

Archival Review: History and (Private) Document Collections in the Basque Nationalism Archive

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The Historical Archive of Basque Nationalism, managed by the *Sabino Arana* foundation, was established in the town of Artea (Bizkaia) on 26 January 1993. Right from the outset, the foundation has strived

for openness and to be at the service of researchers. It contains important historical documents in its newspaper and book libraries, and archive collections. Its purpose is to gather, preserve, organise, and disseminate the cultural heritage of Basque nationalism.

It specialises in Basque nationalism and particularly the emergence, history, and development of the Basque National Party. It focuses on the documents of the Party's leaders, members, supporters, and similar organisations throughout history, worldwide, and focusses particularly on the fields of culture, politics, economics, and society.

The archive preserves a wide range of materials related to *Euskadi* [Basque Country], either under Spanish or French administration, and



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anything related to Basque culture or the Basque identity in general since the nineteenth century, regardless of the geographical area. Its fields of interest include emigration, exile, the Spanish Civil War and both World Wars, the underground resistance, and the anti-Franco movement.

The Archive's Document Collections

Basque National Party Collection

While the historical and current newspaper and bibliographic collections built up over the 30 years of the Foundation's activity are of great importance, the recovery and preservation of the archival documentation is the key feature that makes the Nationalism Archive unique. The most important series (and unique feature of the archive) are the collections comprised of materials dating back to 1936 and covering the four decades of the dictatorship, the Basque underground, and the Basques in exile.

The most extensive collection of the Basque Nationalism Archive is the archive of the Basque National Party, dating back to 1905 and featuring documentation gathered by the *Euzkadi Buru Batzar* or the EAJ-PNV National council. The collection (luckily) survived due to its preservation by Basques in exile.

Prior to the Spanish Civil War, the archive of the Basque National Party's executive bodies (*Euzkadi Buru Batzar*, *Bizkai Buru Batzar*, Basque General Secretariat, etc.), preserved, at its Bilbao headquarters, numerous documents from 1931 onwards: meeting minutes, session files, records of assemblies, correspondence with the local General Assemblies, members, and with satellite organisations of the party, such

as Basque Youth (*Euzko Gaztedi*) and the organisation of nationalist women (*Emakume Abertzale Batza*). The collection also holds electoral, political propaganda, financial documents, etc.



When the civil war broke out, this extensive archive was split up, plundered and partly destroyed, constituting in that sense a typical example of the fate of Basque political collections during the war.

After Bilbao was conquered in 1937, Franco's troops seized a significant part of the archive, transporting the documents (along with those looted from other institutions, private individuals, companies, etc.) to Salamanca. After 74 years of absence, these historical PNV documents were returned in the summer of 2011, and have been kept in the Nationalism Archive ever since.

During the war, another series of documents (comprised of the oldest ones) were hidden on the Spanish side of the border. They would remain concealed, along with other documents generated by the underground movement, until the mid-1980s. The documents included: the minutes of the PNV National Council (EBB) after the union of the *Aberrri* and *Comunión* movements from November 1931 until 1935, and minutes of the Bizkaia Assembly and Territorial Council (BBB), from 1930-1936. Other documents include, among others, PNV membership cards from the 1930s, Basque Government and Republic passports, reports, lists of people sentenced to death, of prisoners in different jails, of refugees and

people in exile, minutes of the Delegated Council and the Resistance Committee operating on the Spanish side of the border.

A final part of the archives was taken (and produced) into exile. The fortunes of the documents were the same as the people who produced them (exile, dispersion, etc) and are therefore testimony and evidence of what happened during those years.

After the Basque territory was brought under Franco's control in 1937, the EAJ-PNV's *Euzkadi Buru Batzar* moved its headquarters to Iparralde (the northern area of the Basque country under French administration), specifically to 'Villa Endara', in Anglet (near Bayonne).

The nationalist executive in exile made serious efforts to establish and maintain contacts between the refugees and those who were imprisoned or had gone underground at the other side of the border. It also tried to redefine and organise its duties as best as possible. Its actions were reflected in series of correspondence, minutes of meetings, reports on refugee aid and of the situation at the Spanish side of the border. They offer valuable insights in the executive activities in the Basque territory in France.

The EBB remained in Villa Endara for just four years. The German invasion of France in May 1940 with the Nazi troops steadily making their way towards the French-Spanish border, implied that the Basque leaders were forced to flee and to go into hiding once again.

Given the risk of the PNV-files being seized by the Gestapo and handed over to Franco's troops, the decision was taken to burn the most sensitive documents.

According to different accounts, it was because of the intervention of Ramón de la Sota, a Basque industrialist and shipowner, who offered to hide the collections in various some of the villa's he owned, that the destruction of the documents could be prevented. Apart from the archival collections, some furniture and the library of the EBB were also hidden on his property close to Biarritz.



Photo: 'Villa Izarra' (Beyris-Bayonne) the PNV's EBB headquarters from 1957 onwards

The end of the war and ensuing peace in Europe meant that the Basque National Party could act with greater freedom from Iparralde from 1945 onwards. Progressively, the nationalist leaders scattered throughout England, Iparralde and France, gathered together in the Beyris neighbourhood of Bayonne. 'Villa Antoinette' would be the new EBB

headquarters in exile from 1946 onwards, and all hidden documents were filed and preserved there.

At the new residence, and starting in 1947, the EBB would change the status and competences of its Secretariat, which marked the start of a period of great activity of upholding contacts and relations with not only its members on the Spanish side of the border, but also with the Basque government, with trade unions and political parties of the Basque Country, Catalonia, Galicia, Spain and other European peoples. The PNV's pro-European policy resulted into its representation on various international forums and PNV being a founding member of various movements of the new Europe like the NEI (New International Teams), the Christian Democrats or the European Movement. All that activity is perfectly reflected in the present EEB Secretariat archives.



In 1957, the archives of the nationalist movement were moved again – for the last time – to ‘Villa Izarra’, a mansion closely located to the previous residence and situated in the Beyris neighbourhood as well. For 20 years Villa Izarra would be the headquarters of the EBB, and it would be the EBB’s last residence in exile. It constituted the beginnings of what is now the Historical Archive of Basque Nationalism, as that villa inherited everything that had been kept in the previous residences, along with the reports, accounts, photographs, members’ correspondence, briefing notes, press cuttings from around the world, etc., generated over several decades.



Consequently, the Nationalism Archive contains documents on the structure and organisation of the Basque National Party from very different eras: one of expansion and legality, i.e. the Republican era (1931-1936), the time of the Basque underground and when action met fierce opposition (1945-1950), and a third, longer in time (1936-1975),

with the documents generated from Iparralde, covering all PNV's activities during exile, and which were collected and preserved in the archive of the EBB Secretariat. Among many other documents, we should mention the briefing papers on the 1947 and 1951 strikes in the Basque Country, the steps taken to raise money for the strikers, scripts and other materials of the first 'Radio Euzkadi', photographs or correspondence of the nationalist leaders with representatives of anti-Franco political groups (Companys, Tarradellas, Prieto, etc.).

These documents are closely related to other collections kept in the Meñaka Building in Artea (until 2011) and in our current premises (in Bilbao since then) and were obtained via private donations. Many of the latter are documents provided by relatives of EEB members or members themselves, local PNV organisations, and leading national or regional figures in the political party.

Along with the collections generated prior to the start of the PNV's political transition (within Spain and in exile), the Archive is also home to a large part of the documentation of the Basque National Party from the last 30 years.

Spanish document collections in the Basque Archive

The documents in the Basque Nationalism Archive include a series of Spanish collections, both from the Republican and Franco sides, generated between 1936 and 1940.

The presence and preservation of those archives at *Sabino Arana Fundazioa* dates back to the Spanish Civil War and the post-war years in France, consisting of the archives that the Spanish Recovery Committee in France seized between 1939 and 1944. The committee stored these archives at its premises, which were none other than those of the

headquarters of the Basque Government on Avenue Marceau in the French capital and which Franco's forces had unlawfully occupied.

In August 1944, only days prior to the liberation of Paris, Franco's supporters fled the building, leaving behind not only their own archives, but also the documents that they had seized earlier. After years of those historical collections being preserved in Paris, the Basque nationalist leaders finally decided to move them to Villa Izarra, the EAJ-PNV headquarters in Bayonne, in the mid-1960s.

In the summer of 1992, all documents preserved at the Villa Izarra, including more than 300 packages of Spanish archival materials dating back to the 1940's were deposited in Artea. Those documents include the archive of the Spanish Technical Committee, SERE documents, the archive of the National Committee for Aid to Spain, and the archive of the aforementioned Recovery Committee (1940-1944) which includes the correspondence between the head of the committee (Colonel Antonio Barroso) and institutions of the Franco Regime in Madrid and Burgos (ministries), the Paris Embassy, and German authorities.



The collections amassed by members of *Euzkadi Buru Batzar* during the war, within the Basque Country and in exile – on the relations with anti-Franco political forces, the Basque government, members, minutes of meetings, agreements, etc. – remains to be one of the most consulted series by researchers.

Relevant information

Document collections

- Archive of the Basque National Party
- Personal collections
- Archives of other institutions (political/cultural).
- Private donations.

Size: 4,500 installation units (approx.)

Book and Newspaper libraries:

Specialised in: politics (Basque nationalism and other ideologies), contemporary history, anthropology, law and social sciences.

Size:

- Monographs: 37,500 different titles
- Newspapers and magazines: 7,400 titles, with over 192,000 copies

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Archive consultation times (prior appointment recommended)

Monday to Friday: from 9.00 a.m. to 2.00 p.m.