

# BASQUE NEWS

N. 85 - 2005



## CONTENTS

### ▼ A MONTH IN THE BASQUE COUNTRY

The "Basque Y" Railway project gets underway.

The Basque Government secures the support of PSE and Aralar for its budgets.

page 2

### ▼ GETTING TO KNOW THE BASQUE COUNTRY

X-ray of the new Basque society.

page 3

### ▼ KEEP A LOOK OUT FOR...

Andoni Egaña makes history in the "bertsolari" competition.

Woody Allen gives concert in Gasteiz.

Achúcarro receives the Universal Basque award.

page 4

## In his traditional end of the year message

# The Lehendakari appeals to everyone to make an effort and work together to secure peace

**“We are witnessing the beginning of an important era in our history, an opportunity which we must not squander”**

The Lehendakari, Juan José Ibarretxe, considers that today, Basque society has an extraordinary opportunity to achieve peace and political normalisation. In his traditional end of the year message, Ibarretxe declared that he was convinced that “despite the many ups and downs and difficulties we may have to overcome, this is an unstoppable process”.

“We still don't know how far away our objective lies. The way will be long and difficult, possibly not without its dramatic moments, but there's no doubt in my mind that we have initiated an irreversible process and there is no turning back”, he said.

Ibarretxe undertook to “work resolutely” every day “to ensure that this hope becomes a reality” and appealed

to all political and social agents, without exclusions, to work in order to achieve this, as, in his opinion, “we are all necessary and we are all part of the solution”.

### **“ETA must take the decisive step”**

In his speech, the Lehendakari pointed out that “we have an appointment with peace” and in order to achieve this he turned firstly to ETA to “take the decisive step and abandon violence”. “It is true,” he said, “ that ETA continues to make threats and plant bombs, but there has not been a fatal terrorist attack for two and a half years, and that is a message of hope. But ETA must have the courage to declare, clearly and une-

quivocally, its wish to put an end to violence, once and for all, according to the wishes of the Basque People”.

Ibarretxe asked the Spanish government to assume its responsibilities and to develop a penitentiary policy respectful of human rights, and asked all political parties to take steps in order to get involved in a "dialogue without exclusions" with a view to reaching an Agreement for Political Normalisation and Coexistence” which will be ratified later with a democratically held referendum. In this sense, he referred to the Proposals for a New Statute, passed by Parliament a year ago, of which he said “ it is still totally valid politically and represents a fundamental contribution, because it contains references to a solution of the so-called Basque problem”.

### The Basque Government secures the support of PSE and Aralar for its budgets

The Basque Government has guaranteed support for its 2006 budgets, thanks to an agreement reached with PSE and Aralar. Behind them lay several years of discord and last-minute surprises on voting day. Agreement was not reached with PP, who were first in withdrawing from the series of negotiations the Vice Lehendakari had initiated with the other political formations. Nor was agreement possible with EHAK, who finally expressed their rejection of the budgets presented by the Basque Government. The 2006 budgets were passed at the plenary session held during the last week of 2005. For the first time in several years, there were no last-minute upsets. The agreement allows the government to face the new year with certain composure.

The agreement reached with the Socialists, who had not given their support to the budgets of the Basque government for the last eight years, makes reference to such important areas as education, transport, culture, industry and housing, and is the result of the “new political times”, as the General Secretary of the PSE-EE, Patxi López, pointed out. He also declared that this understanding was limited exclusively to the budgets for 2006 and that it did not imply broader agreements during this legislature.

For their part, Aralar reached an initial agreement with the Government not to support the amendments presented by PP and EHAK, allowing the project to go through Parliament.

Some hours after announcing this to the public, Lehendakari Ibarretxe expressed his delight that the budgetary agreement had been reached at a multitudinous reception offered to Basque society at the Lehendakaritza.

For Ibarretxe, the agreement with PSE and Aralar is indicative of the fact that the Basque Government has become “an active agent”, representing “the middle ground of political ideas in the Basque Country” and is, therefore, “the only one capable of starting the process of dialogue and of reaching agreements with all the political forces of the country”

Thanks to an agreement between Gasteiz and Madrid

### The “Basque Y” railway system gets underway

After 16 years of discord between the different governments of Gasteiz and Madrid, imprecisions and court appeals, the High Speed Train project, better known as the “Basque Y”, which will join the three capitals of the Autonomous Basque Commu-



signed by the governments of the Basque Country and Madrid, establishes that the section of the railway that runs through the province of Gipuzkoa will be controlled by the Basque Government and that its construction will begin in 2006, entering into service in 2010. This section will involve an investment of 1600 million euros, which will be paid initially by the Basque Government, although the amounts invested will be deducted later from the quotas paid to the central government. Due to its mountainous terrain, trains will not reach their maximum speed in Gipuzkoa and passenger trains will be limited to 220 km per hour. Moreover, in virtue of this agreement, the central government will bear the cost of the 5.2 km-long section that runs from Vitoria to Legutiano. The Ministry of Public Works has already approved the tender for this project which must be completed within the twenty-seven month deadline.

#### Half an hour between capitals

The initiation of this ambitious project has been a source of great satisfaction for the Basque Government, which considers the “Y” railway system to be vital for the development of the Basque Country, as it will represent the backbone of the country and a key solution to resolving the serious transport problems of the Basque Autonomous Community as a corridor for transport between France and Spain.

Once in operation, the High Speed Train will revolutionise connections between Vitoria, Bilbao and Donostia, and reduce travelling time between these cities to half an hour. Madrid will only be two hours away and a future connection with Bordeaux, Pau and Paris will become a reality. Moreover, the new train is designed to carry goods and will have the capacity to absorb the 3000-a-day trailer traffic between Vitoria and Irún, according to studies carried out by the Basque Government.

nity, is now a reality. The end to the deadlock surrounding this important undertaking, considered the largest infrastructures project ever initiated by the Basque Country, with a total budget of 4000 million euros, has come about as a result of a deal reached between PNV and the PSOE to provide support for the State Budgets.

As a consequence of this agreement, the appeal presented to the constitutional court in an attempt to block the first tenders called by the Basque Government, has been withdrawn. At the same time, this deal represents an important milestone in relations between the governments of Gasteiz and Madrid as it will allow the Economic Agreement to be used to finance some sections of the railway owned by the State. This new formula opens the door to future projects, such as the outer dock of the port of Pasajes or the railway which is to run around the southern part of the Port of Bilbao.

The agreement, which is still to be

# X-ray of the new Basque society

The gradual ageing of the population, the incorporation of women into the job market, the changes in eating and social habits, as well as the arrival en masse of people from other countries in search of better opportunities from making a living, are some of the factors reflected in the changes recorded in Basque society over recent years.

This, the first study of the family carried out by the Basque Government, through its Justice, Employment and Social Security Department, analyses responses from a total of 7000 families in Alava, Gipuzkoa and Bizkaia. Its results will be used as a basis for the Family Law which is being prepared by the Basque government and which is to be presented during the first quarter of 2006. As the Minister Joseba Azkarraga has pointed out, the law provides economic help for a first child and an increase in aid for a second child and further offspring.

This new x-ray of Basque society provides a number of figures that highlight the fact that the average age of the population is increasing. According to the survey, the average age of the people who make up Basque households is over 43 and the average age of heads of family is 56. Moreover, almost 20% of households are made up of persons of over 65 years of age.

The survey also reveals that 92% of the population live with a partner or in a parent-son/daughter relationship and that the number of families with non-dependent children and polynuclear families is rising (due in great part and in both cases to the precarious nature of employment and the difficulty of getting on the property ladder). Moreover, in the Basque Country there are 120,000 single person homes (representing 15% of the total), of which almost 71% are women.

## Delay in having a first child

The age of Basque heads of family with children in their care ranges between 47 and 54 years of age and the average age of childless young couples is 35, which means the decision to have children, or not to have children at all, is taken when couples are much older. In addition to these changes in family models, Basque society is subject to other factors such as immigration, which also has an influence on the types of relationships that exist with people from other countries.



Basques dedicate an average of 19 minutes a day to doing absolutely nothing. At least these are the findings of a recent survey carried out by the Basque Statistics Institute into the way Basque citizens divide their time to carry out their daily activities.

This survey reveals a number of changes with regard to previous studies. For example, we have less leisure time and the working day is longer, although this does not mean that we sleep fewer hours.

According to the figures presented in this survey, Basques have learnt to diversify their leisure time more, precisely because there is less and less of this precious commodity. The time people spend in front of the television has dropped and the amount of time dedicated to going for walks and on excursions or doing sport is increasing. We also have less and less social life: Only half the population admits to seeing friends from Friday to Sunday and only one in

## 19 minutes to waste

every three goes out on Saturdays and Sundays for more than two hours.

On the contrary, the activities to which we dedicate most time every day is eating, smartening ourselves up and sleeping, followed by the hours we dedicate to working outside the home, to which men dedicate more time than women. The tendency is reversed, however, when domestic work is involved, an activity in which the time dedicated by women is three times greater than that dedicated by men.

The number of immigrants to the Basque Country is increasing year by year, as does the numbers of foreigners who registered with Basque municipalities in January 2005 (72,767, 23% more than the previous year). Of these, the largest group comes from Latin America (35,054), followed by Europe (19,571) and North Africa (8877).

The efforts of Basque institutions focus upon achieving the full integration, from the work and social viewpoints, of these people in the Basque

country, where they already enjoy a free health and education system, just like other citizens.

In this sense, on International Immigration Day, which was held recently, the Basque Government published an institutional declaration, read by the Minister Javier Madrazo, in which it proclaimed the right to define its own immigration policy and demanded full powers from the central government for the processing and granting of work and residence permits.

He is the first person to win 4 "txapelas"

## Andoni Egaña makes history in the "bertsolari" competition

Never was a final to choose the best "bertsolari" so exciting and well attended than the one held in mid-December, in which the Zarauz-born Andoni Egaña was once more proclaimed champion. This is the fourth time he has won the prestigious "txapela". Egaña made history by becoming the first "bertsolari" to win four finals, the most recent of which was held, for the first time in the history of this event, in the province of Bizkaia.

Expectation for this year's event was great due to the standard of the 8 "bertsolaris" who competed for the "txapela", all of them of between 21 and 33

years of age, except for the champion who is 44. An indication of the great interest this event had aroused was the fact that the Bilbao Exhibition Centre in Barakaldo was a complete sell-out, with more than 13,000 spectators (the largest number ever recorded), who on numerous occasions showed their involvement with enthusiastic applause - there was even a "Mexican wave".

In the end, the experience of the three-time champion won the day in a contest qualified by experts as "the closest" of these championships, held every four years, due to the quality of the finalists: Andoni Egaña, Unai

Iturriaga, Maialen Lujambio, Amets Arzallus, Igor Elortza, Sustrai Colina, Aitor Mendiluze and Jon Maia.

### The "bertsolaris" web site

Since 2003, the "bertsolaris" have had their own web site, used to exchange information about the different forms of improvisation that exist in cultures throughout the world.

The web site, [www.argodat.com](http://www.argodat.com), contains news about all these oral traditions and allows anyone, anywhere in the world, to add details of people, research, news and announcements of events, like the "bertsolaris" championship.

## Javier Retegui re-elected President of Eusko Ikaskuntza

Javier Retegui has been re-elected President of the Basque Studies Society-Eusko Ikaskuntza, on obtaining a landslide victory over the other candidate, Jesús María Larrazabal.

Retegui, Minister of Industry, Agriculture and Fisheries during the period 1995-1999 and Rector of the University of Mondragón until 2002, presented a programme in which he continues to pursue the targets that he himself sent three years ago and focuses upon efforts to open the Basque Country to Europe, with a greater transparency of the entity and a greater role for young people.

## Woody Allen gives concert in Vitoria

On December 23, Woody Allen switched from his native habitat in New York to the Principal Theatre in Vitoria, to offer one of his habitual concerts with the New Orleans Jazz Band.

The concert offered by the famous film director was a sell-out, well before the day of the performance. The audience was eager to see Allen play the clarinet, an activity in which he considers himself to be "an amateur".



**The Bilbao-born pianist, Joaquín Achúcarro** received the 2004 Universal Basque award in recognition of his work "as extraordinary ambassador of Basque culture in the world". These were the words of the Lehendakari, who presented the award together with the President of Caja Laboral, Juan Mari Otaegi (pictured in the photo). At the presentation, made before a large audience of representatives of Basque Society, Ibarretxe recalled that Achúcarro was recognised by UNESCO in 2002 as an "artist for peace" and said that "his desire for peace is shared by the Basque People". For Ibarretxe, this prestigious Basque artist "epitomises the fact that in this life there is no success without hard work" and added that this award "recognises and applauds the concert of our lives", referring to the award winner and his wife, who is also a pianist.