

IFLA/FAIFE
World Report:
Libraries and
Intellectual Freedom



Spain

01-02-1999

8 April 1999, Patxo Unzueta, a columnist of El Pais, the most important Spanish newspaper, told that Herri Batasuna, the political party which supports the terrorist organisation ETA, in the Basque Country (Northern part of Spain), had proposed a motion in the council of Renter?a (a municipality in the Basque Country, with 41.000 inhabitants) in order to remove from the local public library the books in which "the Basque nation is denied to exist". The motion was not accepted, because Herri Batasuna does not have the majority in that town council, but the fact is worrying.

Population:	39,674,000 (1996)
GNP per capita:	\$ 4,860 (1996)
Government / Constitution:	Kingdom
Main languages:	Spanish - Basque, Catalan, Valencian, Galician
Main religions:	Roman Catholicism
Literacy:	97% (1995)
Online:	11,5 (Sept. 2000)

One of the most important librarians associations in Spain, ANABAD, is very interested in professional ethics. About two years ago it organised a whole seminar on this issue. And in its last national conference, which was held last April and whose main theme was "Information and citizens rights", one of the final conclusions is the "proposal of elaborating a deontological code for the practice of the library profession in a framework of freedom and independence, which guarantees to citizens the access to any kind of information".

There are no news of important cases of censorship in Spanish libraries during the period. In any case, the Constitution bans any discrimination by religion, ideology, sex, language, etc.

In relation with libraries, in some laws in elaboration it is explicitly prohibited that any library authority or librarian could prevent a user to access to library materials by religious, ideological or moral reasons except when this is determined by law.

The main problem for the access to the information in Spain today is rather that, despite important developments in several areas of library services, many municipal libraries should be reoriented from the stress in bibliographic heritage to become real local gateway to knowledge for well-informed citizens. On the contrary, for many municipal libraries the conservation of the collection remains more important than facilitate the access, and so collections become old and useless.

Nevertheless, it is awaited that some interesting developments that are being conducted in public libraries and the consolidation of the new legal structure of the country with responsibilities shared by central government, Autonomous Communities and Municipal Authorities, could put definitely on a safe way the future of public libraries and their role in strengthening democratic habits in society.