



Bilderberg 2010: Between the sword and the wall

The Catalan police are refreshingly friendly. But if the time for action comes, whose side will they be on?



Policing Bilderberg:

beneath the uniforms beat human hearts Photograph: Charlie Skelton for the Guardian
The enormous bald detective in beach shorts took the camera from my wife. "Let me see." He scrolled through the photographs, just taken, of me being detained at the campsite gates. He scrolled past, to see a photo of a limousine convoy, whooshing up the hill to [Bilderberg](#). "I don't like this," he said, and waved a huge, disgruntled hand towards the conference hotel.

"Do you know how much this is costing?" asked Hannah. "Do you think the Spanish economy can afford all this?" Grimly, the enormous bald detective started deleting images of his comrades with his giant thumb. "Your opinion," he growled, "is right."

He handed the camera back to Hannah. "But you've deleted my best shots!" The detective whistled to his comrades, who were busy sniffing a jar of salted olives they had found in my car boot. He had them turn around, facing away from the camera. "Go head," he rumbled. "Take photographs."

What a difference a year makes. Last year in Vouliagmeni when I tried covering the 2009 Bilderberg meeting, I had Greek policemen yelling "No fotografia!" at me at every turn. I was arrested, tailed, harassed, rearrested, yelled at, bundled into squad cars, lied to, intimidated, wrestled with and hounded round Athens like I was John Dillinger.

This year, the police have been deployed in the same extraordinary numbers, but they are smiling, rolling their eyes at the rigmarole; the riot police are giving the thumbs-up to protesters and honking their horns as they come round the "awareness roundabout" at the foot of the hotel.

"The police have been laughing and chatting," says Daniel Turon, a Spanish psycho-sociologist, here in Sitges to psycho-sociologise Bilderberg. "One of them said he had read a book about Bilderberg; another said, 'Yes, we understand.'" The Catalan police, he says, "have a different sensibility" from what you may expect. "They are Catalan. Their minds are independent."

Their minds, perhaps, have been focused by recent pay disputes. Two days ago, the police were on strike in Barcelona: they are facing a pay cut next month, as part of [Spain's](#) "austerity measures" (what the IMF calls "fiscal consolidation") – and

disgruntlement abounds.

Yesterday, the Spanish newspaper El Público quoted the Catalan police union's estimate, that "the mere deployment of the Mossos d'Esquadra entails costs of €150,000 for each of the four days of the Bilderberg meeting". This union has lodged a formal complaint about the misuse of resources in guarding Bilderberg.

El Público shares the union's concern: "The members of the Bilderberg club have not been elected by the citizens [of this country] in a democratic process, but the costs of the meeting is being met by them."

Ageing Bilderberg sleuth, Jim Tucker, says the Bilderberg group always reimburses the host nation for costs incurred. But if that's the case, the police are simply an army for hire.

Turon is keen to humanise the officers facing him: "Look at the eyes of the police," he says. "Look at the person who is there. They want to be with us."

"Your position is hyper-naive," laughs his friend, one of the organisers of the Spanish protests, Dídac S.-Costa. "They are puppets. They are nothing. They are a distraction. They are the cashiers at the supermarket; we need to confront the supermarket itself. This is a systemic problem." Dídac is a sociologist.

"We need to use the tools of the system against it. We need a brave judge, a brave lawyer. We need another Garzón" (Baltasar Garzón is the Spanish judge who issued the extradition request for General Pinochet). "We need to use the legal weapons at our disposal; to find a way, as the Spanish say, between the sword and the wall."

Ivan Torres, from Maresme (whom we met yesterday, near his roundabout bed), found himself caught last night between the sword and the wall, up in the hills above the Hotel Dolce Sitges. He was out with Rafa Palacios, the founder of the Stop Secrets Movement, trying to stop some secrets. A spotter on the hotel roof saw them crawling along; minutes later a police helicopter arrived, and officers swarmed the hills to arrest them. The policemen looked at the cameras, looked at the footage, then handed it back undeleted.

Ivan and Rafa were brought before the comisario of the Sitges police. The comisario told them frankly what he thought of them. "We admire you," he said. "We are really sad because we don't want to have a confrontation here." And, like his giant bald underling from earlier, he gestured to the hotel. "I don't like these people. All I want is a smooth operation in Sitges. The people up there," said the comisario, "I really don't like."

Rafa says that on Thursday, as police and activists squared off for the first time and as Rafa took the megaphone, it was this same comisario who stood in front of the cordon. "You have a heart under your badge", cried Rafa, "you have a brain under your hat. You are the ones we will be drinking with after the football, not the ones up the hill!"

Rafa reached out his hands towards the cordon. People who witnessed his speech say this moment defined the subsequent dynamic between the protesters and the police. "You should be protecting us, not them!" Rafa implored. "We are the people. You are the people. You are one of us!"

Rafa says he spoke directly to the comisario when he said: "A time is coming when you may be asked to use violence against us. A time is coming when you will have to choose sides. You will have to decide." And Rafa says he saw tears in the eyes of the comisario.

"I think, my friend, that I touched his heart."

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