was doing something and cut off all attempts. But I do not know.

Journalist: In March 2012, the elections to the Spanish Cortes were to be held, but Zapatero brought them forward in the summer to November 2011.

Josu Urrutikoetxea: Half a year would have given game. I think the Oslo table would have gone ahead.

Journalist: In addition, the PP obtained an absolute majority.

Josu Urrutikoetxea: Yes, but we must also analyze the character of the president [Mariano] Rajoy. It has not been to make many decisions. In December 2012, Rajoy appeared in Norway on the occasion of the Nobel Prize awarded to the European Union, and he was with the Norwegian Government, but he did not say a word to them about our matter.

Journalist: What did you breathe at the table in Oslo?

Josu Urrutikoetxea: Nobody understood the attitude of the Spanish. They said that they had been in a good number of conflicts and that they had not known such an attitude.

Journalist: Didn't the international community have enough strength or will to put pressure on Spain?

Josu Urrutikoetxea: All international issues move according to interests; generally economic, be it Yemen, Syria, Iraq or the Colombian conflict. Nothing is ever given for free. And what is Euskal Herria in this globalized world?

Journalist: Was your representation permanently in Norway from October 2011 to the beginning of 2013?

Josu Urrutikoetxea: Yes, we were there, in Oslo and so on.

Journalist: Until when?

Josu Urrutikoetxea: Me until February 2013. The other two members came out a little earlier, I don't know exactly when.

Journalist: How did you come out?

Josu Urrutikoetxea: They have said that we were expelled, so some have sold it. I left Norway by plane with a diplomatic passport and they took me to the place I had requested. A strange way to get kicked out, right

Journalist: Where did you go, to France?

Josu Urrutikoetxea: To Durban-sur-Arize again. I arrived one night. It was snowing. People were waiting for me around a table for dinner. I told them that I had been in Paris for a year, studying. They did not consume media, and had no danger.

Journalist: And again to work as a landlord?

Josu Urrutikoetxea: Yes.

Journalist: Paris will judge you again next year for the 2005-2006 and 2011-2013 processes.

Josu Urrutikoetxea: He considers me the head of the ETA gang apparatus and says that I met with people to prepare for the peace negotiations. What does that mean? Is negotiating peace a terrorist crime? The accusation makes no sense. In addition, some tests are changing, without giving details.

Journalist: Is Paris up to what Madrid dictates?

Josu Urrutikoetxea: Yes.

Journalist: In Ipar Euskal Herria [in the North of Euskal Herria] they have worked to influence Paris.

Josu Urrutikoetxea: It has been a great job, but it has not been done only in the disarmament process. Iparralde (North of Euskal Herria) is small, it only has 300,000 inhabitants, but it could be an example for any world conflict in this matter. You have to keep working on a day-to-day basis, and you have to keep knocking on the doors of Paris, weaving networks ... It is continuous work. It is something that we have pending in the Spanish State.

Journalist: May 3, 2018: ETA's dissolution day. Why did you read the statement?

Josu Urrutikoetxea: Because they asked me to. When I look around, I see that unfortunately there are not many old members: because they were killed or because they died. They had a deeper and broader journey than I did. I gave my consent, because I thought it

would be closed as it was. If my participation was valid for that, welcome.

Journalist: Did you know that someone else would read the statement?

Josu Urrutikoetxea: Yes. And that there were several possibilities.

Journalist: Were you asked to read much earlier?

Josu Urrutikoetxea: No.

Journalist: Is it true that you recorded a video?

Josu Urrutikoetxea: Yes.

Journalist: Who was it for?

Josu Urrutikoetxea: I don't know what the format was, but I think some members of the international community saw it. Facing the exterior, only the voice of the recording remained.

Journalist: How did you feel when you read the statement? It was the end of ETA's trajectory ...

Josu Urrutikoetxea: That was an important moment in this fight for the rights of our people. But it wasn't the end of anything. It was seen that things are to be done and that it is up to us all to do them. The subject is the people.



"It is everyone's duty to build the future, so that what we have lived is not repeated"

Victims, Basque prisoners, coexistence ... These are issues that are on the political agenda, almost ten years after the end of ETA's armed activity. Josu Urrutikoetxea has advocated that there are no more situations of violence.

Journalist: ETA murdered 774 people, as recognized by the organization in 2018.

Josu Urrutikoetxea: The use of violence as an instrument, as a political instrument for the achievement of political objectives, brings unfortunately irreversible consequences. Once I was going from the Nanclares jail to the [CAV] parliament in an Ertzaintza car [Basque autonomous Police], I said to an ertzaina (Basque policeman): "What do you think, that whoever pulls the trigger feels pleasure?" If you think that, you are wrong. The fact is that when using violence, even if the objective is clear, the consequence is harsh, and I have always felt that way.

Journalist: Shortly before its dissolution, ETA issued a statement on the pain caused: on April 8, 2018. It asked for "forgiveness" from the victims who "had not had a direct participation in the conflict." It was not well received in Basque society.

Josu Urrutikoetxea: The organization made a distinction, because some had direct responsibilities in the general situation, in that situation of oppression, and that was what it said in that statement. It is not so much about asking for forgiveness or not; It is not a matter of looking back and staying to live there, but of drawing the corresponding lessons, and of putting all the means so that it does not happen again. Something that is not resolved can have consequences anywhere. A minority base their position on hatred and revenge. I don't think anything can be built that way. However, with respect for that minority, together we must build our future. In search of that future, I have never relied on hatred and revenge.

Journalist: They ask the nationalist left to make a critical analysis of ETA's activity.

Josu Urrutikoetxea: We are playing with words. Every day we have to build the future, with a positive attitude, and that work corresponds to all of us, so that what we have lived does not happen again. Is it magic to say a word? And tomorrow everything will be resolved? It is about putting the chip, the logic, in the common construction.

Journalist: There are still about 225 Basque prisoners. Are Paris and Madrid moving towards the solution?

Josu Urrutikoetxea: The group of prisoners [EPPK] took the step, announcing that it would comply with the penitentiary regulations of the Spanish and French states. But what happens? That, except in some cases, the others are not complying with their own legality. When will they dare, not to do something special, but to follow their own law?

Journalist: Should governments take other steps?

Josu Urrutikoetxea: First of all, that they comply with their legislation. In practice, there is room in the prisons of the Basque Country. In the Pact of Ajuria Enea [1988] there is something written but not published: if the organization [ETA] ceased the armed struggle, the

prisoners would have to be released! Release! What a setback there has been ...

Journalist: How could the states be forced to put the question of the Basque prisoners on the way?

Josu Urrutikoetxea: I would put the usual medicine on the table: daily work, in all areas, each in his own..

Nation building "is a practice"

Journalist: How do you see Euskal Herria?

Josu Urrutikoetxea: From a distance. First of all, we have to see that it is not an oasis. And, unfortunately, this health situation facilitates the individualization promoted by neoliberalism, and the system takes advantage of it to take even more profound measures.

Journalist: Is there enough national awareness?

Josu Urrutikoetxea: We will build our future little by little, that does not worry me. What worries me is the situation of the Basque language, the use of the Basque language. It is the responsibility of everyone, but especially of the young, who are the ones who come from behind. In Zeberio [Bizkaia, South of Euskal Herria], during the Franco regime, those who came from abroad also learned Basque, but when I went to a meeting in 2002, I saw that the children who left school to play began to speak Spanish. Sure you see an enthusiasm for nation building, but building is practice.

Journalist: Is the Basque Country prepared for a sovereign process?

Josu Urrutikoetxea: There are conditions, in different areas. There is great potential.

Journalist: Do you see any way in the coming years towards independence, towards the Basque republic?

Josu Urrutikoetxea: Why not a Basque republic? We have all the conditions. I see that the new generations want to fight in that sense. We are in another century, they have other instruments that we have not known, but also other enemies, that bring neoliberalism and the globalized world, but with confidence and working day by day, the situation is irreversible with the tools that we have.

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BERRIA (16-12-2020), in Basque:

<https://www.berria.eus/albisteak/191232/delitu-terrorista-al-dabakea-negoziatzea-ez-du-zentzurik.htm>

Video (11 minutes):

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jtfl2KxZ1u4&feature=emb_logo
