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Euskadi

Stinging defeat for Spanish state

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The regional elections in the Basque country on Sunday May 13, 2001 saw an unexpected victory for the forces of moderate nationalism, sanctioning the policy of the Spanish state but also the assassinations carried out by ETA.

[<https://internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/jpg/basque2.jpg>]

PP leader Jaime Mayor Oreja

The electoral arithmetic is perfectly eloquent. There was a spectacular growth of the rate of participation which reached 80% of the electorate, something completely exceptional in the Western democracies. That witnesses to the high degree of politicisation of Basque society, but also the crucial issues at stake in this ballot. The changes in relation to 1998 are slight enough, taken at the level of the relationship of forces between the "pro-self-determination" bloc (those parties who had supported the declaration of Lizarra) and the "Spanish centralist" bloc (Popular Party [PP] and Socialist Party [PSOE]).

But they are very significant if one considers what happened inside each of these blocs. On the one hand there was setback for the Spanish centralist right represented by the PP in its attempt to overtake the Socialists (their relative scores remain stable) and on the other a spectacular displacement of the abertzale (nationalist) left (Herri Batasuna-Euskal Herritarrok) towards democratic nationalism (PNV, Basque Nationalist Party).

The analysis of these results is helps us trace the political perspectives in each of the scattered pieces of the jigsaw puzzle of the Spanish state: Euskadi, Catalonia, Galicia and Spain. One can distinguish several elements.

A setback for the Spanish state

The pact concluded between the PP and the PSOE sought to profit from the moral rejection of the assassinations carried out by ETA to bring the Basque country to heel: to put an end to governmental autonomy, reverse the linguistic policy in favour of the Basque language, Euskera, to halt the progress of the sentiment of national identity and to reduce to nothing the regime of tax sovereignty.

It was necessary, then, to put an end to the reign of the PNV and this underlay the campaign of parliamentary obstruction led by Madrid against the Basque institutions, the criminalisation of democratic nationalism assimilated to violence, xenophobia, fascism, the "gulag", or the Holocaust. The stinging defeat for this enterprise shows the impossibility of a Spanish centralist regime taking control of the Basque country and confirms the nationalist majority which, for 25 years, has oscillated between 58% and 60% of the electorate. The PNV came ahead in 96% of the municipalities.

A crushing victory in the small towns, scores higher than 50% in all the provincial capitals and a clear relative majority in the big urban concentrations with working class and immigrant populations, where the socialist current has been strongly rooted since the 19th century. This massive vote for the PNV is a reaction of national dignity against the external aggression of the state, a stinging rebuke to the Spanish centralist parties. But the importance of this vote stems also from the categorical rejection of the assassinations carried out by ETA.

A sanction against ETA

Euskal Herritarrok (EH) lost more than a third of its votes and half of its seats. We were right to analyse the breaking of the ceasefire and the resumption of assassinations by ETA as the suicide of the abertzale left. What is positive is that these votes have gone to the democratic nationalist current. These are not lost votes and the abertzale left can recover them if it engages in a veritable political regeneration by imposing on ETA a definitive truce or by breaking politically with it. The forces of left nationalism are very active and even if a good part has gone over electorally to the PNV, that absolutely does not imply their neutralisation by moderate nationalism.

However the weakening of EH with the uncritical closing of ranks around its leadership nucleus reduces its margins of manoeuvre and its capacity of political independence in relation to ETA. Self-determination and the reform of the state are unavoidable questions posed by the PNV itself in its discourse in favour of self-determination (the demand for a shared sovereignty of nationalities inside Europe), but which also take on a renewed vigour in Catalonia and Galicia. The Basque employers do not hesitate to demand that the government Aznar adopt a "more flexible policy in relation to the autonomous nationalities and the model of the state".

The PNV has just presented a peace proposal: "A round table involving the participation without exclusion all the political parties which, in the image of Ireland, allows the building of a national consensus to give Basques the ability to speak for themselves which is today refused to them."

Self determination and peace. That requires a change in the leadership of the Socialist Party and a return to the old democratic alliance with the nationalist forces to reform the Constitution and adapt the state to the legitimate aspirations of the nationalities which make it up. Some time will be needed for that, a time with a bitter taste marked - until when? - by ETA's assassinations. Such is political life in our country.