

BASQUE NEWS

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At the inauguration of the 3rd Conference of Basque Communities

The Lehendakari encourages Basques to take bold steps in order to seek recognition in the world

The Lehendakari Juan José Ibarretxe encouraged Basques to work resolutely in order to gain “recognition as a people in their own right”. Ibarretxe conveyed this idea during the inauguration of the 3rd Conference of Basque Communities which was held in mid July in Vitoria-Gasteiz and which was attended by almost 150 delegates and representatives of the 134 Basque Centres distributed among a total of 21 countries, who answered once again the call of the Basque Government to celebrate their four-year meeting.

At the opening ceremony, the Lehendakari stated that “we must not allow anyone, in the name of globalisation, to try to play down the importance of a people who have existed for more than 7000 years, or allow the world to lose a 1000-year-old

language, Basque, the oldest language in Europe”. After rejecting the violence of ETA and regretting the “damage this does to the image of the Basques”, Ibarretxe proposed the Basque should convey to the world “what we really are, a peace-loving and hard-working people and not that stereotype of violence and confrontation they are trying to give us, on some occasions in an interested manner”.

Professor Gloria Totoricagüena, who has dedicated her professional life to studying the Basques all over the world, also spoke at the inauguration. In her talk, she proposed a “transnational and cosmopolitan Basque identity” and said “the fatherland and the Diaspora are plural. We admit to being, and are proud of it, a heterogeneous Diaspora, from our experiences in Europe to the

Americas, Australia or the Philippines. Therefore, with even more reason, we must help each other on this voyage”. Nevertheless, for this professor from Boise, it is essential “to remember and understand our common past” in order to “update and reinvent our identities”. “Ethnic identity”, she pointed out, “is a social construction and new circumstances require new concepts; each generation must reconstruct its own existence”.

Finally, G.Totoricagüena advocated promoting traditional and also contemporary “Basqueness” as, in her opinion, it would be an error to confine Basque identity to a single period in time, “be it the Euskal Herria of the future or the Basque Country of the past, which no longer exists and persists in the imagination of the Diaspora”.

This year, the Basque Government allocates 1.4 million euros to the Basque Diaspora

This year, the Basque Government expects to allocate almost 1.4 million euros to aid packages for persons of Basque origin scattered throughout the world, as well as the Euskal Etxeak and its Federations.

Half of this aid, almost 771,000 euros, will be shared among the 134 Basque Centres, and will be used to finance totally or in part their running costs, maintenance and staff, as well as the cost of new investments and the organisation of programmes and activities.

Moreover, the Basque Government has earmarked 610,000 euros for young people belonging to the Basque communities in Latin America. This aid aims to improve the training of their younger members, as well as reducing the situation of clear inequality suffered by the citizens of some of these countries, which are currently in the throes of a serious economic crisis. Through these aid packages, any person of between 18 and 40 years of age will be able to travel to the Basque country in order to participate in university master programmes, diploma courses and vocational training courses. These aid packages will cover accommodation and living costs and, if appropriate, up to 100% of their registration fees.

The rest of the aid, amounting to almost one and a half million euros, will be used for humanitarian purposes, being earmarked for the almost 1800 Basques who live outside the Basque Country and who, according to a survey conducted recently among the ex-patriot Basque community, ordered by the Secretariat for External Actions of the Basque Government, find themselves in a situation of extreme need.

The Conference examined the case of the Irish, Jewish and Armenian Diasporas

The cases of other Diasporas of great economic and social weight both in their countries of origin and in their countries of adoption were analysed in several talks presented at the 3rd Conference of Basque Communities. Thus, professor Alberto Spektorowski of Tel Aviv University analysed the role of the Jewish Diaspora in the consolidation of the Hebrew nation and presented an overview of its past and present. Spektorowski's talk focused on basically on an analysis of the influence of the so-called Jewish lobbies in different countries, fundamentally in the United States where these groups are extremely important.

His talk included a look at the Jewish associations that operate in the United States and have such a great deal of influence in the North American Congress and Senate as well as in the White House itself. This influence has strengthened over recent years as a consequence of the events of September 11 2001, leading to the current "honeymoon" between the United States, Israel and the Jewish community in America, according to Professor Spektorowski.

In his talk, he also provided other samples of countries such as Argentina where Jewish organisations do a large amount of work in order to conserve Judaism as a living force and to help future immigrants to Israel, especially at times like today when many people

are leaving the country for economic reasons.

The Armenian case

Another of the cases tackled at the Conference was the Armenian Diaspora, described in a talk by professor Razmik Panossian, who presented a report on the current situation of the communities that form part of the so-called "official" or "Western" Diaspora, i.e., the one that embraces the America continent, Europe, the Middle East and Australia.

The fact that only 28.8% of the Armenian population is resident in their own country is eloquent proof of the importance of these communities. The rest of the population is scattered throughout the world, especially in the old Soviet republics. This Diaspora is made up mainly of a population in exile (due to the genocide practiced during the First World War) and is well organised, affluent and very efficient. Currently these communities face major challenges such as maintaining their identity far from the motherland and strengthening their ties with it. They must also resolve a number of linguistic problems, due to the fact that these communities do not use Armenian, and there is also the question of their relations with the local population. For professor Panossian, these challenges are not unlike those faced by the Basque Diaspora.

In brief

■ **Urazandi Project.** The history of the 15 most representative Euskal Etxeak can be found in a collection presented at the Conference under the title URAZANDI. A total of 16 volumes (15 on paper and another on DVD) trace the history of these centres based on the documentation that they themselves have provided, such as magazines, the minutes of meetings, brochures, circular letters, photographs, recordings of statements, local newspapers, etc.

■ **At the inaugural ceremony of the Conference** participants paid tribute to the founders of the centres in Argentina, Isidro Legarreta, Julio Baqueriza and Andoni Irazusta (posthumously); de Centre in Chile, Eukeni Gallastegui, Luis Basauri, Pedro Leguina and Pedro Oyanguren; in Mexico, Javier García Urriaga and Gregorio Blasco; in Venezuela, Izaskun Etxearte; and United States, Martxel Tillous as well as the priest zuberotarra Aita Martxel. Moreover, during the Conference, Xabier Medina received the Andres de Irujo 2002 prize for his research work entitled "Basques in Barcelona".

Forty-nine young people are doing a course in the Basque Country designed for the managers of Basque Centres

“We must get young people to come back to the Euskal Etxeak”

“Young people have stopped coming to the Euskal Etxeak”. This is one of the most widespread statements uttered by the managers of Basque centres distributed throughout the world. Moreover, it should be added that for many years now, there has been little migration from the Basque Country, making it much more difficult to find younger persons to take over from the current managers of the Euskal Etxeak.

In order to study the future of these centres and to draw up new strategies in order to secure the greater involvement of new generations, a total of 49 young persons, most of them belonging to centres in the United States and South America, travelled to the Basque Country one week before the Basque Communities Conference was due to start, in order to take part in a training course designed for the managers of Euskal Etxeak and organised by the Basque Government. After completing the course, these young people took an active part in the Conference, with the presentation of a number of talks on the role of young people in Basque communities and presented a joint proposal for a four-year plan.

One of those attending the course, Luis Foncillas Etxebarria, is one of the few young persons in charge of a Basque Centre. Since January this year, he has been President of the Euskal Etxeak in New York, with more than 100 families. He arrived at this city of skyscrapers nine years ago and for several years he has taken an active part in



For one week, the young people of the Basque Diaspora analysed the current situation of the Euskal Etxeak and their future.

the work of the centre. “It is necessary to attract young people,” he said, “because the future of the Euskal Etxeak rest firmly on their shoulders. We have seen that this problem is common to all Basque centres. Now the challenge is to secure the involvement of new generations. This is not an easy task because young people today pursue a large number of activities including Internet and videogames”.

The Government commissions a survey in order to determine the profile of Basques living abroad

This survey will allow a list of potential beneficiaries of social aid to be drawn up

The General Secretariat for External Actions of the Basque Government, called the Atzeus Registry, which was presented at the Basque Communities Conference, has commissioned a survey in order to determine the profile of persons of Basque Origin residing outside the Basque Country.

The fieldwork was done during January and May of this year and includes 12,780 questionnaires of the 25,000 sent, corresponding to persons of Basque origin, resident in 83 countries. This Register will provide information on the current place of residence of Basques living abroad as well as their socio-demographic situation (marital status, number of children, educational level, purchasing capacity, occupation, knowledge of

languages, etc.) and will be used to draw up a list of potential beneficiaries of social aid that may be provided by the Basque Government.

The questionnaire includes a number of curious details such as the fact that the oldest person of Basque origin is a woman born in the Basque Country 100 years ago and who currently lives in Argentina (home to the largest group of Basque emigrants). The youngest is a child of scarcely four months old, born in Venezuela. The average age of those who completed the questionnaire is 47. Most of them are second-generation emigrants (36%) compared to 30% first generation and the rest are made up by persons belonging to the third generation, i.e. the grandchildren.

Likewise, of all those persons who

have successfully completed their formal education, 61% of those surveyed have completed high school and vocational training and 31.6% have a university qualification. Only 2.2% have no qualifications. Most of them (97.3%) speak Spanish very well, 26% have a good command of English, 10.2% speak French and 7.1% have a good knowledge of Basque.

The questionnaire makes reference to their economic situation: the average income per residential units is 479.31 American dollars, and in terms of employment, 37.5% of Basques living abroad are employees, 18.8% are pensioners, 18.6% students, 9.2% are engaged in housework, 9% are unemployed and 4.2% are either retired or disabled.

Basque communities propose an expansion of their four-year plan

One of the priorities of Basque Centres for the next four-year period is to strengthen inter-institutional relations and to spread the image of the Basque Country throughout the world. This is one of the objectives set out in the four-year plan drawn up by the Conference in which it proposes a policy of growth "and not only subsistence" because "just like any other institution, Basque centres are destined to grow or disappear".

This plan, which must now be adopted by each of these centres with the undertaking to make its own proposals to the Basque Government, consists of three sections: institutional relations, image abroad, communications and culture.

In order to strengthen institutional relations, an up-to-date database with information on individual members, rather than as a family group, is an essential requirement. Moreover, it is proposed to create a personal identification card recognised by the Basque Government for all members, the creation of a common image for the Diaspora with its own logotype, the registration of the name "Zortzigarren Herrialdea" (8th territory), the establishment of Diaspora Day and the institutionalisation of the Aberri Eguna in all Euskal Etxeak. Likewise, the training of young managers and the incorporation of women into the managerial structures of these centres is considered to be absolutely essential for their future.



Boise dance group at the reception in Ajuria-Enea.

Their inter-institutional programmes give priority to the provision of aid for members who find themselves in great need, and to do this, these centres will make a proposal to Parliament and to the Basque Government in order to draw up regulations and specific programmes of social aid.

With regard to their image abroad, Basque centres wish to encourage relations between their different centres as well as with the Basque Country. To do this, an Association of Friends of the Basques and a network

of cooperation and communications via Internet and the new technologies will be created.

The section that deals with cultural issues defines the Euskal Etxeak as maintenance, teaching and dissemination centres of Basque culture and the Basque language and emphasis is laid on access to documentation on history, geography and genealogy, especially through the new technologies, as well as the dissemination of traditional, and especially contemporary Basque culture. Also, they intend to gain the recognition of Basque sports and for these to exercise an active role in the federations of each country, contributing to the strengthening of sports federations in the Basque Country and to their recognition at an international level.

Basque centres demand a spirit of dialogue among politicians for peaceful coexistence

Representatives of Basque centres drew up a declaration in which they asked "for all political leaders in the Basque Country to initiate a process of dialogue - the only valid instrument to resolve differences and conflicts - in order to secure democratic coexistence as well as the economic and social development of our people". The declaration defends the idea that "in a true democracy the right to decide its own future corresponds to the Basque people, based on a scrupulous respect for the will of the majority of citizens of the territories that make up Euskal Herria".

The text of the declaration condemns "any kind of violence and, of course, the violence of ETA" and demands its immediate cessation. It also states that "violence does an enormous damage to the personal and social life of Basques, as well as our collective image in the countries in which we live".

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