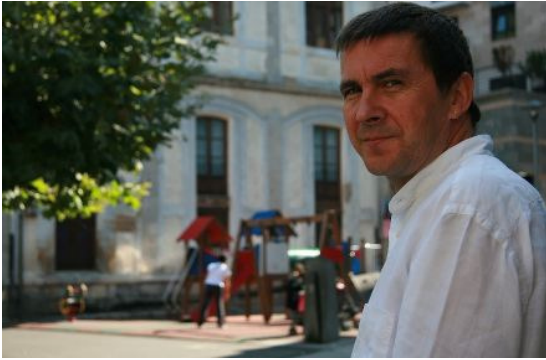


# Arnaldo Otegi - imprisoned peace maker



The declaration of the Basque armed organization ETA (Euskadi Ta Askatasuna, Basque Country and Freedom) on October 20<sup>th</sup> 2011 to unilaterally end its armed struggle after 52 years made headlines worldwide. An end to the last armed conflict in Europe through peaceful negotiations between Basques and the Spanish and French governments is now within our reach.

The end of ETA's armed struggle is the latest development of a peace strategy, initiated by the Abertzale Left, the Basque left wing pro-independence movement, in November 2009.

The core of this strategy is the unilateral commitment to exclusively peaceful means, to peacefully aim for Basque citizens' and international support and to insist that all sides of the conflict accept the democratic will of the Basque people and end violence.

## From a climate of despair to peace dynamics

After the breakdown of the 2006/2007 peace talks the general line of thought was that another period of escalating violence was unavoidable. Reality seemed to prove that point with massive arrests and human rights violations by the Spanish state and new attacks by ETA. To successfully change this climate of despair into a peace dynamics has been the work of many good people so far. But if ordinary people in the Basque country were asked to name the person who more than anybody else dedicated his life to make this happen the overwhelming majority would name one person: Arnaldo Otegi<sup>1</sup>, born in July 1958 in the Basque town Elgoibar.

Arnaldo Otegi has been a spokesperson of the Abertzale Left, the left wing Basque independence movement for two decades. Since 1998 he was leading several negotiation attempts and was imprisoned after the breakdown of the last peace talks in June 2007. In prison he continued searching for a peaceful solution to the conflict and in 2008, being still imprisoned, he put his thoughts about a non violent way forward to the Basque public. After his release from jail in August 2008 Otegi worked relentlessly with a small group of people to get the independence movement and key people within Basque society behind his peace strategy. He wasn't allowed to leave Spain but he nevertheless travelled to Basque places in France where he met with historical and influential leaders of the Basque independence movement.

## Arrest does not stop peace strategy

On 13 October 2009, Spanish military police stormed the head quarter of the Basque trade union LAB in Donostia (Spanish: San Sebastian), where Otegi and his coworkers were having their meeting. But the group had just finalized their new peace strategy proposal and had already started to circulate it to the wider movement. From November 2009 on it would be discussed in town hall meetings by almost 10.000 activists and agreed as the new way forward.

On 18 October 2009 more than 50.000 people took the street in Donostia to demand the release of Arnaldo Otegi. On 17 September 2011, while the peace strategy unfolds, the Spanish special court "Audiencia Nacional" sentenced him to 10 years imprisonment, alleging that Otegi's meetings were not about peace but about receiving orders from ETA.

## Support of Basque society and international community

Within two years the peace strategy initiated by Arnaldo Otegi has changed the Basque country dramatically. Otegi's strategy has been successfully based on two pillars. One is the involvement of Basque society

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<sup>1</sup> See photograph: Arnaldo Otegi in his hometown Elgoibar, [www.arnaldotegi.com](http://www.arnaldotegi.com)

and Basque citizens in making their voice heard peacefully. The second is gaining support of the international community. Both pillars are reflected and safeguarded by corresponding agreements: the agreement of Gernika, named after the Basque town of Gernika (Spanish: Guernica) shows the support of a wide range of parties, trade unions and social and cultural organizations behind the demand for an end of violence of all parties to the conflict, ETA and the Spanish state, and an end to the inhuman treatment of Basque conflict related prisoners. The international conference of Aiete, named after a peace centre in Donostia, and its final declaration, shows the support of the international community, represented by Kofi Annan, Bertie Ahern, Gerry Adams, Jonathan Powell, Gro Harlem Brundtland and Pierre Joxe and supported by Jimmy Carter, Tony Blair and George Mitchell.

These developments were possible because the Abertzale Left unilaterally took courageous steps to peace. In March 2010 they got support by four former Peace Nobel Prize winners (Desmond Tutu, Frederick De Klerk, Betty Williams and John Hume), the Nelson Mandela Foundation and other well known international experts in conflict resolution (Brussels Declaration).

### Relentlessly preparing the ground

Although imprisoned Arnaldo Otegi intervened in critical situations through interviews and letters to make people understand the dynamics, this peaceful strategy would create. None of these developments, which led already to an end of ETA's armed struggle, would have been possible, if Arnaldo Otegi hasn't been so relentlessly preparing the ground.

The armed struggle of ETA is now history and the majority of people in the Basque Country are prepared to play their role in peacefully ending the last armed conflict in Europe by peaceful negotiations. Arnaldo Otegi is still in jail for his leading role in developing this peaceful way out of conflict.

## Arnaldo Otegi Mondragon – Curriculum Vitae



*Basque politician, main leader of the Abertzale Left<sup>2</sup>*

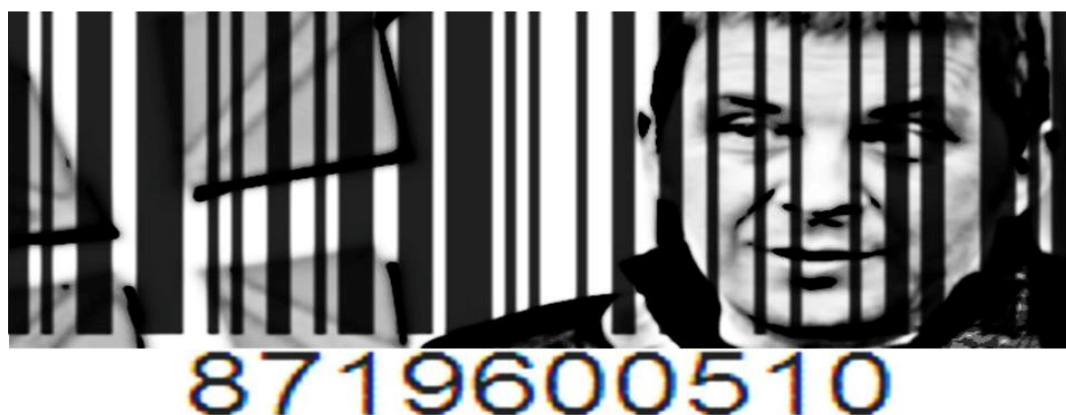
Arnaldo Otegi was born on July 6, 1958 in Elgoibar, a small town in the Basque province of Gipuzkoa. He is married and father of two children. He holds a University degree in philosophy and literature.

Arnaldo Otegi grew up in a Euskaldun (Basque language speaking) family. The Basque language was prohibited by the Franco regime, so his parents sent him to one of the secret Basque language schools. He got involved in the struggle for

democratic rights and Basque independence at an age of 17. In the eighties Arnaldo Otegi was arrested and sentenced for being a member of ETA. After his release in 1993 he continued his political activism as a member of Herri Batasuna (People's Union), a then coalition of the left wing Basque pro-independence movement. In 1995 he became MP for Herri Batasuna (later Batasuna) in the regional parliament of the Basque Autonomous Community. After the arrest and imprisonment of the whole Mesa Nacional (chief executive of Herri Batasuna) in 1997, Arnaldo Otegi became a member and spokesperson of the new Mesa Nacional.

From 1998 on he took part in all peaceful negotiation attempts to solve the conflict between the Basques and the Spanish and French governments. He was in and out of jail with sentences connected to his political activism. In March 2011 the European Court of Human Rights found Spain guilty of violating Otegi's freedom of expression by sentencing him to 12 month of prison for calling the king of Spain "the person responsible for the torturers" in the context of reports about Spanish military police torturing journalists. The Spanish king is head of the armed forces.

Arnaldo Otegi was arrested once again just three days after the collapse of the last peace process in June 2007 and sent to jail to serve his sentence (until 2008) for an homage to Jose Miguel Ordeñana Argala (a member of ETA killed by the "Spanish Battalion", a Spanish right wing paramilitary group). In October 2009 he was arrested again while preparing the new peace initiative of the Abertzale Left. He was sentenced to 10 years of jail in September 2011 and is imprisoned<sup>3</sup> in Logroño, close to the Basque Country.



<sup>2</sup> The meaning of 'Abertzale' in Abertzale Left is strongly associated with a particular understanding of Basque nationalism as a progressive and internationalist movement involving a wide range of organizations such as political parties, unions, cultural organizations, and significant parts of the women, environment and internationalist movements who believe in the liberation of Basque Country. As republicanism has a special understanding in Irish context, abertzale could not be translated as mere nationalism without understanding this progressive role.

<sup>3</sup> The poster below shows Arnaldo Otegi behind bars and his prisoner's number. It was compiled by the "Arnaldo Askatu – Freedom for Arnaldo" campaign (see last page)

## Arnaldo Otegi: quotations

***"There is no other solution to the Basque conflict than by dialogue and negotiation."***

*"Weapons, all weapons must completely disappear from the Basque political equation."*

*point of view a dialogue process that permits reaching a solid agreement regarding the consequences of the conflict."*

*"The conflict between Euskal Herria (the Basque Country) and the Spanish and French States is a political one, rooted in history."*

*"Our commitment to exclusively peaceful and democratic means is irreversible and irrevocable."*

*"It is not about waiting for what others can offer but doing what we can and must do."*

*"The roadmap of resolution is marked by the International Conference of Donostia and the*

*"ETA's military strategy is obsolete and obstructive."*

*Gerni-  
ka  
Decla-  
ration*

*"Now it is time to resolve the consequences of the conflict and to build a framework of peace and fair and lasting freedom."*

*"The priority now is taking on from an honest and constructive*



***"Our efforts are directed towards overcoming the conflict in its entirety in a just, stable and democratic manner."***

**International peace conference in the Basque city Donostia (Spanish: San Sebastian) in the Aiete “house of peace” to promote conflict resolution in the Basque Country:**

## DECLARATION OF AIETE

*The former Irish Taoiseach (Prime Minister) Bertie Ahern<sup>4</sup> read out the following declaration in the name of Kofi Annan, Gerry Adams, Jonathan Powell, Gro Harlem Bruntland, Pierre Joxe on October 17, 2011. The declaration summarizes the agreement reached in the peace conference by Basque political parties, civic society and international moderators. It was later also supported by Jimmy Carter, Tony Blair and the American Senator George Mitchell.*



We have come to the Basque Country today because we believe it is time to end, and it is possible to end, the last armed confrontation in Europe.

We believe this can now be achieved, with the support of citizens and their political representatives, as well as the support of Europe and the wider international community.

We want to state clearly that we have not come here to impose anything or claim that we have the right or the authority to tell the citizens of this country, or relevant actors and political representatives, what they should do.

Rather, we have come here in good faith, with the hope of offering ideas drawn from our own experiences of resolving long conflicts that afflicted our own societies and peoples, as well as others we have helped resolve.

We know from our own experience that it is never easy to end violence and conflict and secure lasting peace. It requires courage, willingness to take risks, profound commitment, generosity and statesmanship.

Peace comes when the power of reconciliation outweighs the habits of hate; when the possibility of the present and future is infinitely greater than the bitterness of the past.

We also know from our own experience that when a genuine opportunity for peace arises it must be seized. The growing demand of the citizens of this country and their political representatives to resolve this conflict through dialogue, democracy and complete non-violence has created this opportunity.

Because of all of this, we believe it is today possible to end more than fifty years of violence and attain a just and lasting peace.

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<sup>4</sup> See photograph (Raul BOGAJO | ARGAZKI PRESS): Bertie Ahern, Kofi Annan, Gerry Adams, Jonathan Powell, Gro Harlem Bruntland and Pierre Joxe in front of the Aiete “house of peace”.

In light of this:

1. We call upon ETA to make a public declaration of the definitive cessation of all armed action and to request talks with the governments of Spain and France to address exclusively the consequences of the conflict.
2. If such a declaration is made we urge the governments of Spain and France to welcome it and agree to talks exclusively to deal with the consequences of the conflict.
3. We urge that major steps be taken to promote reconciliation, recognize, compensate and assist all victims, recognize the harm that has been done and seek to heal personal and social wounds.
4. In our experience of resolving conflicts there are often other issues that, if addressed, can assist in the attainment of lasting peace. We suggest that non violent actors and political representatives meet and discuss political and other related issues, in consultation with the citizenry that could contribute to a new era without conflict. In our experience third party observers or facilitators help such dialogue. Here, such dialogue could also be assisted by international facilitators, if that were desired by those involved.
5. We are willing to form a committee to follow up these recommendations.

Donostia-San Sebastian

17 October 2011

***Bertie Ahern, Kofi Annan, Gerry Adams, Jonathan Powell,***

***Gro Harlem Bruntland, Pierre Joxe***



**Interview with the lawyer Brian Currin, expert in conflict moderation:**

## **“A Ten Years’ Sentence for Otegi? That’s Scandalous!”**

*John Carlin, September 25, 2011, El País<sup>5</sup>*



Brian Currin<sup>6</sup> is the opposite of an assassin. South African by birth, lawyer by profession, he is a professional at mediating conflicts with over twenty years of experience. Whatever terrain he is working on, Israel/Palestine, Northern Ireland, Turkey, Liberia or Madagascar, his objective is to achieve peace and explicitly avoid killings. But, in Spain, he is generally not welcome. Since he became involved in the Basque problem, about two and a half years ago and at the petition of the Abertzale Left, people have asked, what the hell is this man doing here? What right does he have to tell us what to do? And even ... does he have a secret agenda?

His opinion regarding the recent declaration by ETA prisoners asking for a “definitive abandonment of armed activity” will have left some circles with the general feeling that his personal ideology corresponds to that of the pro-independence Abertzale Left. “It’s an essential step and of enormous significance”, says Currin. Regarding the 10 years prison sentence that Arnaldo Otegi, the undisputed political leader of the Abertzales, just received, Currin believes it to be “scandalous”, “incredible” and “counterproductive” and he feels that the court’s sentencing has been clearly contaminated by political considerations.

Currin spoke to EL PAÍS in San Sebastian this week after seven days of travelling from South Africa to England, from England to Madagascar, and from there a return trip to South Africa and finally a trip to Spain.

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**How do you define the Spanish experience? How does it differ, for example, from Northern Ireland where you have worked with all sides, even the British Government?**

I think that the difference in Spain is that the conflict, the Basque one, has been used by the two main political parties, the PSOE and the PP, to win votes, or to make the other one lose votes. This makes things very difficult since it paralyzes you because you know that if you make a move the other is going to give you a beating.

**Why is an emotional subject, apparently easily understood by the citizenry ...**

Yes. The problem is presented in black and white, of good guys and bad guys, quite different from what happened in the United Kingdom where the Labour Party and the Conservative Party both publicly agreed to have a common position in regards to subjects related to national security, and specifically Northern Ireland. The two parties discussed their differences in private but they didn’t criticize one another publicly. If the same thing would have happened in Spain, the problem would have been resolved long ago.

**What is your opinion of ETA prisoners in favor of the Gernika Agreement that assumes the end of violence as an instrument of political persuasion?**

It’s something that needed doing and it is obviously of enormous significances. It’s an essential step towards the construction a political climate necessary for a peace process. It will help generate confidence in society in that prisoners of ETA are in favor of a future without violence in which conflicts are resolved through negotiation.

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<sup>5</sup> English translation of the original interview, published in Spanish language by the Spanish newspaper El País: [http://www.elpais.com/articulo/reportajes/anos/pena/Otegi/escandaloso/elpepusocdmg/20110925elpdmngrep\\_4/Te](http://www.elpais.com/articulo/reportajes/anos/pena/Otegi/escandaloso/elpepusocdmg/20110925elpdmngrep_4/Te)

<sup>6</sup> See photograph (GARA, 07/03/2011)

**What do you think of the recent verdict imposed on Arnaldo Otegi?**

Ten years: It's scandalous! It's incredible that someone could receive a sentence like that for the offense that he allegedly committed. And, look, even if he had been involved in a project with ETA, it doesn't stop being a project whose end is the legalization of a political formation and put an end to the violence, moving from the past towards the future. I can understand perfectly that any association with ETA is illegal. Under such circumstances would have been to declare him guilty, but since the project that Otegi was involved in points towards peace and rejects violence, the logical thing would have been to condemn him to five minutes in prison and that's it. A court could have done that. Now, I know that in this case it categorically was not a project led by ETA. I know because I've been involved in this project with Otegi since began two and a half years ago and the most difficult objective was to convince ETA to adhere to opt of a negotiated peace, that they would see the political advantages of abandoning violence.

**What was Otegi's role in this internal debate?**

Otegi had a critical role since the start. And he showed great persistence and great courage, always coming from being completely convinced that the old ways had failed – he himself recognized that in front of his people- and that there had to be a new way that didn't involve violence. And, to do it unilaterally.

**What has been achieved with Otegi's sentence?**

They have achieved something detrimental to peace. One would hope for a peace process where the government would intervene to create the political atmosphere where those that have committed to peace can achieve it in a constructive way.

**But, is there a project for peace? What is the necessity now that ETA's violence has, in practice, ceased?**

ETA is not the central subject. The central subject is that there are many people in the Basque Country whose aspirations are not met in the Spanish Constitution, that many feel that it was imposed on them. It is not a question of if one is right or not. We are talking about feelings that have a real political weight. This has to be dealt with through a peace process, or negotiation, or dialogue, or whatever you call it.

**How do you interpret the attitude of the Spanish Government?**

Yes, look, today the Tamil Tigers of Sri Lanka have been completely destroyed, but, and I guarantee this, small cells are reorganizing and in ten years a violent conflict will break out. Today the Spanish Government clearly has ETA on the defensive, but they will never get an unconditional surrender. You can't have the police control every room and house in the Basque Country. Other hardliners will come along ready to take up arms and the conflict will continue for more decades until there is finally a political agreement. The police option isn't sustainable in the long run. You have to swallow your pride a little, show some generosity and pragmatism, and be willing to make some concessions.

**What do you say to those who say that you don't have any right to get involved in this?**

I understand that the Spanish react this way. My participation here began when Batasuna asked me to advise them about ETA's prisoners. I began my participation in the same way that I did in Ireland. I did that at the request of Sinn Fein. But, after a time I began working with the other side, with the protestant militants and later the British Government hired me to head the commission charged with deciding on the release, or not releasing, prisoners involve in political violence.

**And the British government paid you?**

Yes. When I began here the leaders of Batasuna asked me to maintain a low profile with the hope that after a time, the Spanish Government would appoint me to a similar position. (Smiling) That notion has kept its distance.



# Euskal Herria – the Basque Country



The Basque Country<sup>7</sup> extends to both sides of the French and Spanish border. A stateless Country divided in three main administrative systems, two states with over 3 million inhabitants; out of those more than 600.000 are fluent Basque speakers, a pre-Indo-European language that has no known relation with any other language.

## A history of conflict

France and Spain deny the Basque Country the right of self-determination. This denial has been met by various forms of response and national self-affirmation. The answers range from collective disobedience to an armed response. In this context, the political conflict has adopted forms of open and bloody confrontation for generations. From 1959 - 2011 ETA waged an armed struggle for independence and socialism for the seven provinces of the Basque Country.

The Basque society has a high degree of participation of its citizens, deeply rooted in Basque history and tradition. For years Basque citizens have created different collectives, organizations and political parties that have worked on every aspect of society.

## The illegalization

Since 1998, as a part of their struggle against the Abertzale Left, the successive Spanish Governments have outlawed different social and political organisations as well as different media under the allegation that they were part of ETA. The assumption of the Spanish special court “Audiencia Nacional” has been that all organizations of the Basque pro-independence movement act upon ETA’s orders. Therefore all members of those different groups are automatically members of a terrorist organization and can be identified by their ideology.

In 2002 the Spanish Congress passed a new Political Parties Law to ban the political expressions of the Abertzale Left. In 2003 the Spanish Supreme Court used this Political Parties Law to declare Batasuna, Herri Batasuna and Euskal Herritarrok illegal, outlawing all three historical and current political organizations of the Abertzale Left (Herri Batasuna was a coalition founded in 1978, Euskal Herritarrok was an electoral platform promoted on 1998, that included Herri Batasuna, and Batasuna was a political party founded in 2001 with the aim to cover the whole Basque Country, north and south, as the previous covered only the south of the country).

<sup>7</sup> Photographs taken from the website eke.org, a Basque cultural and heritage organization

The illegalisation of different political organisations has had as a consequence the arrest of hundreds of political activists. In most cases they have been held under “incommunicado detention” (several international human rights organisation have denounced that incommunicado detention allows torture to take place).

Today there are more than 600 Basque conflict related prisoners in Spanish and French jails.

### The previous conflict resolution attempts

During the last 30 years there have been different attempts to resolve the conflict, Algiers in the late 80s, Lizarra Garazi in the late 90s and the last process in 2006-2007. Each of those processes followed different schemes. From the peer to peer scheme in Algiers, where the delegation of the Spanish Government and ETA members negotiated as equals, to the Lizarra Garazi process that was based on the paradigm of the democratic process and the cooperation amongst nationalist forces in the Basque Country. The last process was based on a two track (political-technical) negotiation scheme (known as the Anoeta proposal) and negotiations took place during several months in 2006 and 2007.

The current peace initiative is based on unilateral steps of the Abertzale Left and of ETA and on support by the Basque society and the international community. The Spanish and the French government are not yet part of it and the initiative has to develop into a peace process with negotiations between all parties to the conflict.

# Campaign: Freedom for Arnaldo Otegi



More than 50.000 people took to the streets<sup>8</sup> on October 17, 2009 to protest against the arrest of Arnaldo Otegi and his coworkers by the Spanish police on October 13, 2009.

Since then many people within the Basque society and internationally have contributed to the campaign "Freedom for Arnaldo Otegi": sending individual photographs with the prisoner's number of Arnaldo Otegi, taking part in rallies, vigils, writing statements and signing demands for his release.

**Arnaldo Askatuz!**  
**Politika Askatuz!**

The overwhelming majority of the Basque society not only acknowledges that Arnaldo Otegi has dedicated himself to find a peaceful and negotiated solution to the conflict, but trust him to bring this about. His arrest in 2009 and the 10-years' sentence in 2011 is seen as a scandalous injustice and as an attack against a new peace initiative.

The website [www.arnaldotegi.com](http://www.arnaldotegi.com) is run by a campaign group of his hometown Elgoibar and collects statements of solidarity and calls to action.

## ARNALDO OTEGI ASKE – a song for freedom

There is huge support for the campaign from within the Basque Country and internationally. For example the well known Basque musician Fermin Muguruza<sup>10</sup> contributed with the song<sup>11</sup> "Arnaldo Otegi Aske" to the campaign "Freedom for Arnaldo Otegi". Examples for international support are the Argentinean Peace Nobel Prize Laureate Adolfo Pérez Esquivel and organizations like the "European Association Of Lawyers For Democracy And World Human Rights (ELDH)" who demand the release of Arnaldo Otegi and the right of the pro-independence left to political participation. Members of various national parliaments have also added their voice, one of the most active has been the Sinn Féin President and TD<sup>12</sup> Gerry Adams. European MEPs<sup>13</sup>, who are organized in the group "Friendship towards a peace process in the Basque Country", have been helping to promote a peace process in the Basque Country.



<sup>8</sup> Photograph: Andoni CANELLADA | ARGAZKI PRESS (GARA, Oct 18, 2009)

<sup>9</sup> Translation: Free Arnaldo! Political Freedom! (from [www.arnaldotegi.com](http://www.arnaldotegi.com))

<sup>10</sup> See photograph: Fermin Muguruza with Arnaldo Otegi's prisoners number (from [www.arnaldotegi.com](http://www.arnaldotegi.com))

<sup>11</sup> YouTube: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6pJOSwUHZkU&feature=player\\_embedded](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6pJOSwUHZkU&feature=player_embedded)

<sup>12</sup> Teachta Dála: Member of the Irish parliament in Dublin

<sup>13</sup> MEPs support group for a peace process in the Basque Country: <http://basquefriendship.wordpress.com/>