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MEPs oppose closure of Basque newspaper

Press release by EFA MEPs Oriol Junqueras and François Alfonsi

Twenty two MEPs from four parliamentary groups have given their support to a declaration which calls for the provisional closure of Basque language newspaper Egunkaria to be lifted. The declaration also calls for the acquittal of those accused and for them to be compensated.

It will be seven years on 20 February since the popular Basque language newspaper Egunkaria was closed down by the Spanish state authorities. The banning order has been kept in force and a prosecution maintained in spite of a recommendation to the contrary by the State Prosecutor who affirmed that there was no evidence to suggest a link between Egunkaria and extremist groups.

Catalan MEP **Oriol Junqueras** told a press conference at the European Parliament in Strasbourg:

"Media organisations cannot be closed down as a precautionary measure without any conviction having been secured. Freedom of the press is a fundamental right that has to be protected. Every millimetre of press freedom is sacred and must be defended scrupulously."

"Europe must show an example and take a lead in defending press freedom and media pluralism. Sadly the Spanish state has undermined democracy by closing Egunkaria. The whole Spanish political class knows just how antidemocratic the closure of Egunkaria has been, yet neither the Partido Popular nor the Socialist party have the courage to speak out against this injustice which they themselves supported at the time. It is shameful to close a newspaper based on allegations which have been shown to be baseless."

Corsican MEP **François Alfonsi** added:

"Freedom of the press is a fundamental right which must be defended and Europe must give a lead. It is disgraceful that a newspaper can be closed on the basis of incorrect allegations."

"If this can happen today in the Spanish state, then we must be vigilant that such behaviour is not repeated elsewhere in the European Union in future. We look to the European Commission to take a lead and remind the Spanish state authorities of their responsibilities. How can we take the pledges of the Spanish EU Presidency seriously when they allow such blatant violations of fundamental rights in their own member state?"

Ends

Note - a copy of the declaration is available on request.

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