

# BASQUE NEWS

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*The Lehendakari during his talk to the Basque community in Cordoba.*

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**The Euskal Exteak of Argentina request that the prosecution against Ibarretxe for his meeting with Batasuna be shelved**

## The Lehendakari urges the Basque Diaspora to get involved in the peace process

**A delegation of the Government took part in Basque Week in Cordoba**

Lehendakari Ibarretxe has sought the support of the Basque Diaspora in the peace process in the Basque Country and has encouraged all Basques who live abroad to get involved, in view of the fact that, in his opinion, they are "a guarantee" that the process "will be irreversible and that we will never return to such a destructive conflict". For the Lehendakari, society must learn to overcome its fear of failure and warned that if anyone is thinking of returning to the previous situation, they will pay for it socially "with the reprobation of all Basques".

At a talk offered to the Basque community in the Argentine city of Cordoba, Ibarretxe announced the creation of a new web site ([www.konpondu.net](http://www.konpondu.net)) designed to channel the

participation in the peace process of Basque society in general and, very especially, of the Basque Diaspora. The event was just one of many organised on the occasion of Basque Week, attended by a large representation of the Basque Government, headed by Lehendakari.

Before an audience of more than one thousand, Ibarretxe offered an account of the social situation in the Basque Country, a "modern, socially and economically balanced country with a high growth rate". However, he added, "this is not enough, because it is necessary to secure peace". He defended the need to continue working "to ensure that the legacy we leave future generations will be a country at peace, with political agreements to coexist,

based on the mutual respect of Spain and the Basque Country".

In the pacification process, Ibarretxe considers that the Basque Diaspora must play the role of an "essential collaborator". "Society represents the means to reinforce and guarantee our peace process. However, I do not refer to the three million men and women who live in the Basque Country, but to the nine million Basques who form part of the Basque community throughout the world".

In Cordoba, the Governor received the Lehendakari with the honours normally conferred on heads of state. Besides taking part in Basque Week, Ibarretxe was granted a Doctor Honoris Causa degree by the University of Cordoba, for his contribution to peace.

# The Basque centres in Argentina consider that the prosecution of the Lehendakari is unjust

Coinciding with the official visit by the Lehendakari to Argentina and Chile at the end of October, the Federation of Basque-Argentinean Entities (FEVA), which consist of a total of 86 Euskal Etxeak, issued a public declaration to manifest its support for Ibarretxe in the legal action brought against him as a result of his meetings with Batasuna, and requested that the case be shelved. This document, signed by a more than 20,000 members, will be referred to the Supreme Court of the Basque Country-TSJPV. As is well known, the TSJPV issued an order giving the go-ahead to a lawsuit submitted by the Foro de Ermua against Lehendakari Ibarretxe for having held a meeting last April with several members of Batasuna, the political formation that is currently subject to a ban on all its activities. The decision of the Basque Supreme Court caused a great deal of surprise among Basque political parties and society as a whole. This initial reaction later turned into anger as this was the first time that the highest-ranking executive in the Basque Country had been summoned to appear before the courts.

The Basque Government considered this act to be of "enormous gravity" and warned of the negative consequences that it would have on institutional relations and "on the need for dialogue between political representatives". The government also reiterated its determination to continue promoting dialogue between all political parties, without exclusions, in order to reach an agreement on the political normalisation of the Basque Country.

## *Declaration of the Euskal Etxeak*

*The news of the legal proceedings brought against the Lehendakari/President of the Basque Country, Juan José Ibarretxe, for having held a meeting with Batasuna, is an incomprehensible obstacle for the current peace*

*Madrid to the Basque Country according to the Statutes of Gernika), go some way to explaining why the Lehendakari has been subjected to a criminal investigation for holding a meeting with Batasuna, following the declaration by ETA of its*

*Spanish institutions must respect, because it will represent the free and democratic will of a peaceful people.*

*The decision of the Supreme Court of the Basque Country has not been understood or supported by any political, social, cultural or economic agent or association in the Basque Country. In fact, not even the Partido Popular, the instigator of this type of processes, has dared to applaud the decision.*

*It is the clearest symptom that we find ourselves before an unjust and incomprehensible action. It is equally symptomatic of the fact that there has been a serious interference in the necessary separation that should exist between the executive and the judiciary - the fundamental basis of a democratic state.*

*We understand, therefore, that the reasons for the Supreme Court having prosecuted the Lehendakari are exclusively political.*

*We demand that the proceedings opened against the Lehendakari be shelved and we express our support and backing for the process of dialogue and negotiation that Juan José Ibarretxe has defended and proposed for a number of years now. We also wish to express our conviction that only by means of dialogue and agreement among all political parties in the Basque Country will Basques be able to continue the process of peace and political normalisation that we all yearn for and desire.*



*FEVA executives during the reading of the Declaration.*

*process in the Basque Country. Moreover, we fail to comprehend how this decision could have been taken in accordance with strictly legal criteria.*

*The politicisation of the justice system pursued by successive governments under Aznar and the fact that judges and magistrates are appointed to the Supreme Court of the Basque Country by reason of their ideological and political affinities with the central Spanish Government and not by the Basque people (as set out in the as yet incomplete process of transferring powers from*

*permanent ceasefire.*

*This is the only way we can make any sense of the situation, especially if we take into consideration that if there is anything clear in this matter it is the fact that the concept of dialogue in general and particularly the dialogue with Batasuna, including the conversations initiated with ETA, is a source of hope and expectation for all Basques at this time.*

*This feeling of hope and expectation is founded on the desire to secure peace and to be able to decide freely and democratically how we want our political future to be; a decision that*

# The European Parliament supports the peace process opened in the Basque Country

## A number of Basque institutions and political parties travelled to Strasbourg to attend the parliamentary session

Aware of the importance of the so-called Basque conflict for the international community, a delegation from the Basque Government, headed by its spokesperson, Miren Azkarate, and the ministers Javier Madrazo and Esther Larrañaga, attended the plenary session of the European Parliament held at its Strasbourg headquarters to debate the peace process opened in the Basque Country. By a margin of 10 votes, the parliament approved a resolution to support the Basque peace process put forward by the Spanish socialist party and supported by Liberals, Social Democrats and the Green Party, with the opposition of the European Partido Popular at the request of the Spanish PP.

There was a clear air of expectation prior to the holding of the plenary session of Parliament in view of the opposing interests of the different groups and of the varied reactions from different quarters as to the advisability or not of the internationalisation of the conflict.

In addition to the delegation from the Basque Government, a number of representatives of institutions and Basque political parties, with the exception of the PP, as well as a number of different associations of victims of terrorism, were also present in Strasbourg.

Basically, the resolution approved an expression of support for the peace initiative in the Basque Country, fostered by President Zapatero following the declaration by ETA of a permanent ceasefire, and urged the president of the Parliament to convey the aforementioned resolution to the European Commission and to the Governments of Member States.

### Fifth major expression of support for the peace process

The backing of the Strasbourg Parliament is the fifth time that the peace process in the Basque Country has received support following ETA's announcement.

In April, women from all Basque political parties, with the exception of

the PP, founded the Ahotsak association and presented a joint manifesto in which it demanded the initiation of a stage in the peace process in which "all projects can be defended". Later, a group of international figures including the leader of the Irish Sinn Fein, Gerry Adams, and the Italian ex-president, Francesco Cossiga, publish-

ed another manifesto in which they expressed their support for the process.

The latest expressions of support have come from the Senate of Chile, which passed an Institutional Declaration, and from an international group of women experts in situations of conflict, who met recently in San Sebastian.



*Miren Azkarate, Spokesperson of the Basque Government.*

### The government will benefit from the support it is receiving

After the debate in Strasbourg, the spokesperson for the Basque Government, Miren Azkarate published a Declaration in which it considered the initiative of the European Parliament to be a positive move, because "without doubt it will bring essential benefits for the peace process in our country".

Likewise, the Government expressed its satisfaction with the support it has received from different groups for the principles on which the Government has based its policies, such as "solidarity, dignity and respect for the victims and their

memory, respect for human rights and democratic values and the right to decide our future in peace and liberty, based on the conviction that democracy and politics can and must contribute to an end to violence through dialogue. The declaration went on to recall that this is even more apparent when one considers that "this government has been the subject of condemnation and criticism on innumerable occasions for having defended this type of principles over a period of many years and that today the Lehendakari is being prosecuted by the Supreme Court for defending the principle of dialogue and for meeting with Batasuna in order to contribute to the securing of peace and political normalisation".

In the opinion of the Basque Government, "it is relevant and encouraging that the institution that represents all Europeans understands that it is necessary to support the peace process in our country and that in this process there can be no turning back because this is the wish of our citizens. Our citizens will never allow a return to the old days of arms robberies and the violence, threats and extortion of the past.

Moreover, the Basque Government reaffirms that "the peace process will go on in spite of the interference and interruptions to which it is being subjected as a result of a number of legal decisions which, on to many occasions, seemed to be based more on political posturing than one judicial reasoning" and expresses its determination to go on working in order to promote "a dialogue between all political parties to reach a final agreement to resolve the political problems of the Basque Country".



**A 21st-century Chateau.** This is the description given to the spectacular building that the prestigious architect Frank Gehry designed for the new winery of Marqués del Riscal located in the town of Elciego in Alava, and which was inaugurated recently in a ceremony attended by the King and Lehendakari Ibarretxe. On this occasion, the author of the Guggenheim Museum of Bilbao has created an impressive building constructed with three different colours of titanium (pink, representing wine; gold, representative of the wire nets placed on the bottle and silver, which refers to the cap placed over the cork), contrasting with the vineyards and rural architecture of the area. The building forms part of an ambitious project called the City of Wine, which includes the new installations of this 100-year-old winery, located in the province of Alava, and a luxury hotel equipped with a select spa in which the latest wine therapy techniques are applied. The effects of this little brother of the Guggenheim Museum have not been long in coming and thousands of people have visited the town to see this singular complex which brings together the worlds of gastronomy, culture, wine and architecture. Without doubt, the new winery will be a great tourist attraction from which not only Elciego but the entire Rioja Alavesa region will benefit.

## In brief

### ► The Sancho el Sabio Foundation opens its collections to the Internet.

Considered to be one of the most important documentation centres on Basque culture in the world, the foundation has opened its collections to the Internet via a web site through which visitors will have access to six municipal archives with 25,000 references, 230,000 bibliographical records and 1.6 million images. From today, students, researchers, experts and the general public will be able to access this large catalogue of information and documentation through the web site [www.fsancho-sabio.es](http://www.fsancho-sabio.es)

### ► The Basque Parliament requests the temporary loan of the "Guernica".

The Basque Government has urged the Zapatero Government to make appropriate arrangements to allow the world-famous painting by Picasso "Guernica" to come to the Basque country on a temporary basis on the occasion of the commemoration in 2008 of the 70th Anniversary of the bombing of the town of the same name. Until now, the trustees of the Queen Sofía Museum in Madrid have refused to allow the painting to be shown in the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, alleging that this would be dangerous due to the delicate state of conservation of this work.

## A powerful new patron for the Cathedral of Santa María Project

Once more, the Cathedral of Santa María in Vitoria has merited the donation of a large financial contribution by one of the most important private patrons in the world.

The World Monuments Fund, based in New York, engaged in providing support to major projects relating to the recovery or maintenance of monuments throughout the world, has decided to contribute to the restoration of the polychromatic paintings of the portico of the Cathedral, considered to be a jewel of Gothic architecture. The major contributory factors that

led to its decision include the excellence of the architecture of the church, the involvement of local authorities in the project and its innovative nature.

Another Basque monument, the Hanging Bridge of Vizcaya, recently declared a World Heritage Site by UNESCO (see issue no. 92 of Basque News), now seeks to receive aid from this important private sponsor, after receiving a delegation sent to obtain information first-hand about this 100-year-old ferry and the plans in place in order to restore it.

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