



## THE BASQUE LANGUAGE IN NAVARRE

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In recent years the Government of the Foral Community of Navarre, Spain, has taken increasingly restrictive measures against the Basque-speaking population. The change from analog to digitalised television was intended to offer higher quality broadcasting and the possibility to watch more channels from around the world. That has been the case, broadly speaking. In Navarre, people can now watch TV stations in English, French or Arabic. However, the only Basque-language station, Euskal Telebista (ETB), is now effectively banned in Navarre. Prior to 2008, ETB had a wide audience in the region. Currently the government of Navarre permits the TV channels of neighbouring areas like Aragon, but not from the Basque Country.

The Committee of Experts of the Council of Europe (CoE), on 24 October 2012, in the third monitoring cycle of the application of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (ECRML) urged the Government of Navarre *"to ensure the availability of at least one radio station and one television channel in Basque, if necessary, in co-operation with the Basque Autonomous Community."* However, all efforts and appeals to date to spread ETB signal in Navarre have been actively opposed. Most recently, the Government of Navarre claimed that this was because of the prohibitive cost involved. Months later, in January 2012, some members of the political party Eusko Alkartasuna (EA) raised 12,000 euros among their members and installed a transmitter in the mountain of the Navarrese capital Iruñea that enabled ETB to be watched.

In the first monitoring cycle of the application of the ECRML (2005), not only the Committee of Experts, but also the Committee of Ministers recommended the adoption of a structured approach with a view to strengthening the use of Basque in broadcasting in general in Navarre. In the second monitoring cycle (2008), the Committee of Experts urged the competent authorities to encourage and/or facilitate the creation or the maintenance of a private radio station and at least one private television channel broadcasting in Basque in Navarre.

Instead of recognizing the right of Basque speakers to be informed in their language, the Government denounced the aforementioned signal as "illegal". Two months later, the Guardia Civil (military police) closed down this transmitter. Basque speakers were again deprived of their rights. They could access information in English or Spanish, but not in their own language. In January 2013, the Ministry of Industry of Spain fined the political party EA 45,000 euros.

The radio station Euskalerrria Irratia has been broadcasting for 25 years in the Navarrese capital, Iruñea-Pamplona without any license. The Committee of Experts of the CoE remarked that Euskalerrria Irratia *"had been excluded from licensing processes several times as well as from annual subsidies applications"*. It concluded that *"Given that this is the only Basque language radio station in an urban area in Navarre, where a significant number of Basque speakers live, and the only radio station that covers the entire area where Basque-speakers traditionally live in Navarre, the Committee of Experts invites the authorities to reconsider their decision on granting a licence*



for this station”.

PEN International reminds the Government of Navarre it has the duty and the opportunity to protect and strengthen one of the most important heritages Navarre has, while it also has to respect and fulfill the right of the Basque speakers in Navarre, in all fields, including media and education.

PEN International urges the Government of Navarre:

- To allow the free speech and the reception of any TV channel, especially those demanded and followed by the population, in particular if these are the only ones in a threatened language as is Basque.
- To end all restrictions imposed on the Basque TV station, ETB, and grant Euskalerrria Irratia a license to broadcast legally.