

BASQUE NEWS

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Pascual Maragall, on the day he was appointed, together with the socialist leader José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero and the Secretary General of Ezkerra Republicana, Josep Lluís Carod-Rovira.

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Maragall, the new President of the Generalitat (Catalan Government) says that he will consult the Catalan people over reforms if Madrid does not respect them

Catalonia begins the path towards reforming its system of home-rule

The President of Andalusia joins those asking for a change to home-rule

The political arena in Spain has been thrown into confusion by the Catalan elections. Although it was the ruling coalition, led by Jordi Pujol and in power for the last 25 years that actually won the elections, the opposition parties have managed to reach an agreement to govern which has led to the socialist candidate, Pascual Maragall, becoming the new President of the Generalitat.

The new government is comprised of three parties: the Catalan Socialists, Ezquerra Republicana and Iniciativa per Catalunya, which is the Catalan version of Izquierda Unida (the United Left). The most striking new element in this agreement between left-wing parties is the presence of Carod Rovira's party, a political organisation that is traditionally republi-

can and pro-independence. It openly defends that Catalonia should be a State. In fact, the new Speaker of the Parliament will be a republican and, in a display of political normality, was the person who had the task of meeting King Juan Carlos to tell him about the appointment of the new President of the Generalitat. On leaving the meeting with the King, Ernest Benach remarked that the King had said "it's good to talk".

Many regarded this statement as stark contrast to the refusal by Aznar's government to talk to the Basque President (Lehendakari) or to the new leaders of the Generalitat. During his investiture speech, Pascual Maragall said that if the Partido Popular did not change its way of going about things then "problems were sure to ensue"

and underlined that the new Government is going to start reforming Catalonia's Statute of Autonomy to provide the regions with a greater degree of home-rule. The new President has made it quite clear that he does not want to break anything, but that he will be leading a change to the Statute and that if the Madrid government ignores the home rule reform approved by the Catalan Parliament, he will organise a democratic consultation of the public for their opinion.

The new leaders of the Generalitat have not hidden their sympathies towards the Lehendakari and the new Catalan President has said that he will meet with the King and immediately afterwards, Juan José Ibarretxe, before organising any meeting with President Aznar. →

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The new agreement to govern Catalonia is similar in content to the proposals made by the Basque President for the Basque Country. Those organising it envisage that the new Statute will be approved by Spring 2005.

They define Catalonia as a nation and advocate a National Agreement on home-rule and financing for Catalonia that all political parties would be prepared to accept. If Madrid decides to block the process "the Catalan public will be asked to express their opinion using the general consultation process that is deemed most appropriate".

The new Catalan government believes that "the constitutional consideration of the Generalitat as a State" has not received sufficient recognition so far and advocates the creation of a Supreme Court of Catalonia that would take on the role of dealing with appeals, something that is currently carried out by the Supreme Court in Madrid. It also promotes the use of Catalan and the recognition of Catalan national teams in sporting events.

The agreement reached for governing Catalonia states: "Federal development of the constitutional and statutory agreement should guarantee a widening of home-rule which must appropriately articulate a diverse Spain and should recognise Catalonia as a nation".

The agreement also contains a proposal for preparing a new model for financing Catalonia that is similar to the ones that the Basque Country and Navarre currently have. The proposal maintains that Catalonia have direct access to the institutions of the European Union when dealing with issues that lie within their power.

"We will aim for the most fitting project that we can aspire to. Many things will change in our wish to be ourselves" said Maragall the day that he took up his post in the Generalitat shortly after inviting everyone to share a "new patriotism" in Catalonia.

Josu Jon Imaz, who up until then had been the Basque Government's spokesman, and who had been elected Chairman of the PNV on the previous day, went to the swearing in ceremony of the new Catalan government and pointed out that Catalonia has the right to reform its home-rule and that the Catalans have the right to decide how they want their political future to look.

The Andalusian President, Mr. Manuel Chaves also joined those asking for a reforming of home-rule of the autonomous regions in Spain and announced that he will be asking for greater economic and fiscal powers.

Basque companies consolidate overseas

Basque companies are continuing their international expansion policy and several of them are taking part in industrial projects of major economic importance. Such is the case of Gamesa Aeronautica which is planning to open factories in Brazil and the United States, with a twofold objective: to double their business in the medium term and to get closer to their customers. In fact, Gamesa will be setting up its plant in the same town that the Brazilian aircraft manufacturer Embraer (their main client) has. What is more, Gamesa has plans to get nearer to another of its customers – Boeing- and to do so will set up a factory in the United States.

The other major Basque company working in this sector, Industria de Turbo Propulsores – ITP, has recently signed an agreement with one of its shareholders, the British multinational Rolls Royce, for the exclusive designing and building of a turbine specifically for larger-sized aeroplanes.

Meanwhile, the co-operative company Fagor Industrial, has announced its intention to enter the Turkish market where at the beginning of the year they will start building a factory which initially will manufacture cold-chambers and tables for the hotel and catering industry. The company already has a factory in France and is looking into expanding into Eastern Europe.

News in brief

■ **Basque companies concentrate on quality management.** Basque companies have been concentrating on continuous improvement, learning and innovation for several years now to become more competitive. Proof of this is the recently-obtained recognition of four Basque companies during the awarding of the European Quality Prize, the most prestigious prize awarded for organisational excellence.

■ **The Inasmet Technology Centre** is preparing the immediate delivery of a sophisticated laboratory called Tribolad which will be installed in the Columbus module of the International Space Station. Tribolad's mission will be to study the behaviour of lubricants and mechanisms in orbit.

■ **The Basque Country reached its tourist record** in 2003 by receiving the largest number of visitors in its history. At a general level, the number of overnight stays has increased around 8% in comparison to the previous year. The majority of those who visit (around 70%) are from other autonomous regions in Spain, and leading the list are people from Madrid, followed by Catalans and those from Castilla-León.

■ **Basque companies have the highest productivity levels in Spain,** according to the conclusions of a study by Adecco which compares the working situation in six autonomous regions, using variables such as occupation, market adaptability, job creation and profitability. This same study shows that the Basque Country is, together with Andalusia, the Autonomous Region where there has been a biggest drop in youth unemployment, and where female employment has grown most.

Ibarretxe and Rousset demand that Madrid and Paris make a commitment to finance this railway

The Basque Country and Aquitaine demand that the High Speed Rail Link be built

They ask that the Dax-Vitoria axis be included once again in the EU's list of priorities

Basque institutions are campaigning that the Madrid government support the Basque part of the High Speed Rail Link, the so called "Basque Y", so that it can be included once again in the European Union's priorities. Recently, Mr. Juan José Ibarretxe, the President of the Basque Autonomous Region and Mr. Alain Rousset, President of the French region of Aquitaine, signed an institutional declaration at the border town of Irun to ask for the Dax-Vitoria-Madrid section of the High Speed Rail link (that includes the Basque "Y") to be built by the year 2010. Once this document had been signed it was sent to the European Commission and the Spanish and French governments.

The event was backed by over 200 people from the Basque Country and Aquitaine, including the President of the Gipuzkoa Provincial Government, the President of the Atlantic Pyrenees General Council, the chancellors of all the Basque universities, the Presidents of the Chambers of Commerce, provincial politicians and mayors from towns on both sides of the border. Their presence, together with the Presidents of the Basque Country and Aquitaine was aimed at visualizing a common concern, which is to get this project (which is considered as a priority if there is to be a connection with Europe) re-included in the EU's list of priorities (the so-called Quick Star)

During his speech, the Basque President said that both the Basque Country and Aquitaine need the Dax-Vitoria line to improve the welfare of their populations and added that it was not the time now to try and find out who was behind the "outrageous"



The President of Aquitaine, Alain Rousset and the Basque President, Mr. Ibarretxe signed a declaration in support of the High Speed Rail Link.

idea of excluding this project from the Quick Star "since now the European Commission and the French and Spanish governments are trying to lay the blame on each other" but to work towards being re-included in the list. The President of Aquitaine also defended the High Speed Train and labelled as incomprehensible the fact that, after the tremendous progress that had been made and with the financial backing available and the work on the Hendaye-Irun platform already started, the whole of this line had not been approved.

A lack of political will in Madrid

Ever since it was known that the Dax-Vitoria line had been left off the list of European Union priorities, the Basque Government, and more specifically its Transport Department, led by Alavaro Amman, has been publicly complaining about the very limited interest shown by the Madrid Government in

defending at a European level the Basque Y, in fact to such an extent that the central government would seem not to even want to do this project. What is more, Vitoria has warned that if the work does not start in 2004, it will not be finished by 2010 and therefore there will be no European financing because the EU will be concentration on the countries that have recently joined.

The Basque Government believes that the Basque Country may suffer a downturn in its economy if it does not have a high-speed rail link, since without this link the Basque Country will only be very weakly tied to Europe (and the Mediterranean corridor will be strengthened) which is why the Basque Government is willing to search for its own means of finance "if Madrid does not have sufficient money in its budget for this project". The Basque "Y" will be the largest investment in the history of the Basque Country, and will cost a total of 3,000 million Euros.

A group of “universal Basques” visits Ajuria Enea

A large group of Basques who live and work outside the Basque Country were recently received by President Ibarretxe in Ajuria Enea during their stay in the Basque Country. They were all members of another group comprised of approximately 50 people whose work, dedication and spirit have led to their inclusion in a book entitled “Universal Basques”, which is a collection of interviews that has been published weekly in DEIA newspaper since last February.

Those who came to Ajuria Enea included José Mari Bengoa, who is the group’s senior member and whose work as a doctor and Nutritional Director at the WHO has meant he has travelled to 60 countries, Javier Etxebeste, Managing Director of Yahoo Europe, Mikel Prieto – a surgeon at the Mayo Clinic in the United States, Modesto Lomba – the fashion designer, the pianist Ainhoa Urkijo, José Antonio Dorronsorro- member of the opposition in Guinea, José María Tápiiz – a teacher in Osaka (Japan), Gloria Totorika-güena- a lecturer at Reno University (Nevada) and Manu Lezertua, head of the anti-crime division at the European Council. There were some other important Basques missing from the event such as the journalist-Iñaki Gabilondo, the film director – Antonio Mercero, the soprano – Ainhoa Arteta, the photographer – Alberto Schommer and others who weren’t able to come to this event, organised by Deia, because



of their professional commitments.

They were all warmly welcomed by President Ibarretxe, since, in his own words “we Basques have always been warmly welcomed wherever we go, and by the same token, we have also been equally prepared to welcome those who have come to us”.

During another moment in his speech, Juan José Ibarretxe pointed out that the coming together of these Basques was a true reflection of the fact that “over and above Manichaen opinions that talk about good Basques and bad Basques, the Basque person is somebody who represents a way of going about things properly. As the group’s veteran, José Maria Bengoa defined the meeting as “a magical event full of hope” and encouraged

the Basque President to carry on working towards peace.

The Kursaal and the Euskalduna, voted the best Conference Centres in the world

Basque Conference Centres are to be congratulated. In the space of just a few months the Euskalduna Conference Centre in Bilbao was voted the “Best Conference Centre in the World – 2003” and the marketing strategy developed by the Kursaal Centre in San Sebastian, which amongst its other functions, is the seat of the International Film Festival, was also chosen as the best in the world. The Euskalduna received the award from The International Association of Conference Centres which appraised the building’s quality, exhibition areas, level of technical installations,

Congress preparation, participant satisfaction, catering and physical location. The award, which is called the “Apex Award” is the highest that a Conference Centre can receive. The Kursaal Conference Centre has had its work rewarded with a prize for the best marketing strategy, given by a total of 700 companies that work in the field of conference tourism. The award was given in the Korean city of Busan and the video that supported the Kursaal candidacy included an appearance by the Korean Real Sociedad footballer Lee Chun Soo, who is an idol in his country.

The most comprehensive data base on Basque issues is set up

Since the end of last year, the most comprehensive data base on Basque issues in the world has been up and running. Under the heading of Eusko Bibliographia you can find over 100,000 unpublished documents that were collected together by the bibliographer from Bizkaia Jon Bilbao over a 60 year period. These were then given by his daughter to the Bizkaia Provincial Government. These documents, of incalculable academic worth, in this way can become a vital working tool for researchers and people interested in Basque issues, who would like to know more about anything related to the Basque Country.

More specifically, the over 100,000 entries included in the web-site can be consulted in Basque, Spanish, English and French and cover the period between 1981 and 1994. Anybody interested in taking a peak should access

www.bizkaia.net