

BASQUE NEWS

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After learning of Batasuna's proposal the Basque Government, through its spokesperson Miren Azkarate, demanded that the coalition show courage by distancing itself from violence.

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Batasuna thinks that only political and democratic approaches will work, but it stops short of distancing itself from street violence

The Government attaches value to Batasuna's new proposal and calls on ETA to abandon violence

The Basque Government considers the new political proposal by Batasuna (previously Herri Batasuna) to be "a positive step forward" and publicly calls on ETA to state before Basque society that it definitively renounces the use of violence as a means of achieving political objectives.

This appraisal by the Basque Government comes two days after Batasuna (which is currently illegal) made a long document public in a well-attended rally in Donostia-San Sebastian in which, among other commitments, the pro-nationalist coalition defends "the use of exclusively political and democratic means", although the text does not demand that ETA abandon the armed struggle.

Despite considering "the goodwill" of the proposal as positive, the Government is of the opinion that there

are still major gaps in it and has demanded "a clearer attitude and forcefulness regarding the violence of ETA" from Batasuna. For the tripartite Basque Government, Batasuna "must show greater political courage to recognise that future relations between the Basque territories depend on the wishes of Basques living in the Autonomous Community of Euskadi, Navarre and Iparralde (the northern Basque Country)."

Nevertheless, just a few days after the new proposal a new outbreak of the so-called "kale borroka" (struggle in the streets) occurred, with sabotage mainly directed at political party offices and local council property, together with the placing of fake bombs under the cars of several political representatives of the Basque Autonomous Community and Navarre. Faced with

this intensification of street violence, all the parties insisted that Batasuna must explicitly condemn these attacks, a demand that was answered by the coalition through a communiqué accusing the parties of committing "an irresponsible act" by continuing with "the strategy of condemnations and irresponsible demands".

As a result, the Government considers that the present moment is particularly important regarding the debate on the Proposal for a New Political Statute, already presented in the Basque Parliament, because "if we all defend a scenario where there is no violence and we all commit to only use political and democratic channels we do not think it will be possible for anyone - including Batasuna - to deny that the Basque people should be consulted to decide our future". ➔

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Otherwise, asks the Government, how will they tell their followers that they refuse to carry out a democratic consultation, regardless of whether Batasuna asks for the vote to be Yes, No or Abstention regarding the Proposal that the Basque Parliament may approve?

Expectations and then disappointment in political parties

The announcement, made several days in advance, that the pro-nationalist Left was going to present a new proposal created great expectations among Basque political parties, which hoped for an explicit distancing from violence and from ETA. However, at no time did Batasuna demand that the terrorist organisation lay down its weapons, which was highly disappointing for the majority of the parties. The Partido Popular acknowledged “an effort in the language” by Batasuna but considers “that there is no democratic content that can be detected” and both Eusko Alkartasuna and Ezker Batua consider the text presented by the coalition as “insufficient, incomplete and disappointing” owing to a “total absence of self-criticism and lack of courage”. The Socialist Government in Madrid, for its part, does not see “anything that is worth listening to” because the proposal does not “clearly and categorically condemn violence”, so it is in favour of continuing to fight ETA through police work and the Courts.

In any case, Batasuna's proposal has livened up the political debate and has opened up a process on the future of ETA that the Lehendakari considers “irreversible”. Speaking in Madrid before a large group of foreign correspondents, Ibarretxe claimed that “the door of non-violence has been opened and it is clear that it cannot be closed again” in the world of Batasuna and ETA, because “it is a process in which there is no way back”. For the Lehendakari politics has clearly won the battle against violence “and this opens up areas of dialogue at a tremendous speed”.

Euskadi and Aquitaine set up a logistics and transport platform

The Basque and Aquitaine governments have recently signed an agreement that gives legal status to the Euskadi-Aquitaine Logistics Platform, whose objective will be the promotion of this Eurozone as “the Atlantic Gate to Europe” in the field of transport and logistics.

The signature of this agreement, considered by the Basque Government as “the founding act of the Euskadi-Aquitaine Euro-Region” will allow the defence of common interests before Madrid, Paris and Brussels and drive for-

ward a series of actions to offset the problem of road transport congestion suffered by the Pyrenean area, with a commitment to sustainable and quality transport.

For this purpose, the Logistics Platform will work on the implementation of the so-called maritime (between the ports of Bilbao and La Rochelle or Nantes) and rail ‘highways’ (the aim is to transport trucks on high-speed trains between Euskadi and the south of Paris) to absorb part of the goods traffic that the roads of both regions support on a daily basis.

In 2020 one third of the Basque population will be over 65 years of age

According to a study by the Basque Government on the economic and social consequences of population ageing, one third of the population will be over 65 years of age by 2010. The same survey reveals that young people (0-19 years of age) will represent just 17% of the total in the same year. The report sees the phenomenon of population ageing as one of the most important changes that the Basque Country has undergone in recent years, meaning that in future there will be a need to strengthen health care for older people in hospitals and primary care in order to respond to the needs of this sector of the population.

The EU approves a number of agricultural proposals by the Basque Government

The European Union has given the go-ahead to a wide-ranging package of agricultural and support measures for rural areas presented by the Department of Agriculture of the Basque Government. Present forms of assistance have been discussed in meetings between the Regional Minister of Agriculture and the EU Commissioner for Agriculture, a process that the government considers “essential when it comes to implementing agricultural policies that are the exclusive competence of the Basque Government and the EU”. Among the measures approved are a premium for young people starting to farm and assistance to improve basic services for the population, the development of towns and villages in rural areas, the promotion of tourism, the installation of micro-companies and the diversification of activities.

Euskadi shows the highest increase in worker productivity

Together with Madrid, Euskadi is the Autonomous Community with the highest productivity per worker, according to data from a study by Caixa Catalunya covering the 1995-2002 period. Specifically, these two Communities exceed 35,000 euros of gross added value per worker employed. These figures are in line with another study presented last summer by Adecco, according to which worker productivity in the Basque Autonomous Community grew at the fastest rate in the Spanish State. In the second quarter of this year productivity improved by 2,4%, well above the figure of 0.7% for the previous year, in contrast with the stagnation shown by other autonomous communities in the country

Social cohesion, innovation and sustainable development: budget targets for the Government

The proposed Basque budget for 2005 is 7,117 million euros

Guarantee economic growth, improve social solidarity and cohesion, balance the budget, increase public investment, make progress in terms of the Information Society and promote sustainable development: these are the basis behind all the measures taken by the Basque Government over the last five years.

This approach has been adapted to the current situation and has been reflected in all the budgets presented throughout the present legislature. These guidelines have served to deal with the recent contraction of the economy on a world scale, despite the fact that the Basque economy is closely tied into foreign markets and is therefore (and has been) affected by this contraction.

Indeed, in recent years Euskadi has shown sustained and upward growth rates (2002: 1.7%; 2003: 2.5%; 2004: 2.7% –this last figure being an estimate for the year–), and has reduced its unemployment rate to 8.2%. Vis-à-vis 2005, and bearing in mind the existence of elements of uncertainty on the international scene (the price of oil, geopolitical conflicts...) that may have an effect on the duration and intensity of this phase of prosperity, estimates point to the economy growing by 3% (a higher rate than nearby countries) and put unemployment in 2005 at 7.9%, on a level with the average for the

European Union.

The economic recovery consolidates

The consolidation of the recovery of the Basque economy will be mainly characterised by the positive contribution of exports and a rally in domestic demand, particularly in investment in capital goods. This ties in with the reactivation of industrial activity in Euskadi, with the construction sector slowing its rate of expansion. Finally, private domestic consumption in the Basque country remains stable, which is reflected in the expected evolution of the service sector.

In the light of the above scenario, and within its proposed Budget for 2005 of 7,117 million euros (7,662 million euros if public companies and entities are included), the Government aims to make a further contribution to the reactivation of our growth through its commitment to innovation and competitiveness of the economy and the sustainable development of Euskadi, and also to the solidarity and cohesion of Basque society.

To this end the Budget will maintain the level of public investment and will continue to work on the redistribution of expenses with the aim of guaranteeing the high degree of social integration that already exists in Euskadi. One

figure illustrates the situation: in 2002, 700 of every 1,000 euros were spent in the social area, and four years later the figure will be 720 per 1,000 euros (5,121 million euros, 71.95% of the budget).

60% of the Basque budget for 2005 will be allocated to the Departments of Health and Education

The aim here is to consolidate our efforts in the area of social expenditure, thus enabling the Public Administration's contribution to maintaining the recovered rate of growth of our economic activity.

An example of the commitment to social cohesion through the Budget in the current legislature is that in 2005, as in previous years, the Departments of Health and Education will receive the largest allocation, almost 60% (58.9%), with a higher percentage increase against the 2004 figure. With a 7% rise the Health Department will be above the average increase in expenditure (6.8%), and Education will receive 5.3% more than last year.

Self-government = Welfare

In the light of the above figures, it can be said that in this legislature Basque society has reached the highest levels of welfare and economic growth since self-government was reinstated. The figures back this up. In Euskadi there are 4,000 new companies in comparison with four years ago, we have gone above the average level of income in the European Union, we have increased our per capital GDP by 3,635 euros to 22,200 euros per inhabitant (the highest figure in our history), spending on R&D has multiplied by 20 in the two last decades, we have the highest number of organisations and companies with quality certification, we

are at the top of the ranking in the Spanish State in terms of Internet users, new research centres have been set up, productivity is around 10% higher than the European average, and we are the only Autonomous Community in the State that has approved a Sustainable Development Strategy with objectives and specific plans up to 2020. In many cases this level of progress and achievements are the results of the lines of action mentioned above. They have meant that the contribution of Basque institutions has made a decisive contribution to a better quality of life for each and every person who lives in Euskadi.

Euskadi signs the United Nations Millennium Declaration



Euskadi has lent its support to the United Nations Millennium Declaration, whose principles include freedom, equality, tolerance, solidarity, respect for the environment and common responsibility. Lehendakari Ibarretxe signed the document of adherence to the Declaration in the name of all Basques in the presence of Eveline Herfkens, Coordinator of the Millennium Objectives Campaign. Euskadi thereby assumes the objectives stated in the Declaration, which was signed by 189 Heads of State and Government in a General Assembly of the United Nations held in 2000.

The text contains a number of goals and objectives, some of them with a horizon of 2015, which can be sum-

marised as: the fight against poverty and inequality, the promotion of Justice, equality between individuals, sexes, races and peoples, consolidation of democratic values, access to education, health and drinking water, tolerance and peaceful co-existence between cultures and, finally, the promotion of sustainable development that cares for the environment.

Through this signature Basque society as a whole takes on these commitments as its own and assumes the values stated in the Millennium Declaration as a guideline to design "our political modus operandi, both in our actions abroad and our internal policies in each of the affected sectors", said the Lehendakari.

Ibarretxe supports literary creation as a way of creatin

Lehendakari Juan José Ibarretxe recently awarded the Euskadi 2004 Literary Prizes, instituted by the Basque Departments of Culture, during a ceremony held in the Lehendakaritza in which the figure of the recently deceased writer Martin Ugalde was present throughout. In his speech, Ibarretxe paid a warm tribute to the creator of the first

modern stories written in the Basque language and recalled one of Ugalde's famous phrases: "freedom is what makes us free". The Lehendakari also spoke in favour of literary creation, saying that it, together with translation, serves as "a bridge to bring us closer to others from a standpoint of difference and diversity". The Navarrese writers Jokin Muñoz and Eduardo Gil Bera were this year's winners in the category of Literature in Basque and Literature in Spanish, Jesús María Olaizola from Zarauz won the Children's and Youth Literature Prize and the Literary Translation award went to Antton Garikano, a translator from Tolosa.

The marshland of Jaizubia, recovered after 200 years

The sea has returned to the marshes of Jaizubia, in the Bay of Txingudi, after two hundred years thanks to an environmental recovery plan implemented by the Basque Government in recent years. The Jaizubia area between Irún and Hondarribia thus becomes the largest wetland in Gipuzkoa and the second in the Basque Autonomous Community after Urdaibai. Visitors will now be able to enjoy paths around 3 kilometres long to get to know the flora and the fauna of the area, which includes herons, ducks, egrets, coots and cormorants.

Donostia-San Sebastian, international gastronomy centre

Once again Donostia became the centre of international cuisine, with the Kursaal hosting the 6th "Lo Mejor de la Gastronomía" Congress, which brought together many of the best chefs in the world. They demonstrated the latest culinary developments and secrets to more than 3,000 people who work in the sector. A new feature this year was the 1st 'Congress of Chocolate', in which experts in sweets and desserts presented their works of art. In parallel to the presentations and papers, the Kursaal was home to over 100 stands with companies presenting wine, food and other related products.

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