

# BASQUE NEWS

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*Ibarretxe's presentation of the achievements and future challenges of the Basque Government and its road map for peace and political normalisation lasted more than two hours.*

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**At the General Policy Debate, which opens the new term of Parliament**

## **The Lehendakari calls on the citizens of the Basque Country to voice their opinion and announces a referendum for October 2008**

**Ibarretxe sets out his road map for the coming months, which includes the holding of elections following the referendum**

October 25 2008 is the date set by Lehendakari Ibarretxe for the referendum to be held in the Basque Country, either on the political agreement reached with the Spanish government or on the manner in which the problem is to be resolved should the Madrid government refuse to initiate the process of dialogue and negotiation proposed by Ibarretxe to President Zapatero.

The Lehendakari made his announcement during the General Policy debate held at the end of September, when he also indicated that, following the referendum, elections would be held "whatever the result".

During his talk, Ibarretxe pointed out that, in view of the fact that both ETA and the Spanish government had gone back on their word, his responsibility was to place the "key to a new scenario for solution" in the hands of Basque society, and presented a "clear" road map "with specific political consequences."

"I refuse to tell society that there is no solution or that we are not capable of finding one, nor do we accept the argument that due to the fact that ETA broke its ceasefire, there is no other solution and it is necessary to penalise the dialogue between parties and even persecute this through judicial channels",

Ibarretxe warned. He went on to say that "he did not accept the viewpoint that political initiatives must be put on hold until ETA gives us permission to do so, by declaring whatever kind of ceasefire or truce".

The Lehendakari went on to insist once again on the validity of the new Political Statutes, passed by absolute majority in the Basque Parliament and subsequently rejected by the Congress of Deputies in Madrid, highlighting their great importance "as a legal-political instrument, which will remain in force until another proposal, submitted and approved with more votes, replaces this by democratic means". ►

## Road map for the peace process

(Continued from page 1)

The steps and political consequences referred to by the Lehendakari are set out in a road map consisting of four stages:

### ► Offer of a Political Agreement to the President of the Spanish government

Based on the principle of a rejection of violence and a commitment to exclusively democratic means, a respect for the wishes of Basque society, and a commitment to incorporate this recognition and its exercise in the legislative code.

.....

### ► June 2008. Plenary session of the Basque Parliament

In order to endorse this Agreement and authorise a binding referendum for its ratification; or to authorise a referendum that would lead to a process designed to resolve the situation.

Should Parliament not give its permission to carry out either of these two referendums, the Lehendakari would call elections.

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### ► October 25 2008

Referendum to ratify the Agreement with the Spanish government or to enjoin the Spanish government and ETA to begin the process of dialogue in order to achieve a definitive end to the violence (provided that beforehand ETA expresses its wish to abandon terrorism) and instruct Basque political parties to open a process of negotiation, without exclusions, and to reach an agreement for political normalisation concerning the right of the Basque People to decide their own future and the framework of internal and external relations which they wish to maintain.

Dissolution of Parliament and the calling of elections.

### ► Second half of 2010. Process of negotiation and Referendum

Should the referendum to ratify the agreement or to instigate the process of negotiation have a positive outcome, ETA and the Spanish government would, on the one hand, open a process of dialogue to seek an end to violence and, on the other, Basque political parties would begin a process of negotiation in order to reach, within a previously established timeframe, an Agreement for Political Normalisation, which would be ratified in a binding referendum to be held during the second half of 2010.

## Vaccination for preventing cancer and an increase in pensions

Although the announcement of the road map for the period leading up to 2010 occupied most of the attention of journalists and guests, the Lehendakari dedicated a large part of his two-hour-long speech to providing details of a series of initiatives and social, health and economic measures that the Basque Government plans to put into motion over the coming months.

In the field of health, Ibarretxe announced the financing of a vaccination for the prevention of cancer of the neck of the uterus, a programme to respond to specific women-related conditions and a plan to reduce waiting lists for the consultation and diagnoses of specialists and to ensure that these do not exceed a period of 30 days.

Moreover, Ibarretxe undertook to convert the Basque Country into the first Community to provide less-well-off widows and pensioners with an additional amount of benefit, up to 100% of the minimum salary.

Moreover, the Basque Govern-

## A leading country

In another important section of his speech to Parliament, the Lehendakari set out the economic achievements obtained during recent years as well as the major challenges for the future, among which he highlighted his determination to convert the Basque Country into a European model in the field of innovation. Aided by a large amount of statistical data, Ibarretxe underlined the fact that in 2006, Basque GDP increased 4.2% above the Spanish and European average, marking 13 years of uninterrupted growth. The per capita income of the Basques is the third highest in Europe, after Luxembourg and Ireland, and unemployment, which has reached levels as high as 25%, currently stands at 3.4%. Only Denmark and Holland have lower unemployment rates.

According to the Lehendakari, in terms of well-being and, using the same methodology as the UNO to measure the Human Development Index of a country, in other words, in terms of the income levels per inhabitant, education and life expectancy, the Basque Country would be among the first five countries in the world.

ment will create and guarantee a fund to cover the non-payment of pensions by ex spouses after couples split up. Aid will be allocated progressively beginning with those cases of greatest need.

With regard to education, Ibarretxe announced the implementation during the first quarter of 2008 of the Education System Law, which aims, among other objectives, to reduce school failure rates from the current level of 13% to 10%. Moreover, and with regard to labour relations, the Lehendakari reported on the intention of the Government to approve a decree to award public contracts to companies with prevention of hazards in the workplace certificates.

During a talk given in Puerto Rico

# Ibarretxe highlights the role of institutions to break the deadlock and to achieve peace



In San Juan, Puerto Rico, the Lehendakari once again defended the role of Basque institutions and political parties to break the deadlock and to find a way to peace, following the failure of the peace process. He assured his listeners that the existence of ETA must not prevent the Basque People from determining their own future.

"Irrespective of what ETA might do or say, Basque society has the right and obligation to tackle questions of great relevance for its future in a democratic manner. Not to do so would provide ETA with the capacity to control the future of our people and we are never

going to allow that to happen", he stated emphatically, before a large group of lawyers and members of the judiciary who attended the talk given by the Lehendakari at the Annual General Assembly of the Lawyers College of Puerto Rico.

At this, the final act of his visit to the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico, Ibarretxe indicated that in order to resolve the political problem, first it is necessary to recognise that there is indeed a problem. In his opinion, this includes recognising that the Basque have the right to decide their own future. "The key to a solution" is,

precisely, to recognise the right of a people to decide their own future and the commitment to exercise this right through agreement and negotiation. He cited the cases of Quebec and Scotland as examples of what he was saying.

## Institutional meetings at the highest level

Juanjo José Ibarretxe held several institutional meetings, some of them at the highest level.

In the capital of the Dominican Republic, the Lehendakari attended a dinner offered by the President, Leonel Fernández and his wife (seen in the photograph) and in Puerto Rico, Ibarretxe had a meeting with the Governor, Aníbal Acevedo, with whom he reviewed the joint political initiatives pursued by the Basque Country and that American state.

Moreover, during his trip, Ibarretxe and the rest of the Basque delegation, had the opportunity of meeting groups of Basques living both in the Dominican Republic and in Puerto Rico. The meeting

## The Association of Municipalities of the Dominican Republic express their support for the Basque People

During his visit to the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico, Lehendakari Ibarretxe completed a busy agenda of institutional and academic ceremonies. In the Dominican Republic, the first stage on his journey, the Lehendakari inaugurated the "Digital Cities Forum: the experience of the Basque Country", in which he referred to digital solidarity as one of the major objectives of Basque society and went on to assure his listeners that the Basque Country is committed to overcoming what has been called the "digital gap", to prevent an increase in the differences in the level of development between peoples and individuals. On the occasion of the Lehendakari's visit, the Federation of Municipalities of the Dominican Republic (Fedomu) passed a declaration in which the municipalities of the country expressed their support for the Basque People and recognised the "huge efforts" that are being made "to establish peace and exercise the right to self-determination through democratic procedures and by establishing a broad consensus of all sectors".



with the latter group was especially moving as it was the first time that a Lehendakari had visited Puerto Rico. At both meetings, the Lehendakari encouraged members of the Diaspora to take part "without trepidation" in the debate on the ability and right of the Basque People to decide its own future.



## A Basque language school or “ikastola”, the best education centre in Europe

The ikastola Lauaxeta in Amorebieta has been named the best education centre in Europe with regard to the quality of its management. The ikastola received the highest prize for excellence awarded by the European Foundation for Quality Management, at a ceremony held in Athens. It is the first time that this prestigious award, for which both public and private European organisations with the most advanced management systems competed, has been awarded to a Basque organisation. In the opinion of the Basque Minister for Education, also present at the award ceremony, “this award reflects the quality of the Basque education system”.

In addition to the ikastola Lauaxeta, another two Basque organisations: the Fundación Novia Salcedo and the Basque Health Service-Osakidetza, were finalists in this year's competition.

## The Basque University offers the largest number of qualifications of any other university in the Spanish state

The University of the Basque Country offers the largest number of qualifications of any University in the state to students who wish to complete a degree course. Almost 44,000 new students began university courses in the Basque public university in mid-September, representing an increase of 20% with regard to the previous academic year.

**The Guggenheim Museum Bilbao has been chosen Universal Basque 2006**, for “placing the Basque on the international map”. This major prize awarded jointly by the Basque Government and Caja Laboral, has arrived in the year that this famous Basque Museum celebrates its tenth anniversary. On this occasion and in addition to its cultural qualities, the jury took into consideration the important international projection of this Museum, its contribution to the dissemination of a positive image of the Basque Country, as well as its economic impact on the local economy. Since it opened its doors in October 1997, the Guggenheim Museum has received around 10 million visitors of which almost 8 million have come from outside the Basque Country, and of these, more than half came from abroad.

## Madrid rejects establishing a calendar for the return of the “Salamanca papers”

The so-called Basque Salamanca papers, which contain documentation seized from the first Basque Government during the Civil War, will remain for the moment in the General Archive of Salamanca, following the refusal by the Congress of Deputies to establish a calendar for their return to their original owners.

The attitude of Madrid has been criticised by the Basque Government who have been insisting on the return of these papers (see issue number 87 of Basque News), putting forward the same reasons of “historical justice” that were taken into consideration in the return of this documentation to Catalonia after.

The response of the Basque Government in the face of this new obstacle was not long in coming. Miren Azkarate, the Minister for Culture, posed the question “what happened to Zapatero’s promise?”, and regrets that the Basque Government is the “only autonomous institution set up during the Republic whose historical documents are still held illegally”. In Salamanca, piled in 260 boxes, the collection contains letters, ID cards of *gudaris*, and documents and information about different associations, parties and trade unions during the time of the Republic and the Civil War, although there is also documentation from the pre-war years.