

## Groups Protest ETA Peace Talks in Spain

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By MAR ROMAN

MADRID, Spain -- Hundred of thousands of people, including relatives of those killed or wounded by bomb attacks by Basque separatists, packed the streets of Madrid Saturday to protest a government offer to hold talks with the armed group ETA if it renounces violence.

The demonstrators shouted slogans against Prime Minister Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero and his Socialist government and demanded the resignation of the government's ombudsman for victims of terrorism, Gregorio Peces Barba.

Zapatero says the time is right to seek talks with ETA, arguing that the group has been seriously weakened by a wave of arrests over the past two years and has not killed anyone since May 2003.

Under his offer, Zapatero said that if the group renounced violence, he would be prepared to discuss the fate of more than 500 ETA prisoners in Spanish jails and terms for the group to disarm. ETA has yet to respond.

ETA, whose initials stand for Basque Homeland and Freedom, has killed more than 800 people since beginning its violent campaign for independence in 1968. The group wants independence for the three-province Basque region in northern Spain, along the border with France.

People of all ages carried Spanish flags and banners with slogans such as "No negotiation in my name" and "We are all united with the victims." Crowd estimates varied widely and ranged from between 200,000 and 850,000.

"The government is taking a wrong way," said Maria del Carmen Fernandez, 60, who lost her husband in a car bomb attack in Madrid in 1981.

"Many people have died at the hands of these assassins, and the government is not recognizing our pain. We don't want to negotiate with the people that killed our loved ones," she said.

Survivors of ETA attacks led a march of politicians \_ including former Prime Minister Jose Maria Aznar and opposition leader Mariano Rajoy.