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Ibarretxe takes the oath of office before the Oak Tree of Gernika

The Lehendakari will promote a committee to foster dialogue between the different political parties in order to achieve peace and normalisation

On Saturday June 25, Juan José Ibarretxe took the oath of office as Lehendakari of the Basque Government before the Oak Tree of Gernika, symbol of Basque liberty. This ceremony marked the end of an arduous two-month process that began with the calling of Autonomous Community elections, won by the PNV-EA coalition.

In a solemn ceremony full of symbolism and before the emblematic 15-year-old oak sapling, which he had planted a few months before in substitution of the old oak tree, Ibarretxe used the same words in the Basque language as were used in 1936 by the first Lehendakari, José Antonio Aguirre: *“Humbled before God, standing on Basque soil, in remembrance of our ancestors, under the Oak Tree of Gernika, before you, representatives of the People, I swear to perform my duties faithfully”*. After the swearing in ceremony, Lehendakari entered the Assembly Hall and took up office before more than 300 representatives of Basque institutions and society and

thus became Lehendakari of the 8th legislature of the Basque Government. After being sworn in, Ibarretxe's first words as the new Lehendakari were to express publicly that his greatest wish for the coming years was to achieve peace.

No one is sufficient and we are all necessary

Peace and political normalisation are, precisely, the major objectives set by the Lehendakari for the legislature that is now beginning. Much of his speech at the Investiture Debate, during which he presented himself as candidate for Lehendakari on behalf of the PNV-EA coalition, together with Patxi López who represented the PSE, dealt with this point.

For Ibarretxe, the next four years represent a great opportunity to achieve peace and in this process we are all necessary.

Convinced that the government “must give its active support to a peace process that will lead to an end to vio-

lence through dialogue”, in his speech before Parliament, Ibarretxe promised to promote the setting up of a multi-party committee in which all political viewpoints will be represented. ➔

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One process and two stages

Specifically, the proposal consists of a first stage in which a workgroup formed by representatives of political parties would be set up immediately (presumably in September) in order to propose the methodology, structure, content and procedures of the workgroup.

After these aspects have been agreed, the second stage would begin with the creation of a Political Dialogue Committee, which, in the opinion of Ibarretxe, must have the support of all political parties, without any form of exclusion, and must be allowed to do its business in a violence-free environment. The route map proposed would conclude with a popular referendum to determine the opinion of Basque society and to ratify the Political Agreement reached between the parties.

Likewise, Ibarretxe undertook to prepare and approve within a maximum period of six months, an Integrated Plan in favour of Peace and Reconciliation, which will include and bring together all the actions to be taken by the government in the field of human rights. Some of the major premises of this ambitious Plan include solidarity with the victims of terrorism, reparations for the victims of the Franco regime and the recovery of historical memory, as well as the defence of human rights of detainees. The plan also includes the setting up of an International Human Rights and Freedom Observatory.

In order to initiate this process of dialogue, Ibarretxe declared that he was willing to reach a broader agreement than the one obtained until now. But while providing assurances that the Government will undertake the process in an open spirit and without preconditions or limitations, he defended the Proposal for a New Statute passed by absolute majority of the Basque Parliament, as a political asset which contains some references to basic questions which must be negotiated in order to achieve a Normalisation Agreement". Questions such as the recognition of the Basque People as a political subject, their right to decide their own future, territoriality, bilateral relations with Navarre and Iparralde, the framework relationship between the Basque Country and the Spanish State and the priority status of human rights.



A new Government based on integration and mutual understanding

"Let us banish the idea that is not possible for people with different ideas to reach agreement". With these words, Ibarretxe introduced the members of the new Basque Government formed by the three parties, the Partido Nacionalista Vasco, Eusko Alkarta-suna and Esker Batua.

For this legislature, the Lehendakari has designed a government with a greater presence of women but with a few changes with regard to the last one. Only three ministries out of eleven have new heads: The Department of Education, Universities and Research (EA); the Department for the Environment and Territorial Planning (EA) and the Department of Transport and Public Works (PNV).

A new team for a government that, in the words of the Lehendakari "is based on integration and mutual understanding" and which represents "a firm basis that provides Basque society with serenity and stability". "It is relatively simple," the Lehendakari insisted at a ceremony where the new ministers took their oaths of office, "to put a programme into operation with a single party government".

During his speech, Ibarretxe declared that he was aware that the Government needed to negotiate in order to carry out its proposals and in this sense he declared that he was

willing to reach an agreement on each and every one of the government initiatives with all the political parties present in the Basque Parliament.

Star projects for the next four years

Over the next four years, the Government expects to put a number of new plans into operation as well as promoting and developing initiatives already in progress.

In the area of social progress, the government proposes to guarantee the right of all persons to enjoy life with dignity, with access to work, education, health, housing, social protection and cultural integration.

To do this, the new government will draw up the *Basque Employment Law* and strengthen the current health system through a new *Strategic social-health care plan* in order to consolidate this system as a public, free, universal and quality service.

In the realm of housing, the star projects will be the *Land Law* which was already drawn up and agreed upon during the last legislature, the *Sponsored Housing Law* and the new *Housing Master Plan*, the budget for which will be increased gradually and which has been drawn up with the intention of increasing the public housing projects by 50%. ➔ ➔

The new faces of the Government

The new government team appointed by Ibarretxe to face the challenges of the eighth legislature, contains few changes with the regard to the last government, although it is more equitable in nature as the presence of women in the Cabinet has increased. Of the eleven members of the government, six are men and five are women, and of these, only three are new:



Esther Larrañaga has occupied a number of different posts in the Basque Government since 1995 including jobs as Deputy Minister for the Environment and as Deputy Minister in the Justice Department. Now, the Lehendakari has chosen her to direct the Department for the Environment and Territorial Planning. She has been given the task of “increasing an awareness and knowledge of the theory of sustainability, both in daily life and in public policies, the special emphasis on transport, energy and industry”. The new Minister has undertaken to comply with the Kyoto undertakings, as well as working in order to “achieve a balance between rich and poor countries” She replaces Sabin Intxaurreaga.

Nuria López de Guereñu is the new Minister for the Department of Transport and Public Works and in her new post she faces the challenge of converting “Euskal Hiria” into a reality so that the Basque regions “can intercommunicate in natural manner and to optimise the mobility of people and goods”. This telecommunications engineer, who was head of the Department for the Development of the Rural Milieu of the Provincial Council of Gipuzkoa, declares that the work of her Department will be conducted in accordance with the principles of sustainability and that it will use “Nordic models” to plan any infrastructures there may be required in order “to achieve balanced transport systems to ensure that the development of the Basque Country is not hindered”. She replaces Alvaro Amann.



Tontxu Campos, the new Minister of Education, Universities and Research, considers that in this area we must work “to bring together the precepts of liberty, solidarity, justice, progress, the Basque language and universality”. Born in Baracaldo, he has been responsible over recent years for the Department of Innovation and Economic Promotion of the Provincial Council of Bizkaia. He considers that any effort made in the area of education is dependent upon “our providing ourselves with good professionals and the people society needs to fulfil our goals in the fields of social welfare, economics, cultural and politics”. He replaces Anjeles Iztueta.



Other priority questions from the social viewpoint will be the promotion of the third stage of the *Struggle Against Poverty Plan*, a new law that will achieve a progressive application of the minimum wage in all areas, the enhancement of the *Social Services Law* and the *5th Drug Dependency Plan*, as well as putting into operation the *Dependent Persons Care Plan*.

In the area of education, culture and equality, the new government will promote the *Basque Education System Law*, with the intention of achieving the maximum level of agreement between the education community and students. It will develop the *Basque University System Law* and will promote the full development of the new

Basque Vocational Training Plan, as well as the *Basque Culture Plan*. Likewise, over the coming years each and every one of the objectives set out in the recently passed *Law of Equality between Men and Women*, considered by the Lehendakari to be the single most important law passed during 26 years of self-government, will be met.

In terms of technology and sustainability, the aspirations of the government include setting up the *Basque Innovation Agency* and the development of the *Energy Strategy Plan of the Basque Country*, which among other objectives, intends to comply with the undertakings of the Kyoto agreement in order to reduce the omission of contaminating gases into the atmosphere.

Finally, and with respect to neigh-

bouring provinces and regions, the government intends to strengthen its historical, cultural, linguistic and economic ties with Navarre and Aquitaine in order to create a European Euro-region to defend the common interests of the European Atlantic axis. The Basque presence in European institutions and decision-making forums will also be strengthened and the opening of new official delegations of the Basque Country abroad will be promoted. The creation of the *Basque Country Institute*, the aim of which is to strengthen cultural relations with several countries with which the Basque Country has maintained close ties in the past, especially Europe and countries in which Basque groups and centres are based, is especially important.

The Conductor, Inma Shara, enjoys great success on the international music scene

The young Basque conductor, Inmaculada Sarachaga –known in the music world as Inma Shara–has become the third woman in history to conduct the prestigious Philharmonic Orchestra of Israel, at one of the concerts it offered in Tel Aviv in July.

With this concert, Sarachaga initiated a busy summer schedule. Directly after returning from Israel she will begin to work with the National Orchestra of the Ukraine to offer a concert at the La Coruña Festival, and then she will be off to Atlanta, to work with its Symphonic Orchestra. Later on, this Alava-born conductor will begin a tour of several Spanish capitals with the Atlantic City Orchestra, and will end a busy year in Madrid where she will conduct in the Paris Symphonic Orchestra and the London Philharmonic.

Ibarretxe with the Basques of North America

At the end of July, the Lehendakari Ibarretxe will begin a trip to the United States in order to hold meetings with the Basque community of the country and to take part in a number of academic ceremonies.

In his first official trip after being appointed Lehendakari, Ibarretxe will travel to the city of Boise, capital of the State of Idaho, the home of the largest Basque colonies in the whole of North America. There, the delegation headed by the Lehendakari expects to take part in the Jaialdia 2005–International Festival of Basque Culture, an event which is organised every five years and which brings together thousands of people from all over the country.

Moreover, the Lehendakari, accompanied by the Culture Minister, Miren Azkarate, plans to attend several ceremonies at Boise University,

including the presentation of the Programme of Basque Studies, which has the support of the Basque Government, and a History and Culture Seminar, during which tributes will be made to the work of institutions (including the Basque Government) and people in favour of Basque culture in this part of the world.

For its part, through the Lehendakari, the Basque Government will award one of its highest honours, the Lagun Onari. It is the first time that this award has been given to an institution and in this case it is wished to pay tribute to the State of Idaho “for recognising the Basque-North American culture, for fostering the bonds of friendship, culture, politics and trade and for making a significant contribution for the benefit of the Basque Country”.



The Basque Country has joined the White Band campaign “2015: No excuses” promotion by the UNO against poverty. The Guggenheim Museum of Bilbao was one of the 7 emblematic buildings throughout the world chosen by the United Nations as the setting, through the placing of a large white band, for the campaign in favour of the Millennium Declaration, the objectives of which include the struggle against extreme poverty and hunger and the universalisation of primary education.

Together with the Coliseum of Rome, the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin, the Gate of No Return in Senegal, Sydney Harbour Bridge and the UN building in New York, the Basque art museum provided the setting for a ceremony in support of this Declaration which was signed five years ago by 189 heads of state and government leaders.

The old mining area of Bizkaia is converted into a golf course

The old iron ore mines of La Arboleda, located between the municipalities of Abanto, Ortuella and Trapagarán, in Bizkaia, provide the setting this month for the installations of the first public golf course in this province.

This golf course, which has been financed by the Provincial Council, was designed by the prestigious golfer, Severiano Ballesteros, and covers a total surface area of 104 hectares, and is 6 kilometres in length.

Besides regenerating a natural area and degraded by two centuries after intense mining, the project intends to revitalise the economy of this region thanks to the creation of direct and indirect jobs that the new sports centre will generate.

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