

BASQUE NEWS

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Moments after the new Act was presented, the Lehendakari talks to a group of students from the Idiazabal school who are working alongside Emakunde in the struggle for gender equality.

CONTENTS

▼ A MONTH IN THE BASQUE COUNTRY

Basque tourism breaks its second record.

The Boulevard in Vitoria – the best in Spain.

page 2

▼ GETTING TO KNOW THE BASQUE COUNTRY

The Government puts forward an ambitious plan to face up to the challenges of the 21st century.

page 3

▼ KEEP A LOOK OUT FOR...

Joane Somarriba receives the Universal Basque Prize.

National Geographic includes the Guggenheim as one of the most important buildings in the world.

page 4

The Bill for gender equality is passed

The Basque President encourages men to get more involved in equality

The Basque President, Juan José Ibarretxe encouraged men “to get more involved in the fight for gender equality” and to foster positive discrimination in favour of women in all fields; politics, the administration, business, culture and the media. Ibarretxe reiterated this idea during the presentation to Basque society of the Gender Equality Act which had recently been passed by the Basque Government. The Bill, which has been sent to the Parliament for approval, is the result of the contributions received from wide sectors of society to the text prepared by the executive and has as its objective to provide a backbone for equality policies and to lay down the regulations and basic principles that should govern the intervention of

different Basque administrations, The Lehendakari (Basque President) believes that it is vital to get Basque men involved in this struggle since, as he said “if we do not build an equal world, there will be neither democracy nor human development”.

The presentation of this initiative, which is unique in Spain, took place in an event that was held in the Presidency building and was attended by the majority of the members of the Basque Government, associations and groups that support gender equality, members of the Basque parliament and a large group of pupils from a school in Gipuzkoa that works hand in hand with the Basque Institute for Women, Emakunde. It was precisely the director of Emakunde, Txaro Arteaga, who in

her talk defined this new Bill as an “essential tool for our community to carry on taking firm steps towards a society comprised of men and women who, on an equal footing, can fully develop as people, outside traditionally very limiting roles”

The creation of an Office for the Defence of Gender Equality

One of the issues raised by the Bill presented by the Vitoria Executive is an equal number of men and women in the lists of candidates put forward for Basque elections, as well as in the make-up of decision-making bodies in professional, business, economic, union, political and cultural associations and organisations. →

(Continued from Page 1)

What is more the Basque administration will work towards reconciling personal, family and working life by fostering joint responsibility with men in family tasks and responsibilities, together with greater flexi-time at work and economic subsidies to companies who develop these measures.

A special mention was made in the new text of violence against women, also known as "gender violence" which in the words of the Lehendakari "is the most perverse and horrifying side of inequality".

In the case of gender violence, the law stipulates the obligations of Basque institutions, such as offering victims of domestic violence shelters and at the very least one emergency immediate shelter in each of the 3 Basque provinces. Victims will also be given preferential treatment in the allocating of public housing and the institutions will be obliged to take steps to guarantee their geographical mobility and safety.

In its awareness of this problem, the Basque Government has recently launched a campaign against domestic violence and sexual abuse. In this case the campaign was aimed specifically at immigrant women. Part of the campaign involved publishing 6,000 leaflets in English, French, Arabic and Chinese with information on what to do when one is a victim of domestic violence together with the inclusion of the telephone numbers and addresses of the social services which a person can call or visit.

In addition, and for the first time in the whole of Spain, the idea of creating an Office for The Defence of Gender Equality is considered (a sort of Ombudsman for Equality) which would be attached to Emakunde and where any member of the public or group who believed they had been discriminated against for reasons of gender, could make a complaint. The functions of this body would include research, facilitating negotiation, making recommendations to people and organisations, referring complaints to the competent institutions and bodies and analysing and assessing the degree to which anti-discrimination regulations are met. Any person or organisation that is investigated by this office will be obliged to collaborate – and if they refuse to do so, the new Act will provide the office with the ability to sanction.

Basque tourism breaks its second record

In recent years Basque tourism has been going through a true "tourist boom". In fact so much so that tourism has become a driving force in the economy of some areas. Such is the case of Bilbao which has seen how international operators and major hotel chains (such as the Sheraton, etc.) have set up home in the city. The so-called "Guggenheim effect" and the appearance on the market of new, low-cost airlines has led to a complete revolution in the number of visitors who are increasingly coming to the Basque Country for leisure reasons. Leisure tourism has knocked business tourism off the top spot in Bilbao, which had been more traditional until recently. At the end of the 90s seven out of every ten people coming to the Basque Country, did so to visit one of the trade fairs or many conferences

that are organised. Now this tendency has seen an about turn and it is leisure that encourages visitors to come to the Basque Country.

The Basque Country's attraction for people from other areas of the country and overseas is plainly seen in the figures. So far this year the number of visitors has gone up by 10% in comparison to the previous year which was record-breaking in its own right. If this trend continues, 2004 will be a year in which records will still be broken with over a million visitors, at a time when there has been a general downturn in this industry at a State level. What is more, the increase in visitors has led to a significant increase in the number of hotel beds. In the last 11 years the number of available hotels has increased by 78%, from 191 in 1992 to 341 at the end of last year.

In brief

▶ **Good results in the Basque Aeronautics industry.** The Basque aeronautics industry managed to increase its turnover last year by 10%, despite the crisis which this sector is going through around the world. What is more, this year's prospects look set to record an increase in sales of 3.5%. The excellent performance of Basque companies in this unfavourable international climate has been to a large extent due to its participation in the A380 Airbus programme – a plane that is known as the "Superjumbo". Now that the 2002 downturn in sales has been overcome, the outlook is for a recovery of the industry in 2005 or 2006.

▶ **The Boulevard in Vitoria – the best in Spain** Vitoria's Boulevard shopping centre has been named as the best of those opened in Spain in 2002-2003. The decision to award this first place amongst shopping centres was based a great deal on the "commercial mix" or ability for different operators to fit in to one single space and offer a balanced and mixed range of products. Another factor that was taken into account when awarding the prize were the access roads to the shopping centre (which is located on the land occupied by a former steel mill) which are very well-located for visitors from outside Vitoria, as well as the finish of all the buildings and the percentage of available surface area that is occupied.

The Government puts forward an ambitious plan for the next 10 years

Basque culture gets ready to face up to the challenges of the 21st century



A feasibility study for a young dance company is one of the things envisaged by the plan.

So as to make sure that Basque culture is in a situation in which it is able to “face up to the major challenges of the 21st century” (these are the words of

Miren Azkarate, the Basque Government’s Culture Minister) the Basque Government has recently presented its Basque Culture Plan. This is an ambi-

tious document, which a group of 35 experts have participated in and which has been helped with the opinion of 300 professionals, representing different artistic areas. The Lehendakari had committed himself to preparing this ambitious plan, which aims to run up to 2015 and commissioned it to the Basque Culture Board.

The result is a long-term strategic plan with specific task indicators up until 2015, although it will be specified with the planning of actions for the 2004-2007 period, that will be implemented by annual plans. In fact, for the remainder of this year, the Basque executive has envisaged a total of 1.3 million Euros that will be aimed at the setting up of structures that will allow the development of the plan, including the Basque Culture Observatory. This new body will have the carrying out of studies on the situation of handcraft industries, plastic arts, museums, dance, theatre, the audiovisual sector, heritage, books and libraries and the digitalisation of cultural contents as its main mission.

In the longer term the plan envisages other initiatives such as the holding of an International Conference on Cultural Policies, a campaign to promote reading and library use, computer adaptation of the museum network and the feasibility of a literary magazine.

Some of the things envisaged within the plan

Performing Arts

It is proposed that there be a feasibility study carried out of choreographic centres and a young dance company, as well as the creation of a stable dance programme circuit. What is more, improvised verse creation and musical and drama productions will be supported.

Audiovisuals

A great deal of investment

is foreseen in this sector, much of which will be channelled through EITB (Basque public sector radio and television). What is more, public radio stations and television channels will become the means for disseminating the products of the Basque culture industry.

New technologies

The idea of setting up a Basque National Archive is put forward, together with

the development of public service web-sites, the digital publication of everything published by Basque institutions and the creation of public spaces in the new networks and a Basque cultural portal.

Heritage

The Plan includes the drafting of two new laws – one for museums and one for libraries. They will be accompanied by a plan for museums, a Board and a

Basque library system and the definition of a National Historic Archive.

Basque

Cultural products in Basque will be promoted which will lead to the annual production of films and TV movies. Other plans include the development of free software in Basque, overseas promotion of literature and greater use of translation.

National Geographic includes the Guggenheim as one of the most important buildings in the world

The North-American television channel National Geographic has included the Bilbao Guggenheim Museum in a documentary about emblematic buildings and called it "the most impressive building in the world" In the documentary, which will be broadcast in 47 countries, the Basque art gallery is compared to another six buildings that arouse the admiration of the international community of architects, because of the tremendous complexity of their construction. In addition to the Guggenheim, the list of buildings prepared by the channel includes the Sears Tower in Chicago (one of the tallest in the world), Euro tunnel (that links France and Great Britain under the English Channel), the Arab city of Dubai (an oasis of sky-

scrapers in the middle of the desert), the reconstruction of the bridge at Mostar, the Mina Tau Tora in South Africa and the Rolando Rehegan aircraft carrier. The documentary was presented in the actual museum, and at the event, the museum's director, Juan Ignacio Bidarte, thanked everyone for all the praise that this building designed by Frank Gehry has received and indicated that during the seven years since it was built, the Guggenheim had become a "visual icon of the transformation process that Bilbao is going through and that it had provided the whole of the Basque Country with international projection". As an example of this, he highlighted the fact that 70% of visitors come from overseas.

Bilbao will have a rally like the one in Monte Carlo

After two years of negotiations, the streets of Bilbao, will become the place for a car race which, together with the Monte Carlo one, will become the only urban circuit where the World Series by Renault Championship will be held. The agreement that has been reached between the Bilbao Town Council, the Bizkaia Provincial Government and those in charge of Renault Sport Technologies and RPM Racing guarantees that Bilbao will be hosting one of the world championship trials at the end of July next year. It was also play host to other automobile trials up until 2007.

In this way Bilbao will become the only capital in the whole of Spain to play host to the greatest high-speed sporting spectacle after the popular Formula 1.

Saveurs d'Europe pays homage to Basque gastronomy

The prestigious French Association "Saveurs d'Europe" has decided to pay homage to the cuisine of the Basque Country, including that of the French Basque Country and to do so has recently awarded several prizes in different categories to people from the world of Basque gastronomy. And hence famous figures such as Juan Mari Arzak, or groups such as the cheese-makers of Idiazabal and products such as kidney beans from Tolosa or txakolí (young wine) from Getaria and others received a "Marianne" from this association at an event held in San Sebastian. In addition to them, restaurant-owners, producers and chefs from several French-Basque restaurants were awarded prizes.



Somarriba, Universal Basque for 2003

The cyclist from Bizkaia, Joane Somarriba stepped off her bicycle for a moment to go up on to the podium that proclaimed her Universal Basque, 2003. The sportswoman was awarded this important prize given by the Basque Presidency and Caja Laboral for her sporting and personal achievements and for her contribution towards promoting the image of the Basque Country around the world. Very emotional at receiving the prize and with her close family members and several guests, Joane said that receiving the Universal Basque Prize was "greater than all the successes that she had achieved so far" and what is more was "the greatest honour" for a Basque person. The cyclist, who has won three Tours de France, two Italian Giros and one world time-trial has announced that she will be retiring after the world championships to be held next year in Madrid.

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