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Government spokesperson and Culture Minister, Miren Azkarate, during the talk she gave to the Basque Diaspora in San Francisco.

CONTENTS

▼ A MONTH IN THE BASQUE COUNTRY

The Basque Government will search for Basques who disappeared during the dictatorship in Argentina.

page 2

▼ GETTING TO KNOW THE BASQUE COUNTRY

The Basque Country collaborates with the UNO in the fight against AIDS.

page 3

▼ KEEP A LOOK OUT FOR...

The Basque Country establishes a foothold once more in New York.

The Basque language, a symbol of Basque identity and culture.

page 4

The government spokesperson travelled recently to San Francisco

During her trip to California, Azkarate argued against returning to a past of violence and extortion

In San Francisco, the Culture Minister and Spokesperson of the Basque Government, Miren Azkarate, argued against returning “to a past of violence, death, murders, extortion and blackmail”, following the terrorist attack last December at Barajas airport, which led to the breakdown of conversations between the terrorist organisation and the Zapatero government.

Azkarate travelled recently to California to take part in the events organised on occasion of the 25th anniversary of the Euskal Etxea in San Francisco. There, before a large audience made up of members of the Basque Diaspora, the Government Spokesperson offered a talk entitled “The way towards peace”. In her talk, she insisted once again on the idea defended by the Government of the Basque Country following the terrorist attack, namely, that we must “not fall into despair”. We must work to prevent a return to the violence and discord between the political parties, as occurred after the previous failed attempts to reach peace.

During her talk, Miren Azkarate looked back at the origins of the peace process and recalled that ETA expressed

its wish to open negotiations and undertook “not to interfere in the political debate” and that President Zapatero, in turn, admitted that he would respect the democratic decision of the citizens of the Basque Country, provided that any decision they might take was in accordance with the Spanish Constitution.

In Azkarate's opinion, during the months the process was still on course, the Zapatero government was aware of the effects this might have on their election campaign as well as the “ferocious opposition” of the PP, which prevented it from having the “courage” to take key decisions such as bringing some ETA prisoners home to the Basque Country. The Minister added that the terrorist group never renounced “its control of the policies of Batasuna” and prevented political agreements from being reached.

Loss of confidence between interlocutors

The whole process came to a climax with the brutal terrorist attack at Barajas airport causing the deaths of two Ecuadorians and the destruction of a large part of the terminal. The attack also had “more serious long-term effects”

such as the “profound crisis” in the ambience of trust that must exist mutually between both sides in any peace process. Faced with this situation, the Basque Government “has decided to adopt a clear and determined position” by demanding that ETA abandon violence as a means of exerting pressure and offering the government of Madrid its collaboration and co-operation. However, it warns that should measures such as those approved by the Aznar government (the banning of Batasuna and using the law for political purposes) be adopted, no progress will be possible in the peace process.

Miren Azkarate also referred to the conviction held by the Basque government, namely, that only a strong social network that allows citizens to take an active part in the construction of peace will prevent the process from “falling into a vacuum” and a “return to a past of violence and extortion”, and in this sense alluded to the initiatives taken recently by the government to encourage the participation of the citizens of the Basque Country, including the web site konpondu.net and the municipal debate forums (see issue 97 of Basque News). ►

The Euskal Etxea in San Francisco celebrates its 25th anniversary

The Culture Minister attended the anniversary celebrations

►► In addition to giving a talk on the new political situation in the Basque Country, Miren Azkarate took part in the events organised by the Euskal Etxea in San Francisco (one of the largest in United States) to celebrate its 25th anniversary.

The Culture Minister took part in the annual meeting of the association of North American Basque Organisations (NABO), which analysed, among other matters, the objectives in place to foster the teaching of Basque through the Basque centres. The meeting highlighted the progress that has been made in the teaching of this language since 2003, the year in which the World Conference of Basque Communities was held in Vitoria.

Today, Basque classes are given by ten teachers at the different Euskal Etxea in the United States through a system certified by the Basque Government and

adapted to a number of different circumstances. The government provides teaching and training materials to anyone who wishes to give Basque classes and the centres provide the human

resources. The aim is to spread of the teaching of Basque throughout the main population centres of Basque origin in United States such as New York, San Francisco, Boise and Ontario.



Miren Azkarate also attended a series of events organised by the Euskal Etxea, in which a number of local authorities took part, such as the Mayor of South San Francisco, Rich Garbarino (on the left of the photograph) and the deputy governor of California, the Democrat of Basque origin, John Garamendi (on the right of the photograph). Garamendi highlighted the efforts of the Basque Diaspora to keep Basque culture alive and stated that he has not forgotten the heritage left by his Basque grandfather nor the contribution made by "immigrants from all over the world" to the United States.

The Basque Government will collaborate with the government of Argentina in an attempt to locate people of Basque origin who disappeared during the 1976-1983 military dictatorship and who may amount to more than 300. During his recent trip to Argentina, the Basque Social Affairs Minister, Javier Madrazo, signed an agreement with the Secretary for Human Rights of the Justice Ministry, Eduardo Luis Duhalde, through which the Basque Government will allocate 216,000 euros to the search. Many of these people had fled the Franco dictatorship only to find themselves in the grips of another dictatorship in

The Basque government will search for Basques who disappeared during the dictatorship in Argentina

Argentina and lost their children and grandchildren.

This collaboration between both governments will allow investigations to be made into the fate of these people and trace their

movements once they had been kidnapped. The result of the investigations will be collected in a biographical archive, which will be created to enable identification by their families

and circle of friends. Among other measures contained in the agreement, a genetic bank will be created allowing the identification of the large amount of human remains corresponding to these people, as well as a photographic archive which will include images of the victims, an account of this black period in the history of Argentina and, in general, all those aspects that must be recorded for posterity.

The Basque Country collaborates with the UNO in the fight against AIDS

The Basque Country will participate directly in UNO programmes in the struggle against AIDS. The Lehendakari has signed an agreement with the Executive Director of ONUSIDA, the Belgian Peter Piot during a visit the latter made recently to the Basque country in order to sign a collaboration agreement in this field. Through its Department for Social Affairs, the Bas-

que Government will allocate a total of 300,000 euros to develop preventive measures and treatment against HIV infections in Rwanda, the country that has been especially affected by this pandemic, in which 30% of those infected are between 24 and 44 years of age. The programme financed by the government will have a duration of two years and will be aimed precisely at

people within this age range as well as at children and pregnant women.

The Health Department will also collaborate with ONUSIDA by offering advice on HIV prevention programmes among intravenous drug users in Eastern European countries, taking advantage of the experience gained in this field in the Basque Country. This consisted of the introduction of an anti-AIDS kit as well as syringe exchange programmes in NGOs, chemists and penitentiary centres, and was successful in reducing the epidemic among drug addicts.

The Government will give schoolchildren the opportunity to hear the testimonies of the victims of terrorism

Aware of the importance of educating for peace, the Basque Government has put into motion an initiative to give schoolchildren the opportunity to hear the testimonies of the victims of terrorism.

The first experiments will take place during the months of March and April in six Basque education centres and will allow children studying ESO (from 12 to 16 years of age) to hear at first hand the testimonies of the victims of ETA, through their writings. In accordance with the results of this pilot scheme, the initiative will be applied to the education system as a whole.

The programme forms part of the Basque Plan for Human Rights Education and for Peace, which is being prepared by the Basque Government. Its aims include the establishment of coexistence plans in schools, information on the work of the Basque parliament for students and a specially-designed course in order to increase awareness of the most serious violations of human rights in the Basque Country.

Agreement to revitalise the use of the Basque language in the French Basque Country

In order to encourage and revitalise the use of the Basque language in the French Basque Country, the Basque Government and French authorities recently signed a cross border agreement that will guarantee stable inter-institutional relations in matters relating to linguistic policy. The agreement aims to foster the joint work of both communities to encourage the use of the Basque language in order to increase the number of speakers of all ages and to put an end to the decline in the use of the Basque language in the French Basque Country, highlighted by recent socio-linguistic studies.

The Ombudsman Service for equality now has its official headquarters

The headquarters of the Ombudsman Service for the Equality for Men and Women has been in operation since February and aims to achieve the objectives for which it was created, namely to work for equality, especially in private companies. During the inauguration ceremony (pictured in the photograph), the director of the service, Maite Erro, pointed out that doing away with inequality “is not something that involves only women but will benefit all sectors of our society and future generations”. The Lehendakari encouraged men “not to be afraid of taking part in this project”.



The Basque Country once more establishes a foothold in New York

The government has given the green light to the creation of a delegation in the United States

The Basque Government has already laid the foundations for the creation over the coming months of a new delegation of the Basque Country beyond its frontiers. This time, the chosen country is the United States and the city is New York.

In the city of skyscrapers, the Basque Government intends to install the sixth of its foreign delegations, in addition to those already existing in Madrid, Brussels, Chile, Mexico and Argentina. In view of the presence of the United Nations in that city, the aim is to give the Basque Country a prominent



position on the international scenario.

The United States was chosen due to its importance as the top political power and the world's largest economy and because the US is

a reference model in a wide range of technical and industrial fields and the centre of international activities in the majority of sectors. In addition to activities of an industrial nature pursued through

the office of the Association for the Promotion of Industry (which depends on the Basque Government) in Chicago, the Basque Country and the United States take part in a number of exchanges in the fields of science and technology, justice and culture (thanks to the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao).

Return to the Big Apple

It is not the first time that the Basque Government has set up a delegation in the Big Apple. In 1938, during the Spanish Civil War, the Basque Government set up an office, which remained operative until 1960. On that occasion, the place chosen was 30 Fifth Avenue, famous for its exclusive stores and jewellers.

During the first years of the post-war period, the American office was the headquarters of the Basque Government in exile and was headed by Lehendakari José Antonio Aguirre, who arrived in New York in 1941, after escaping from Hitler.

After 1948, the Basque delegation in United States was directed by Jesús de Galíndez, and later by Jon Oñativia and Pedro Beitia until 1960, when the office was closed.

The Basque language, a symbol of Basque identity and culture

A survey by the Basque Studies Society-Eusko Ikaskuntza made public recently, warns that Basque identity and culture find themselves at a critical moment in their history, although the Basque language continues to be the one symbol that defines both concepts, even among its critics.

According to the authors, the dilemma is how to develop the identity and culture of the Basque people without ignoring the importance of globalisation and modernity. This problem is made worse, in their opinion, due to

the existence of a "political conflict", which largely prevents the development of a "new Basque identity".

The study is based on a number of surveys, discussion groups, personal interviews and Internet inquiries and poses questions such as the true nature of Basque identity and culture, the concepts and contents we associate with them and the extent to which people identify with these. The responses to these questions confirm that the perception of the inhabitants of Euskal Herria concerning Basque

identity and culture is disparate, reflecting the plural nature of Basque society.

Thus, one of the conclusions is that there is a feeling of identification in all the Basque provinces, although the proportion varies from one to the other. Nevertheless, the Basque language is the only symbol that appears inevitably in any definition of Basqueness. After language, dance, pelota and rural sports are the aspects most generally associated with Basque culture.