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In the end, Madrid has accepted the proposal made by the Lehendakari and the Vice Lehendakari to resolve the dispute about the Quota paid by the Basque Country to the central government.

CONTENTS

▼ A MONTH IN THE BASQUE COUNTRY

CAF wins a contract to construct and operate the Mexico City suburban railway system.

The Basque Country and Catalonia consider a high-speed train link.

page 2

▼ GETTING TO KNOW THE BASQUE COUNTRY

San Sebastián, site of a Conference-tribute to Einstein, attended by 6 Nobel Prize Winners.

page 3

▼ KEEP A LOOK OUT FOR...

The Hanging Bridge of Bilbao, soon to be declared World Heritage Site.

The pianist, Joaquín Achúcarro, Universal Basque 2005.

The Queen Elizabeth docks in Bilbao.

page 4

Madrid accepts the proposal of the Lehendakari to resolve the Quota conflict

The Basque Government considers that the conflict with Madrid concerning the Quota paid by the Basque Country to the central government and which has been a bone of contention since 2003, has at last been resolved. The Government of Madrid has finally accepted the proposal submitted by the Lehendakari Ibarretxe at the Conference of Presidents of the Autonomous Communities concerning the financing of the health system, held three days after the meeting between Ibarretxe and Zapatero at the Moncloa. This proposal recognises the right of the Basque Country to take part in all the extraordinary budgetary extensions made by the Spanish Government, now and in the past, to finance health in the Spanish State as a whole.

Recognition of this right has direct implications on the Quota conflict as this means that the Basque Country

will discount 6.24% of the aforementioned extraordinary budgetary items from the Quota. Now, the Economic Agreement Joint Commission will be responsible transforming the proposal made by the Basque Government into an agreement to be signed by both sides.

This new situation means that the deadlock which has existed between the central and Basque governments since the time of the previous Aznar government, and which Zapatero undertook to resolve when he became president of the central government has been broken. Over the last year and in spite of its good intentions, the Basque Government has condemned the lack of determination shown by Madrid to settle definitively this and other pending disputes.

For this reason, there was a great deal of interest, both in political and media

circles, in the results of the meeting held between the Lehendakari Ibarretxe and President Rodríguez Zapatero. Although in principle, the meeting was of a formal nature, as it was the first time they had met since Ibarretxe was sworn in as Lehendakari after the April elections, there were a number of very important questions on the table, such as the sinking of the oil tanker Prestige, which was paid for by the Basque Government, and the Quota accounts, as well as other issues of a more political nature such as the political normalisation of the Basque Country.

Following the meeting, both parties agreed that they had taken advantage of the encounter in order to "make progress in the institutional dialogue", although their versions about the results of the meeting were contradictory. →

(Continued from page 1)

At a press conference held after the meeting, the Minister for Public Administrations, Jordi Sevilla, declared that the disputes concerning the oil tanker Prestige and the financing of the Ertzaintza (Basque police) had been resolved and announced that an agreement about the Quota was imminent. However, these agreements were subsequently questioned first by the Office of the President of the Basque Government and, one day later, by the Vice President who called upon the Zapatero government to submit an undertaking "in writing" in order to "break the deadlock". Finally, this issue was resolved at the meeting of Presidents of the Autonomous Communities, held three days later, when the Madrid Government accepted the Basque proposal.

Sincere, discreet dialogue to seek solutions

In addition to these specific issues, Ibarretxe offered Zapatero "sincere, discreet dialogue" in order to secure peace and the political normalisation of the Basque Country. In the Lehendakari's opinion "there are no magic remedies" for these problems and that the only way to resolve them is to open "a process of sincere dialogue between all political and institutional agents".

In this sense, Ibarretxe expressed to the Spanish President his wish to begin a series of conversations with all Basque political parties in order to initiate "a process of dialogue that will enable us to reach agreements leading to political normalisation". This process would allow both parties to discuss "in an absence of violence and without exclusions", any political project that may be presented and, if appropriate, materialised, "with a respect, in all cases, for the wishes of Basque citizens, expressed freely and democratically".

Finally, the Lehendakari declared that he was not in favour of drawing "hasty conclusions" about the meeting, which "represents just one of a series of many other meetings which, both in public and privately, must be held in the future". "It represents a first step which must be followed by many others", he concluded.

CAF wins a contract to construct and operate the Mexico City suburban railway system

The government of Mexico City has commissioned the Basque company Construcciones y Auxiliar de Ferrocarril-CAF with the construction and operation of the first suburban train to be installed in the capital of Mexico. To do this, the Gipuzkoa-based company had to fight long and hard with its most direct competitor, the French group Alstom. The new contract represents a "qualitative leap" in the commercial strategy of the company, which is also interested in railway concessions, and has increased the value of the company's order books to 2800 million euros.

The operation was sealed at the end of August for a total estimated amount of 500 million euros. The deal includes a 30-year concession to plan, build and operate an underground line between the central area and the north of the capital. CAF, which has been active in the Mexican market for 14 years, will have the support of local partners who will have a 20% shareholding. It is expected that the new underground will transport about 320,000 passengers every day and that it will be operative in October next year. Moreover, this Basque company will supply a total of 20 electric units consisting, during the first stage, of

three car units and of four units as of the fourth year of operation, to meet increasing demand.

The Basque Country and Catalonia study a high-speed train link

The governments of the Basque Country and Catalonia are finalising an agreement to promote the construction of a new high-speed railway line to join both communities in the future.

The Transport and Public Works Ministers of both governments met recently to examine the possibility of joining the Basque Country and Catalonia with a high-speed railway line, which will be routed along the Ebro Valley. In their opinion, this venture would lead to a "strengthening of their economic potential" as well as having a positive effect on their respective seaports.

Although the bases of the project are not as yet well defined, progress is being made in preliminary studies of the technical and economic feasibility of the future railway. Should it prove to be feasible, the project will be presented in Madrid.

In brief

The Technology Park of Miñano will be the site of the first European laboratory

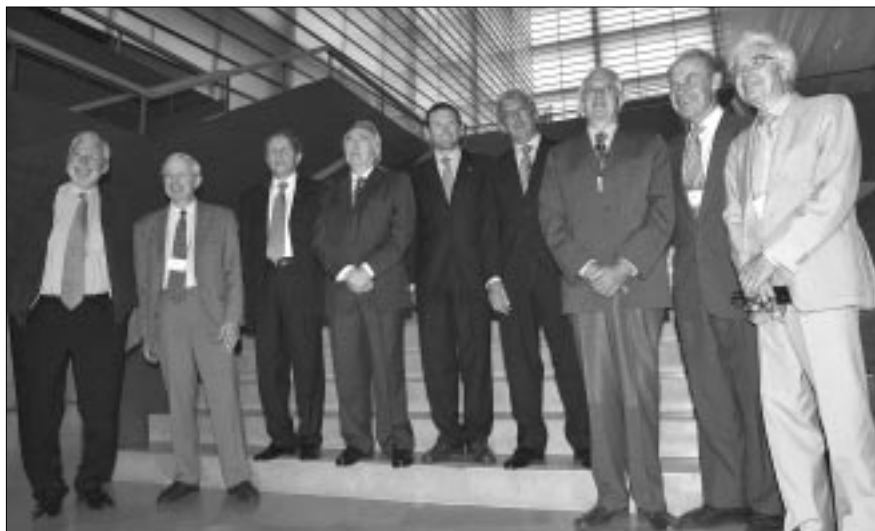
with the technological capacity to carry out "accelerated life tests" of materials used in the construction of aircraft and which are essential in order to obtain the corresponding material approval certificates. The three large Basque companies in this sector (Gamesa, ITP and Sener) will invest 6 million euros in this laboratory. Boeing and Airbus have already announced that they are to make intensive use of this new technology in their new models of aircraft.

The number of qualified workers in the Basque Country is the highest in the Spanish State according to the conclusions of the "Infoempleo 2005 Report", based on an analysis of almost 176,000 offers of employment published in one year in the national press. Specifically, Bizkaia accounts for 67% of all the offers of qualified jobs in the Basque Autonomous Community.

The number of visitors to the Basque is increasing year by year. In just the first seven months of 2005, the Basque Country received 60% of all the tourists who visited this region during the whole of 2004, considered the best year for tourism ever. Peace, culture, good weather and quality services are some of the attractions of the Basque Country for those who come here to discover what it has to offer.

Experts from all over the world meet to pay tribute to Einstein

San Sebastián, world capital of physics



The Lehendakari with some of the guest speakers, including the six Nobel Prize Winners who attended the San Sebastián Conference.

For four days (September 5-8), San Sebastián became the world capital of physics when it staged the "Albert Einstein Annus Mirabilis 2005" Conference. This event was attended by leading figures in the world of science and research, including six Nobel Prize Winners.

The Conference was held thanks to the efforts of the Donostia International Physics Centre Foundation, headed by the Professor of Physics of the University of the Basque Country, Pedro Miguel Etxenike. The aim of this event was to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the publication in a German magazine of the "five works of Einstein". These texts, including the theory of relativity, changed our interpretation and understanding of the universe and the role of physics in our society forever. According to the biographer of the great German physicist, "no single person until then or since then has contributed so much to science as Einstein did in one impressive year".

The event was attended by twenty of the world's leading scientists who debated a range of subjects including the origin of the universe, cosmology, nanotechnology, black holes, pulsar physics, quantum physics and relativity, among others.

Moreover, some of the many speakers at the Conference tackled the subject of Einstein as a human being, as unconventional as he was creative, inte-

rested and committed to some aspects of life beyond the purely scientific.

The success of the Conference was such that the organisation had to set up an annex so that more people could follow the discussions via a video-conference link. In the end, the fore-

casts of the organisers were exceeded by a wide margin and almost 1500 people attended the Conference, double the expected number.

Science must humanise economic development

The Conference was inaugurated by a number of leading figures including the Lehendakari. In his speech, the Lehendakari referred to the devastating effects of hurricane Katrina and declared that "in these modern times, in which technology encourages complacency, natural disasters serve as a reminder that we must act with humility and intelligence".

He also pointed out that humanity is capable of changing the conditions of nature, and this obliges us "to act with intelligence, beyond private interests". He went on to say that science must contribute to "humanising economic development and to overcoming the sustainability problems of the planet". "Since the Second World War, the world has become a village and the gains of just a few people can mean, in the mid-term, losses for everyone", he warned.

An exceptional Conference with six Nobel Prize winners

The San Sebastián Conference was attended by some of the world's top physicists. Some of the most prestigious scientists in the world met to discuss the figure and importance of Einstein. These included six Nobel Prize Winners, who became the stars of the Conference:

■ **Claude Cohen-Tannoudji**, 1997 Nobel Prize for Physics. This Algerian-born Professor is the author of a large number of books and articles about subjects relating to atomic physics and quantum optics.

■ **Anthony Hewish**, 1974 Nobel Prize for Physics for his contribution to the discovery of pulsars, which lead to further research into different areas of astrophysics.

■ **Sheldon Lee Glashow**, from New York, is currently Professor of the University of Boston. In 1979, he shared the Nobel Prize for Physics for his contribution to the unified theory of weak and electromagnetic interactions.

■ **Dudley Herschbach**, 1986 Nobel Prize for Chemistry. An Emeritus Research Professor, he has been linked to Harvard University all his academic life.

■ **Jean-Marie Lehn**, 1987 Nobel Prize for Chemistry for his studies of the chemical bases of molecular recognition.

■ **Jean-Marie Lehn**, Nobel Prize for Chemistry for his studies of the chemical bases of molecular recognition.

■ **Heinrich Rohrer**, who, in 1986, won the Nobel Prize for Physics for his work on the tunnelling-effect electron microscope.

Basque musicians in the main European musical market

Under the Euskadiko Soinuak-Basque Sounds trade name, Basque producers, managers, record companies and music groups have taken part in the Berlin Popkomm trade fair. Representatives of Euskadiko Soinuak, the programme to disseminate Basque music abroad, were present at this fair for the second year in succession with their own stand, developed jointly by a number of Basque companies in this sector, including record companies and management agencies.

Popkomm and other music fairs are important events for companies that seek commercial contracts in order to export and exchange their products, as well as to keep up to date with news and events in the world of music at an international level. Moreover, having their own stand and participating directly in the fair has represented a very important move for the music of the Basque Country within the context of European music, especially at this time of crisis and change in which the music sector finds itself.

The Hanging Bridge of Bilbao, closer to being declared World Heritage Site



The candidacy of the Hanging Bridge in Bilbao for declaration by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site has gained a great deal of ground recently as representatives of this organisation have speeded up the procedures required for this to happen.

The experts responsible for assessing this large, 112-year-old iron structure, had decided to bring their visit forward by one year in order to issue their report. This will give the Hanging Bridge worldwide recognition in the spring of next year. The explanation for this unexpected decision is UNESCO's interest in conserving the industrial heritage of the 19th and 20th centuries before it is lost forever. In fact, of the 900 monuments declared World Heritage Sites, only 23 are industrial.

Experts base their special interest in

the Hanging Bridge that joins Portugalete and Las Arenas on the banks of the Nervión River Estuary on the fact that this was the first bridge of its type to be built and that it is still in full operation. In addition to its use as a means of transport, this Bridge has become a major tourist attraction in Bizkaia as it is, after the Guggenheim Museum, the most popular site for visitors to the city.

The Queen Elizabeth visits Bilbao

The Queen Elizabeth II, the fastest and best-known transatlantic ship in the world, has docked for the first time in its 36-year history at the Port of Bilbao. Doing a short but intense visit, the almost 1800 passengers of this luxury liner disembarked in order to visit the most "classic" tourist destinations in the Basque Country: the wineries of the Rioja Alavesa, San Sebastián and its surrounding area, the Urdaibai Marshlands and the new Bilbao, with the Guggenheim Museum as the main attraction. The Queen Elizabeth is expected to return next year to the Basque Country.

The Pianist Joaquín Achúcarro, Universal Basque 2005

The Bilbao-born pianist, Joaquín Achúcarro, has been chosen Universal Basque 2005, an award given by the Basque Government and the Caja Laboral savings bank, in recognition of his "musical talent and the projection of the image of the Basque Country through his music".

Achúcarro, who has declared that he needs music to breathe and to live, demonstrated his exceptional talent even as a child, enabling him to win several gold medals at prestigious international piano competitions. His international career began in 1959 when he made his debut with the London Symphony Orchestra.

Since then, this Basque musician has played with more than 200 orchestras under the baton of such prestigious directors as Menuhin, Metha and Chailly, among others.

In the words of the directors of the Universal Basque award, Achúcarro was nominated for this year's prize "not only because of his modesty but also because of his exquisite musical poetry and his tremendous sensitivity and strength", making him one of the leading pianists in the world.

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