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The Lehendakari and his ministers just before the first Government meeting after the summer break.

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The Lehendakari starts the political year by saying he will see out his term of office

Ibarretxe: "The coming months are going to be decisive in the future of the Basque Country"

In December the Basque Parliament will be voting on the draft New Statute tabled by the tripartite government

According to the Lehendakari (Basque President), Juan José Ibarretxe, over the coming months the Basque Country will be facing one of its most intense political periods since the return of democracy. During a long speech to the media after the holding of the first cabinet meeting since the summer holidays, Ibarretxe was upbeat about the new political term which now begins and which he ventured would be "tremendously important for the future of the country since it would lay down the foundations for a new plan of co-existence between the Basque Country and Spain".

The President announced his intention to stick to the timetable envisaged for the debate in the Basque Parliament on the draft for a new Statute for the Basque Country, which is due to be voted on by the parliamentary groups

the coming month of December, as well as the idea of bringing this parliamentary session to a normal close and calling elections for the coming spring. Ibarretxe made an ironic comment on the –in his view– paradoxical situation in the Basque Country. "We are the only country" he said "that already has a series of names for candidates to the presidency – showing a merit worthy Olympic spirit (referring to María San Gil for the Popular Party (PP) and Patxi López for the socialists (PSE) and yet no elections have yet been called. At this point he called to the other political leaders "not to become nervous" and defended "carrying on working every day" and gradually covering different stages. "For the first time we have a Bill of law in parliament and the road ahead has been drawn up. There are no excuses for

anybody. We are going to debate, vote and decide upon our future" he declared.

A debate in parliament and not in the media.

During another moment of his speech, Ibarretxe referred to the proposal for reforming the Statute put forward by the Basque Socialist Party and said that he would support debating it and discussing its as long as it was tabled in the Basque Parliament "and not in the media, which is what has been done". The Basque socialists have announced their intention to reform the Statute to include, amongst other aspirations, the transfer of social security from central government, with a view to presenting the text within its electoral programme at the next autonomous elections. ➔

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The decision not to transfer this proposal for reform to the Basque parliament for debate was criticised by the President who called it mere “electioneering” and was very categorical when he said that “we will debate your proposal if it is raised in the appropriate place, which is the Parliament, but if it is only debated in the media we will not”.

Ibarretxe also criticised the stance taken by the current central government, lead by Rodríguez Zapatero which he accused of only respecting and giving legitimacy to those debates on statutory reform being held in parliaments controlled by socialists, as is the case in Catalonia and Andalusia, whilst he denies this self-same right to debate to the Basque Parliament and society. His appearance before the media was also used by the President to repeat his conviction that the current three-party government (PNV-EA-IU) is a good government for the Basque Country since it represents the central nature of Basque society and is what the immense majority of Basque people want for the future of the Basque Country – a country “free of tension and extremes”

Finally, in reference to recent attacks perpetrated by ETA in its “particular summer campaign” along the Cantabrian coast, the President, after expressing his solidarity towards and “maximum friendship” with Cantabria, Asturias and Galicia once again demanded that the terrorist group disappear and was categorical when stating that “however many barbaric acts ETA carries out, they will not prevent us from deciding upon and debating the future of this country at a political level”. Hence, he repeated his commitment to get the consultation on the draft for a new Statute to be held at a time when there is no violence.

Zapatero raises false expectations amongst Sestao’s shipyard workers

The Basque government has lodged a public complaint against the decision of the Madrid government to “sacrifice” the Sestao shipyard in order to save other shipyards around Spain in view of the serious crisis that the other shipyards in the Izar group are going through. .

In his recent visit to Bilbao in mid September, to attend an event proclaiming the PSE’s new candidate to Lehendakari, President Rodríguez Zapatero spoke to the Sestao workers and told them that the company’s future and order book were both guaranteed. However, Zapatero’s promises were questioned a few hours later by the Basque Government’s industry Minister, Ana Agirre, after holding a meeting with those in charge of SEPI (a publicly owned company which runs the shipyards). During the meeting, SEPI maintained its idea of apparently separating civilian and military shipyards and setting up a new Publicly Limited Company “New Izar” which would not include the Basque shipyard. According to the minister “SEPI is even talking about technical bankruptcy, predestined death, liquidation and selling off of assets and the impossibility of contracting in work, when the objective reality is they have still not put forward

any industrial plan, nor have they made any effort to search for any kind of private investment”. The way Ana Aguirre sees it, SEPI’s plans mean that the Sestao shipyard “comes off worst of all, which is why she demanded that Madrid revoke this decision at the same time as calling “unacceptable fraud” the central government’s talk of privatization.

The Basque Government’s President and spokesman have made repeated offers to collaborate in solving this problem which they believe must include maintaining the Basque shipyard. Workers’ representatives called the meeting held with the people in charge of the state-run company “frustrating and excessively tense”, since it does not reflect Zapatero’s promise to guarantee the continuity of the company and they announced that mobilizations would be stepped up. “ Despite the fact that unions will take a responsible line when calling their protests –they said- it is very difficult to control workers’ feelings of frustration”.

As SEPI’s plans were made known, criticism from both trade unions and political parties began to rain down on the President of the central government whom they accused of “deceiving” the workers by creating false expectations.

The Basque Country- where it’s at in the world of air freight

The Basque Country has recently hosted what is considered to be the largest trade fair in the world, exclusively for air freight, where over 900 managers from companies in the sector from all five continents and over 5,000 professionals met up. Entitled Air Cargo Forum 2004, the event was used to make Basque airports known around the world, especially Foronda airport, on the outskirts of Vitoria, which is mainly used for goods transport. The Vitoria airport is the third in Spain as far as load capacity goes and has surpassed the 50,000 tons of freight per year mark. Those in charge of the main airports of the world, together with the chairmen and managers of the main airlines, aircraft-building companies and transport and logistics companies attended the fair which is held every two years and which this time had a record number of people attending it.

The Lehendakari took part in Catalonia's "Diada" (national day)



The Lehendakari became one of the stars at the events held to celebrate the Diada (Catalonia's national day) which is traditionally held on the 11th of September. The day before,

Mr. Ibarretxe went to the town of Bellpuig in Lerida to read a commemorative manifesto and to attend the awarding of the "Star and Fog" prizes given by the town's (which only has 3,700 inhabitants) local council. The Star prize recognises the work of people and institutions who promote Catalan culture and language and the Fog prizes are given to those who have made their efforts in completely the opposite direction.

This year it was the Lehendakari's job (because he had been awarded the Star prize the previous year) to write and read a manifesto in keeping with the occasion. A great deal of expectation was raised since he was sharing the stage with the chairman of the Barcelona football team, Mr. Joan Laporta (who was also awarded the Star prize in 2004). According to the "Periódico de Cataluña" paper, Mr Ibarretxe used his good command of Catalan to recall the figures of President Lluís Companys and Lehendakari José Antonio Aguirre who in 1939 went into exile together, as an example of the "fraternal relations which still exist between Catalonia and the Basque Country" and the total respect that the decisions taken by the Catalan people will always have in the Basque Country. When the event finished, Ibarretxe had no hesitation in singing *Els Segadors*, the hymn of Catalonia.

Catalonia and the Basque Country: two sister nations

A summary of the manifesto read by Juan José Ibarretxe

A Catalan saying basically states that families are made. Catalonia and the Basque Country are two nations, two sister peoples that over the last two centuries have used each other as a reference point.

If just one picture could represent this mutual relationship it would be a cold day in the winter of 1939. The place would be a mountain pass in the Catalan Pyrenees and the main stars would be two men, two leaders.

A friend of the Basque people, Lluís Companys, who in August 1937 received, with open arms and an open heart, our President, Mr. José Antonio Aguirre, the Government of the Basque Country and hundreds of Basque citizens who had to leave their homes and start the long road into exile. A bitter road which he too would have to take, together with his people when crossing the Pyrenees together with the Lehendakari.

The image of José Antonio Aguirre, coming from Paris, to accompany

President Companys during his departure from Catalonia is one of the most tragic moments of the history of the Catalan nation. This 4th of February 1939 is an excellent image of this fraternal relationship between The Basque Country and Catalonia, Catalonia and the Basque Country.

But they were unable to crush the Catalan nation, just as they were unable to crush the Basque Country. Companys and Aguirre's ideas, that are common to many other men and women of their generation, served as a reference point to those who during the darkest times of Franco's regime never stopped hoping they would recoup their personal and collective freedoms. Today they still serve as an example of how to exercise those freedoms and develop them at the same time as exercising tolerance towards the ideas of others.

Catalonia is a nation. The Basque Country is a nation and we will never be what the Basque and Catalan peo-

ple do not want to be. We will not allow anyone to deny us our personality. Because it is perfectly possible to take part in projects at a Europe-wide or State level at the same time as making greater inroads in to our identity as a people. Accepting what is universal whilst contributing something of our own, but nobody will ever be able to do away with what we are: a people, a nation that wants to live alongside others whilst being ourselves.

We have to speak clearly both in politics and life. That is why I want you to know that the Basque Country will never take part in a project of joint co-existence with the State, if it is not done of its own free will, because the Basque Country is not a subordinate part of Spain. Tomorrow is Catalonia's national day and from the bottom of my heart I say...

Anem por feina!
Ekin gogor lanari!
Visca Catalunya

A last goodbye to the tree of Gernika

Initial work aimed at permanently removing the current tree of Gernika started this summer at a emotional event attended by the Lehendakari (who was given a branch of the old oak tree), the President of the Basque Parliament and the President of the Bizkaia Provincial Government (as well as other dignitaries). For several years the tree had been suffering from a fungal disease which only left 11%

of its organism functioning. The whole process to replace the oak will finish after Christmas. Between now and then the rest of the branches will have to be pruned and the trunk cut. Afterwards, the heart of the root will be removed and used to complete the tree's scientific history, the ground will be cleared and new earth laid so as to plant its replacement – a 15 year old descendent of the tree.

Venice awards a prize to Bilbao's urban recovery



The urban recovery process carried out by Bilbao Ría 2000 was awarded the special "Water Cities" prize at the Architecture Biennial held in September in Venice. In fact the company was invited to take part in the section on regeneration plans for maritime and river environments. This has allowed Bilbao to show to the world all the work that is being carried out on both sides of the Nervion estuary including the Guggenheim Museum, the Euskalduna Conference Centre and complete recovery of the Abandoibarra area.

The Biennial's organisers gave a special prize to the formula used to set up Bilbao Ría 2000 – a public company – which all the local authorities and some companies have had a stake in for nearly 12 years.

A Basque delegation led by the Mayor of Bilbao, Iñaki Azkuna, went to Venice, even though they were surprised at being awarded the prize. "We weren't expecting it but it has been a great recognition" he said after collecting the award from the Mayor of Venice.

In addition to the Bilbao project, up until November you will be able to see exhibits of the urban regeneration projects carried out in Alexandria, Hamburg, Athens, New York, Seoul, Yokohama and Venice itself.

The film festival awards him the Donostia Prize

Woody Allen premieres his latest film in San Sebastian

The world première of Woody Allen's latest film "Melinda and Melinda" marked the opening of the San Sebastian International Film Festival. Great expectation surrounded Mr. Allen's presence in San Sebastian with locals anxious to get a closer view of the director of such emblematic films as Annie Hall, Manhattan, Take the Money and Run, Hanna and her sisters, etc...

With the awarding of the Donostia Prize and the screening of a retrospective of all his work as writer, director and actor ever since he started out almost 40 years ago until today, on this occasion the Festival wanted to pay homage to the New Yorker "as a fundamental figure in modern cinema".

In addition to Woody Allen, the red carpet was also rolled out to receive Annette Benning and Jeff Bridges who were similarly awarded the Donostia Prize

Gernika "A city for peace"

Gernika has been awarded the "Cities for Peace" price which is given every two years by the UNESCO to those towns that can prove they have worked specifically towards a peace culture. The jury recognized the town's symbolic nature as a city that, after having been brutally bombed, had managed to overcome its pain to become a world reference point for peace and reconciliation.

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