

BASQUE NEWS

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The Lehendakari pictured next to a sketch for the work "La Paloma de la Paz", a sculpture created by Nestor Basterretxea.

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Ibarretxe: "We can't allow the peace process to collapse"

In his Christmas Message, the Lehendakari called on everyone in the Basque Country to take an active part in the peace process

The last message of the year from the Lehendakari Ibarretxe to the inhabitants of the Basque Country was tainted by the terrorist act of ETA at Barajas Airport, which has led to the suspension of the official dialogue currently in progress with this organisation.

In his traditional Christmas Message, the Lehendakari emphasised that the process must not collapse, "we are not going to consider the process broken" –he insisted and called on Basque Society to take an active part in the process, because "each and every man and woman in this country are a key player in the efforts to find a solution". "ETA has spoilt our end-of-year celebrations, but they have not succeeded in causing us to give up hope", he emphasised in his message.

For the Lehendakari, if "we continue to confuse the violence of ETA with the solution of a conflict of a political na-

ture, we will not get anywhere". He urged the population not to confuse the end of violence "with the right to decide our own future, or the opposite, to establish an end to violence as the condition that determines our right to decide".

"The hope of a people is the best ally to achieve peace"

Convinced that "the hope of a people is the best ally to achieve peace" and that reaching political agreements is not the exclusive domain of politicians, "but everyone's responsibility", Ibarretxe made an open invitation to take part in all the initiatives. In order to foster the participation of Basque citizens, he himself made an undertaking in this sense at the last Debate, held in September, on the General Policy of the government.

"On many occasions we ask our-

selves what we can do to help, to get things going. Well, here is the answer: take part, give your opinion, make your contribution, however small. Remember that no one can do it for you and that we need the strength and involvement of everyone, yours too, to bring this question to a satisfactory conclusion", declared the Lehendakari, making a personal appeal to all Basque citizens.

After reiterating the fact that it is necessary to look forward without forgetting the past, "with an emotive allusion to the victims of violence, Lehendakari Ibarretxe ended his Christmas message with a reference to the coming year, "a new opportunity to continue making progress, to make our dreams come true and, let us not forget, the only dreams that do not become reality are the ones that never existed in the first place", he concluded.

Almost one thousand guests attended the reception offered by the Lehendakari

Ajuria Enea opens its doors for Christmas

As is customary at this time of the year, the doors of the Lehendakaritza opened wide to receive a large number of guests to the reception offered by the Lehendakari to Basque Society, as part of the Christmas festivities.

On this occasion, the building occupied by the President of the Basque Government's department could barely cope with the high on one thousand guests who represented every sector of Basque Society. These included institutional representatives, political leaders, business executives and union representatives, members of the judiciary, artists, sportsmen and women and members of other associa-

tions and organisations of all kinds (cultural, social, economic, etc.).

The Lehendakari began his talk to these representatives of society by referring to the peace process. He urged them to make a distinction between concepts of peace and politics and demanded an end to street violence (kale borroka), the transfer of prisoners to the Basque Country and the legalisation of Batasuna. These are the key issues, in his opinion, to continue making progress. "We cannot jeopardise or subordinate peace to politics, nor politics to peace", he emphasised.

For the Lehendakari, the current situation is "delicate, but marvellous at the

same time". "We have before us a great opportunity for this generation to seek peace and future generations will hold us to account for the way in which we do this, so we must not, and cannot miss this opportunity", he insisted.

Likewise, Ibarretxe pointed out that it is wrong to "confuse people" with permanent debates in the mass media on the subject of pacification and urged politicians not "to show off their muscles, like a playboy on the beach, as if to say that we know much better and we have more information than others", and alluded to the boredom of Basque society with this subject.

"To lead a process of hope"

For the Lehendakari, it is necessary to convey to Basque society that "we are working as much as we can towards achieving peace" and in this sense, he ratified his commitment to "leading a process of hope".

"We must be brave and take risks. We have been given this opportunity to try and resolve this matter".

In a reference to the victims of terrorism, the Lehendakari stated bluntly that "we cannot achieve peace nor reach political agreements for coexistence if this is based on a determination to forget the past" and defended the idea of "recognising in an ethical manner" the people who have been "most afflicted by violence", as the only way of achieving "that just and true peace".

"Coexistence and reconciliation does not involve forgetting, but a critical reading of the past", he said.



*During the reception, the group **Capilla Peñaflorida**, specialised in ancient music, played three 18th-century carols (see photograph)*

Major figures from all over the world signed a manifesto of support for the Lehendakari

Among the signatories there were seven ex-presidents of several different governments and a Nobel Prize-winner.

Important personages from all over the world, including a total of seven ex-presidents of different governments or states and a Nobel prize-winner, signed a manifesto of support for Lehendakari Ibarretxe for the lawsuit brought against him as a result of the meeting he had in April with several members of Batasuna.

The document was signed by the ex-presidents of Colombia, Ernesto

Samper, of Ecuador, Rodrigo Borja, of Costa Rica, Rodrigo Carazo, of Guatemala, Vinicio Cerezo, of Bolivia, Jaime Paz, of Panamá, Ernesto Pérez and of Paraguay, Juan Carlos Wasmosy, as well as the Nobel prize-winner, Adolfo Pérez Esquivel, the granddaughter of Emiliano Zapata, Margarita Zapata and several mayors, ex-ministers and senators, forming a list of 23 names.

Ibarretxe and the Attorney General ask for the immediate and definitive shelving of the criminal proceedings

The criminal proceedings against the Lehendakari by the Supreme Court of the Basque Country-TSJPV continue to generate news on a daily basis. The latest news is the decision of the legal representative of the Lehendakari and the Attorney General of the TSJPV, Maria Angeles Montes to ask the Basque court to definitively dismiss and shelve the legal proceedings opened against Ibarretxe, for a crime of disobedience.

Both decisions are based on a previous ruling of the Supreme Court that there can be no crime of disobedience because there is no express order to indicate that dialogue with Batasuna is a crime. Moreover, for the Supreme Court it would be a breach of constitutional rights for anyone to try, through the exercise of a legal action, to alter the political strategies entrusted in democratically elected governments.

Based on these arguments, in the words of its spokesperson, Miren Azkarate, the Basque Government asks how it is possible to determine whether the plaintiffs or the judges wish to gain political capital by applying pressure with the threat of legal action on the legitimate and democratic actions of a government.

For this reason, the Basque Government calls for wisdom and common sense, as not only are the fundamental rights of the Lehendakari in question, but also the political system, pluralism and the formation of free opinion are also affected.

Criminalising political activity

The manifesto is open to new contributions and its contents are as follows:

On October 10 2006, the Spanish Justice system initiated legal proceedings against the President of the Basque Country, Lehendakari Juan José Ibarretxe, for his meeting with the political group Batasuna, after ETA had issued a public announcement of its permanent ceasefire.

We who sign this manifesto, consider that this action is of the utmost gravity from the legal and political viewpoint, as it affects the three basic principles of democratic life, namely:

– The interference of legal bodies in the political arena, clearly violating the separation of power that must prevail in any democratic system.

– The criminalisation of political activity through a disregard for the legitimate right to all meetings, and by denying the possibility of maintaining an open dialogue open with all the political and social agents of the country, necessary in order to obtain peace and the political normalisation in the Basque Country.

– It is an obstacle to the peace process which now, more than ever before, requires open and sincere dialogue between all the parties involved.

Within this context, we wish to:

• Draw public attention to the opportunism and importance of this kind of legal action which hinders the peace process and affects the highest political authority in the land, democratically chosen by Basque Society.

• Express our solidarity with the Lehendakari of the Basque Government, Juan José Ibarretxe and

• Back his policy of dialogue and negotiation in search of peace and political normalisation in the Basque Country, which is the wish of so many.



The work of the association "Grandmothers of May Square" in favour of human rights has been recognised by the Basque Government, which has awarded this association this year's René Cassin Prize. Two of the grandmothers, Estela Barnés de Carlotto and Tosa Tarlowsy de Roisinblit, received the award, which was presented by the Lehendakari and the Justice Minister, at a moving ceremony held at the Lehendakaritza. Ibarretxe praised the determination of this Argentinean association which he cited as an example of the defence of peace, and conveyed the gratitude of the Basque People for

having received Basque citizens with open arms, during "the merciless military rising led by Franco". Estela Barnés received the prize on behalf of the association of which she is President and stated that her only merit was her "love for her children and grandchildren, and a great deal of obstinacy and perseverance to challenge a dictatorship".

In brief

The history of the Basque Country in Mezu@. The Fundación Sabino Arana has presented its redesigned web site and the creation of an electronic bulletin, Mezu@, through which all citizens may obtain immediate and orderly access to documents drawn up from materials held in the Archive and Museum of Basque Nationalism, as well as digitised photographs and images of historic documents.

The universal promotion of Basque Pelota, is the priority objective of the World Council of Basque Pelota, recently set up in Bilbao, in which Argentina, Australia, Bolivia, Chile, United States, Ireland, Venezuela, Dominican Republic, Philippines and the Basque Country will be represented. Carlos Lasá will direct this new entity created under the auspices of the Basque Government.

The prestigious New York Film Academy will create a drama and digital film workshop in Bilbao, the aim of which is to train future professionals and reveal "all the secrets" of the film industry, with the same techniques, methodology and teachers as in New York. The NYFA is one of the most prestigious film academies in the world and in recent years has been chosen by many young Hollywood actors and actresses.

A Museum with many friends

Today, the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao has the largest number of Individual Members in the Spanish State and is ranked third in Europe, after the Louvre in Paris and the Tate Modern in London. With its 15,235 members, this Basque art gallery occupies first place on the State ranking, much higher than the Prado Museum (with double the number of individual members) and the Reina Sofía Museum, which occupy second and third place respectively. Moreover, the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao attracts the largest number of visitors of all the Guggenheim Museums distributed throughout the world (the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York, the Peggy Guggenheim Collection in Venice and the Deutsche Guggenheim in Berlin).

The directors of the Guggenheim Bilbao point to the high level of loyalty of their "friends", who are extremely satisfied, moreover, with the Museum, giving it a score of eight out of ten.

The museum prepares for its tenth anniversary

In order to maintain these high levels of loyalty, the museum is preparing an ambitious programme of exhibitions to be held in 2007, the year that marks its tenth anniversary.

The museum will host a large exhibition of American art including about 200 works covering the period from the 17th century to the present day. Later, a group of Basque artists will present an exhibition of their work, some of which will be created specifically for this exhibition.

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