

PROXY OBSERVER

SEÑALAMOS A LOS CULPABLES DE LA VIOLENCIA

REPORT: Madrid 20D - Police Repression, Press Harassment and Spain's Gag Law

Report prepared for:

Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe OSCE
Permanent Mission of Spain to the OSCE
Argentinierstrasse 34A
1040 Vienna
Austria

Prepared by: Emilio Esteban (Proxy Observer co-ordinator)

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INTRODUCTION:

As Spain's increasingly isolated government pushes forward with an unpopular and sinister "Gag Law", social movements continue to defy any attempt by Madrid's ultra conservative regime to silence them with authoritarian laws and heavy-handed police tactics. This report outlines the events of December 20th a day which saw peaceful protests across Spain being curtailed by police, with serious repression against the alternative press.

BACKGROUND TO THE PROTEST:

The 20D protests against Spain's Francoist Gag Law took place across the whole of the Spanish peninsula in approximately 35 cities. Barcelona saw the biggest protest with an estimated 3,500 people taking to the streets. The protest in Madrid too, was larger than had been expected by the organisers or the authorities. This report relates to the Madrid protest, as it is where *Proxy Observer* is based.

It should be pointed out, that a day before the 20D protest, Spain woke up to the news that the offices of the *Popular Party*, which forms the current government, had been the object of a car bomb attack.

This news event was distorted by the Spanish media, labelling the attack against the government building by a "ruined businessman", as a "terrorist attack", as opposed to political violence. A clear sign of a possible breakdown in law and order in Spain, provoked by government austerity cuts and repressive measures such as the "Gag Law".

THE ORGANISERS:

The list of organisations taking part in this event is longer than ever, with more than five organisations, Human Rights groups and political parties helping to organise an event which saw thousands of pro-democracy citizens take to the streets, in a last minute effort to stop the introduction of the most repressive piece of legislation since General Franco's dictatorship. Among the groups which contributed to the organisation of this huge protest were: [@Nosomosdelito](#) [@greenpeace_esp](#) [@info15m](#) [@PAH_Madrid](#) [@CGT](#)

LOCATION & DATE OF PROTEST:

The protest was scheduled for the 20th of December 2014. In the city of Madrid a social group known as *No Somos Delito* had arranged to gather at a large plaza in Ópera at 12 noon.

THE EVENT:

As expected by most activists, the key word for this event was "repression". What should have been a relatively straight forward and totally peaceful march, turned frighteningly tense at times due to police interference.

The signs of police repression were present even before people started gathering at the agreed location. Police numbers in the centre of Madrid was excessive and calculated to provoke fear among those gathered.

In the *Puerta del Sol* area, there were no less than three police vans and an equal number of patrol cars. The pedestrian area leading to *Ópera* was continuously crisscrossed by police cars, creating a sense of unease among tourists and locals.

Spanish police began turning up the heat with unwarranted ID checks, from the start of the protest and kept up the pressure to the very end of the protest, with the sole intention of creating tension and public alarm.

The march itself was chaotic. Police halted it at least twice and redirected it for no apparent reason, creating dangerous bottlenecks in narrow streets packed with Christmas shoppers.

In the most frightening of these incidents, the protest march was suddenly split in two by a cordon of riot police in *Callao*, leaving some protestors cut off from their friends and family on the other side of the police line.

This occurrence typified the unnecessary and dangerous provocations by police, and it was only the actions of the organisers (*No Somos Delito*) which prevented the situation from getting out of control.

HARASSMENT OF *PROXY OBSERVER*:

Proxy Observer's attempts to inform the OSCE, appear to be attracting the attention of Spanish police and, not for the first time, we are now firmly in their sights.

Spanish authorities are determined to stop our reporting activities, going so far as to illegally retain documentation from activist Emilio Esteban, as outlined in a [press release](#) we made public the day before the protest.

Not surprisingly, on the day of the protest, Emilio became the target of police harassment early on in the protest. He was subjected by police to a highly irregular ID check, and as expected, the police immediately threatened to take him to the police station.

The reason? "*Incomplete documentation*", the very documentation Spanish police had retained a day earlier, and which they have still not returned. *Proxy Observer* anticipates incidents such as this will become a regular feature at future protests, as police attempt to silence our monitoring activities.

POLICE PRESENCE:

Madrid's notoriously ill-disciplined "Puma" units (UIP) surpassed themselves at this protest. In a disgraceful display of disrespect for both the law and the taxpayers who pay their salary, many UIP officers turned up looking scruffy and unshaven. Some were even smoking in public.

So far this year, the regime in Madrid has spent 600,000€ equipping their "*antidisturbios*" (UIP riot police) with new helmets, shields and shin pads. But their illegally sized batons have not been replaced.

The reason for this was clear to see as Spanish riot police stood waiting for the arrival of protestors for the 20D protest, with their bent batons proudly on display. UIP *Puma* units are known to regard their bent batons as "trophies" which bare silent witness to their brutality during protests. The symbolism of these damaged batons is not lost on protestors, and most definitely has an intimidatory effect.

As usual, some police officers had their faces covered with scarfs, while many had no police ID numbers, a legal requirement for all police officers in Spain. This was a regular feature of this protest, with almost a quarter of UIP officers with missing ID numbers.

More worryingly, those officers who did comply with the law, displayed the required metal ID plaque, deliberately scratched, making it impossible for those who wished to report them for aggressions to read the numbers.

HARASSMENT OF THE ALTERNATIVE PRESS:

The attack against press freedom during this protest was two-pronged. First, the “official” press, which comes under the influence of forces which are contrary to the social movements (ie: the banks), simply ignored the protests, and instead continued talking about the “terrorist” attack of the previous day, hinting strongly that an opposition party known as *Podemos* was involved.

Secondly, Spanish police misused ID checks at strategic moments, to retain or distract journalists forcing them to lower their cameras and prevent them from filming police abuse.

It would not be inaccurate to say that during this protest, the alternative press came under constant “low-level” police harassment, to impede them from doing their job of reporting and recording the facts.

THE “FNAC INCIDENT”

As mentioned earlier, at one point during the 20D protest, riot police split the protest in two, leaving the head of the protest isolated behind police lines. At this point, it is reported that a fight broke out at the entrance of a large retail store called *FNAC*. (Proxy Observer did not witness anything)

The fight broke out between a security guard, and people who were trying to enter the store. The security guard was reportedly injured. *Proxy Observer* cannot confirm if those involved were protestors or shoppers who simply panicked and tried to escape the crush.

While it is true that Spanish police officers were not involved directly in this incident, it is also true that the panic caused in *Callao* by the actions of the police contributed to the panic and public alarm which led to this incident.

The *FNAC* incident should not be under-estimated in importance or significance. Not least because as well as the “Gag Law” Spain’s conservative government also intends to pass a new law called “*Ley de Seguridad Privada*”.

This new law effectively converts security guards into “para-policemen”, giving untrained security guards similar powers to the police. Under this law, local supermarket security guards will be able to act as policemen, but with no training and no legal control.

This new law effectively privatises the police, handing over the powers of the police to untrained, ill-equipped security guards, placing the public in grave danger as has already been seen in the *FNAC* incident.

INJURIES and ARRESTS

Unlike previous protests, the objective of the police this time was to frighten, rather than injure or arrest protestors. This obvious change in tactics, is resulting in less police violence, and could be said to be the result of international pressure.

However, during this protest it has become apparent that while the use of police violence has decreased, harassment against alternative journalists has increased significantly, possibly in an attempt to enforce Spain's new Gag Law, which prohibits the filming or photographing the police.

SECRET POLICE & INFILTRATORS:

The presence of secret police was noticeable in Ópera where protestors were to gather. There are no reports of secret police provoking trouble or acting as Agent provocateurs.

THE AUTHORITIES

It is evident from the outcome of this protest, that Spanish authorities are, on the one hand, softening their tactics of crowd control during protests, bringing them in line with international standards, quite possibly because of harsh criticism levelled against Spain's Gag Law.

On the other hand, Spanish authorities are increasing low-level (ie: non-violent) repression against ordinary citizens who wish to exercise their rights, including ID checks which usually result in a huge fine.

Harassment against journalists is now at its height. This worrying increase affects the way in which these events are reported, given that the "official" media rarely reports on social protests at a time when the government is most unpopular.

It is also now evident that state security forces have orders to curtail or prevent citizens' basic rights, such the right to protest peacefully and freedom of movement. This is evidenced by the fact that Spanish police prevented protestors from moving freely on 20D, as is the constitutional right of every citizen.

REPORT CONCLUSIONS:

Our conclusion from having observed this protest, is that Spanish authorities are trying to pull the wool over the eyes of the international community, by appearing to respect citizens' democratic rights and freedoms.

In fact, the opposite is true. While the dramatic images of large-scale police violence against huge crowds of unarmed protestors are now absent from social protests, there is an ominous increase in police surveillance, harassment and repression.

UIP units appear to have been “groomed” to seem more polite and less violent, but the use of fear tactics are now on the increase. Protestors and journalists are afraid of being identified and fined for participating in protests, or being taken to a police station where there are no cameras present.

The OSCE should remain alert and question this apparent “improvement” in Human Rights in Spain, a nation which still resembles a Franco-style police state in many ways. Spain’s Gag Law is proof of this. It is a law which is incompatible with democracy. The proof of the pudding is in the eating.

REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS

We recommend the OSCE apply pressure on Spain through international channels, to ensure that the forces of law and order comply with the law as regard proper ID to be displayed in public.

We further recommend the OSCE strongly condemn the illegal seizure of documents from activists, with the sole intent of detaining dissidents and preventing protests from being observed.

We recommend the OSCE raises the issue of police harassment of the press during protests, with the aim of obtaining a solid guarantee from the Spanish government that it will respect the right to report.

We suggest the OSCE outlines to the government of Madrid which aspects of police behaviour and protocol are incompatible with international standards, in an effort to ensure these are corrected.

Report dated: 28/December/2014

PHOTOGRAPHIC & VIDEO EVIDENCE:

Excessive police presence in Callao

http://proxyobserver.weebly.com/uploads/1/2/6/1/12613438/6848080_orig.jpg

Police officer with scratched ID number

http://proxyobserver.weebly.com/uploads/1/2/6/1/12613438/1688560_orig.jpg?592

Video <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5T7xXsimkGA>

Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=76ybUP2WRKE>

For more photographs and videos, please visit our web site:

<Http://proxyobserver.weebly.com>