



## Combatting Terrorism Lessons of Capbreton

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As time goes by, it becomes more evident that the ETA attack in Capbreton is going to represent a serious setback for the Spanish government's anti-terrorist policy. Each new attack of the terrorist group actually acts as a reminder of the resounding failure of Zapatero's policies, appeasing terrorists. In addition, the existence of two casualties provides another shovelful on the grave of a negotiation process finished off by the group, despite Zapatero's refusal to consider it to be terminated. The most relevant aspect of this fight against terrorism is that the death of these two agents can open a breach in the iron encirclement that *Guardia Civil* (Spanish Civil Guard) had created around the terrorist organization.

After this tragic attack, the government must change at least two things in the way they combat terrorism. First, Spanish intelligence agents cannot continue working in France without being able to carry weapons, nor without a legal status resembling more than that of tourists. For a long time, the European Union has developed various formulas; for example, the implementation of joint investigation teams,

which make it incomprehensible that we are still working under these difficult conditions. After the death of these two officers, Zapatero announced that a permanent joint team on ETA would be set up, though he failed to give any specific details.

Nevertheless, it is necessary that all Police and Guardia Civil officers who perform anti-terrorism missions in Southern France can carry them out in units adapted to grant them physical and legal protection. The death of these two young officers can at least serve to go beyond the phase in which the French authorities just "acknowledge" the presence of our security forces in their territory. As a result, they could carry out their operations, when ready, in order to enter into this new phase, one in which the fight against ETA is executed within a framework of joint operative structures, becoming more effective and offering suitable protection to our agents.

Secondly, anti-terrorism missions as sensitive as the one being carried out by the two officers assassinated in Capbreton cannot be executed by unskilled agents. Agents must have spe

cific training and cannot be commissioned from just any Spanish town. It is only logical that the Information Command would test its agents before offering them the course or assigning them to a definitive post, but it is not rational to move these agents into the line of fire without proper expertise and training. This government's obsession with increasing the number of anti-terrorism agents has not gone hand in hand with the necessary amount of training, preparation and equipment required by these personnel increases. It is something the government should amend as soon as possible.

Spanish Interior Minister Alfredo Pérez Rubalcaba was counting on police pressure to cripple ETA – at least until the election period in March 2008. In that fashion, the government would not have to lose face due to mortal attacks that put in evidence the failure of its anti-terrorist policy. The most worrisome aspect of the Capbreton attack is not that the terrorists have shown their firm determination to kill by carrying out those cold-blooded assassinations, but that the detection and murder of these two officers can put at risk, though momentarily, the excellent work that Guardia Civil has been performing in Southern France.

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