

BASQUE NEWS

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The Lehendakari and several of his ministers during one of the large number of visits paid to places of environmental interest.

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The Basque Government is preparing a plan to achieve environmental sustainability

The Basque Country tackles the effect of economic development on the depletion of natural resources

The Basque Government has drawn attention to the danger of the Basque Country using up all its natural resources and has warned that the objectives established three years ago to reach environmental sustainability are "still a long way off". In a recent report presented by the Minister, Sabin Intxaurreaga, the Government declares that "environmental management alone is not enough". To resolve this question there must be drastic changes in production and consumption models; changes that involve a greater involvement of society as a whole.

The aforementioned report concludes by setting out a series of considerations in which it states that, despite the fact that some improvement can be seen in the state of the environment in the Autonomous Basque Community, "there is no reason for being self complacent" and declares that the time has

come to "stop talking and to do something".

In view of this, the Minister insisted in his introduction to the report that there has been no noticeable progress in the dematerialisation of the economy, nor in the reduction of consumption levels (energy, water, natural resources, land), or in the generation of waste. Neither has there been any progress in our attempts to obtain air of a higher quality and this is in spite of the improvements in industry and collective transport - the largest emitters of contaminating agents into the atmosphere.

Aware of this problem, through the Department for the Environment, the Basque Government is putting the final touches to the Basque Environmental Strategy Plan for the next four years, in which more ambitious objectives are proposed to accelerate the necessary reforms.

Thus, the plan includes a series of priorities, the most important of which is the reduction in the use of private vehicles, due to the effect on atmospheric contamination, noise and traffic congestion. For this reason, priority will be given to the development of sustainable transport means.

Another of the aspects stressed in this ambitious government plan makes reference to the need to minimise the occupation of new land and to regenerate the central areas of cities and towns in order to "freeze" the physical expansion process of urban areas.

The Plan also considers that it is essential to involve the public in this process of environmental awareness and to achieve this, one of its priorities is to promote "sustainable consumption" among consumers, and to draw a line between economic growth and the consumption of natural resources. ➔

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The fight against climate change

Nevertheless, the real "bête-noire" of the environmental struggle is climate change, and, more exactly, the potentially disastrous consequences of the "greenhouse effect" for the inhabitants of the planet.

Recently, the Basque Government warned about the destructive power of global warming, and appealed for a greater level of involvement of Basque society in order to comply with the undertakings of the Kyoto summit to reduce emissions of contaminating gases.

In spite of the fact that this Autonomous Community has done more than any other to comply with European agreements to limit the emissions of these substances to 15%, the Basque Country still has a long way to go to reach its objectives. Specifically, in order to comply with the Kyoto agreement, the Basque Country must reduce its contamination levels by 10% over the next seven years. In this way, we could avoid the catastrophic consequences, which, according to a study made by 400 experts, many bring about worldwide climate change by the end of this century. With regard to the specific dangers for the Basque Country, this disturbing report points to a possible increase of 30 cm in the waters of the Cantabrian Sea (which would endanger buildings such as the Kursaal and the Guggenheim Museum), an increase in temperatures of between 3 and 5 degrees and a drop in rainfall, among other effects.

Gasteiz accepts the challenge of zero contamination

The capital of Alava is one of the first municipalities to join the fight against atmospheric contamination and has designed a five-year action plan to reduce the emission of contaminating gases to a minimum.

Currently, 35% of the emissions of CO₂ in Vitoria-Gasteiz come from industry, almost 30% from transport, 21.7% from commerce and the rest is divided among waste (7.9%) and agriculture (5.7).

For this reason, the plan conceived by the Town Hall of Vitoria-Gasteiz under the title "zero contamination" affects all sectors of the population: the public, builders, farmers, drivers and the Town Hall itself.

Among other measures, the plan includes reductions in car tax for owners of diesel vehicles and a 10% increase in the number of users of public transport. Likewise, the authorities are backing the use of renewable energies and there are plans to oblige owners to install solar panels in all new buildings.

Foreign investment in the Basque Country beat all previous records in 2004

Foreign investment in the Basque Country rose ostensibly last year and has reached historic levels. After dropping significantly in the two previous years, gross foreign expenditure reached a figure of 2196 million euros, representing an increase of 645%, six times greater than the previous year. An important part of this investment in the Basque Country corresponds to securities transactions, in other words, shareholdings in companies with headquarters in the Basque Country.

The investments of Basque companies abroad also increased greatly during 2004, with a four-fold increase in volume with regard to the previous year. In

total, Basque investment abroad amounted to 3,703 million euros.

The optimum performance of these two economic variables demonstrates the favourable situation of the Basque economy at this time. In accordance with the latest figures provided by the Basque Statistics Institute-Eustat, the Basque economy grew by 2.9% during the first quarter of this year, in other words, double the figure estimated for countries in the euro zone. According to sectors, agricultural and fisheries and the building sector enjoyed the highest growth. On the other hand, industry was the slowest-moving sector in the Basque economy.

In brief

- ▶ **MCC expects to create 25,000 jobs in four years.** Besides creating new jobs, the 2005-2008 Strategic Plan of Mondragón Corporación Corporativa includes investments totalling 4000 million euros as well as 20 new plants in Eastern Europe and China. If these forecasts are met, in 2008, MCC will reach a turnover of 17,000 million euros, 62% more than last year.
- ▶ **Basque aeronautics companies** plan to collaborate more closely in order to secure bigger and more ambitious contracts. An indication of the buoyancy of this sector is the fact that Basque aeronautics companies invoiced 699 million euros in 2004, 6% more than the previous year. Currently, this sector is formed by 25 companies employing almost 5000 workers.
- ▶ **Tubacex aspires to becoming the number one producer in the world.** This Basque group engaged in the manufacture of seamless stainless steel pipes has approved a strategic plan up to the year 2010, the aim of which is to guarantee its growth in order to become the number one producer in the world. Besides the Basque Country, this group currently has several plants in Austria and the United States, where the group achieved a 70% increase in sales last year.
- ▶ **Bilbao to take over the presidency of the international Cities and Ports Association.** Through its mayor, Iñaki Azkuna, Bilbao will take over the presidency of this Association representing more than 200 cities and ports. The Association has become a forum for exchanging experiences and for debating the challenges and problems arising from the integration of port areas in urban districts.

The second-generation Basque Internet is now in operation

It connects all the R&D centres in the Basque Country with the rest of the world



The first large high-capacity connections network which links all the Basque R&D technology centres with the rest of the world, is now in operation. The second-generation Basque Internet network, also called I2Bask, is the result of an ambitious project promoted and financed by the Basque Government through its "Basque Country in the Information Society" programme, the aim of which is to implement the latest technologies in a large information highway.

Specifically, the I2Bask network will allow universities based in the Basque Autonomous Community (Deusto and Mondragón and the Faculty of Architecture that the University of Navarre has in Donostia) to interconnect with the Basque Technology Parks –Zamudio, Miramón and Miñano– and a large number of Technology Centres –Labein, Tekniker, Ikerlan, Robotiker, Inasmet, etc.– as well as other organisations such as the Basque Health Service-Osakidetza or the Basque Meteorology Service- Euskalmet. At the same time, the first information exchanges with the Spanish State's equivalent service, RedIris2, have

already begun.

This new computer tool will allow 7000 researchers and lecturers in the Basque Country to benefit from the extraordinary bandwidth of this communications network, which has just

been put into service, linking them with other laboratories, universities and R&D departments throughout the world. The number of beneficiaries may increase substantially as eventually, university students will also be provided with indirect access to the network.

This large, high-speed, information highway will have a radical effect on the way researchers work as they will be able to contact any laboratory in the world by means of direct videoconferencing, exchange large amounts of data with other colleagues or create groups of computers located in different places, capable of working together and, in this way, increase their processing capacity.

This initiative is a "strategic promotion" of the Basque Government, which considers it essential to prevent the scientific and teaching community of the Basque Country from falling behind colleagues in other countries in their respective areas of study and work.

For the time being, only public research centres are connected to the new information highway, but it is possible that companies with R&D departments will also be connected in the future.

Basque institutions promote technological innovation

Support for technological innovation is one of the priorities of Basque institutions, aware of the importance innovation has for a country to stimulate competitiveness and economic growth.

A clear example is the Txekintek programme, which has been put into motion by the Provincial Council of Gipuzkoa to support business projects of a technological and innovating nature, with direct applications to the industry of that province.

Some of the ideas received last year relate to biomedicine, audiovisual means, the physics of sound, automatic home systems, advanced materials and robotics, among others, eloquent proof of the dynamism of these new entrepreneurs. These projects are created by people working in companies, research centres or universities, people with a knowledge of the needs of the market, who have the capacity to take risks and who wish to provide Basque industry with innovating solutions.



Ibarretxe, with the first members of a Basque expedition to Everest

In a moving ceremony held at Ajuria Enea, the Lehendakari Ibarretxe received a large number of the members of the first two Basque expeditions to scale the highest mountain in the world. The first of these, organised in 1974, had to be abandoned just a few metres from the summit. In the second attempt, made 25 years ago, Martín Zabaleta managed to place the Basque national flag, the "ikurriña" on the roof of the world with the cry "gora Euskadi askatuta". As shown in the photograph taken at the ceremony, the Sherpa who helped Zabaleta in his exploit, Pasang Temba, placed the traditional white scarf of the Tibetan Lamas around the neck of the Lehendakari. Ibarretxe, recalled the emotion he had felt at that time and said "all Basques climbed the Everest with Martín that day".

THE TITANIC BERTHS IN BILBAO

For the first time in the Spanish State, a piece of the hull of the mythical Titanic can be seen at the Maritime Museum of the Nervión River Estuary in Bilbao. The piece of steel measures 3 m high by 2 metres wide, weighs more than three tonnes and will be on exhibition at the Bilbao Museum until September. This relic was discovered 20 years ago at a depth of exactly 4000 m. For the Museum's directors "it is a unique opportunity to touch a myth".

CHINA NOW HAS AN EUSKAL ETXEA

Since the beginning of this year, there is an Euskal Etxea in a remote part of China. This is the most recent Basque centre to be created and is located on a street in the centre of Shanghai. It has a membership of 30, mainly young persons working in Basque companies based in that enormous country.

RUSSIAN ART AT THE GUGGENHEIM

The Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao is engaged in negotiations to bring the largest exhibition of Russian art organised outside the land of the Tsars to the city. It is a magnificent collection of more than 250 works of art and will be on show at the Guggenheim Museum in New York in September. In view of the quality and value of the pieces, some of which have never left their country of origin, the negotiations to bring this important collection to the Bilbao-based Museum are not without complication. The exhibition covers a period of nine centuries and includes icons, portraits, examples of critical and socialist realism and experimental works.

In 2007, Gasteiz will be the amber capital of the world

Vitoria-Gasteiz will become a headquarters of the World Amber Conference to be held in 2007. The conference will be attended by the most prestigious palaeontologists and palaeontomologists in the world. This conference will make Alava (more exactly, Peñacerrada) the focus of attention for experts in the study of amber dating from the Cretaceous period.

In order to win the rights to organise this meeting of experts in 2007, Vitoria-Gasteiz had to compete with other locations such as the Lebanon, and especially Peking. In the end, the organisers opted for the bid from the Basque Country in view of the quality of the proposals of the organisers in Vitoria-Gasteiz. The first point in this city's favour was its low crime levels. Moreover, the directors of the Natural Science Museum in Vitoria undertook to publish an international yearly magazine which will be called Alavesia, as a tribute to an insect discovered in amber near the village of Peñacerrada. This magazine will contain the most prestigious catalogue of scientific publications in the world. Finally, Alava's bid sought to promote young researchers and new talents and this was the factor that tipped the balance definitively in favour of Vitoria-Gasteiz.

At this scientific meeting, to be held in 2007, subjects will include not only fossil insects found in amber, but also insects found trapped in any material, making this event even more interesting.

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