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The Lehendakari offers Zapatero the chance to agree on a way forward to securing peace and political normalisation

Ibarretxe expresses his conviction that 2008 will be the year that marks end of the political deadlock



Zapatero and Ibarretxe shake hands at one of their last meetings.

Convinced that this year will see the end to the deadlock surrounding efforts to secure peace and political normalisation in the Basque Country, Lehendakari Ibarretxe has repeated his offer to President Zapatero to reach an agreement on these two issues before June. At the same time, Ibarretxe has questioned once again the attitude shown by Zapatero in refusing to address the

same questions he discussed with ETA some months ago. "We are doomed to understand each other", the Lehendakari pointed out in an interview granted to Radio Euskadi a just a few days following the General Elections, in which the PSOE won a convincing victory, but failed, nevertheless, to gain an absolute majority. The elections, marked by the dominance

of a two-party system (PSOE-PP), were overshadowed by the murder by ETA of the ex-socialist councillor of Mondragón, Isaías Carrasco, two days before voting. In Ibarretxe's opinion, the moment has come for political negotiations with the Spanish President, for which he maintained an "an open predisposition" to reaching an agreement "to a peaceful coexistence between the Basque Country and Spain in the 21st century". Ibarretxe criticised the warnings made by Basque Socialists that any negotiation with Zapatero would include an undertaking to withdraw his proposal. "We are not going to ask the Socialist Party of the Basque

Country to withdraw anything nor are we going to ask them to think in a different manner. During the interview he pointed out that he did not share their ideas but respected them and that he would like them to respect his ideas too, because before any negotiations can begin it is essential for each party to show deference for the ideas of the other.

In response to the question of whether he is willing to be negotiate with EHAK to secure their support when the Basque Parliament votes on whether to grant the Lehendakari authorisation to hold a referendum or not, Ibarretxe replied "let's not get ahead of ourselves". "What will happen in June is that the position of each party will become much clearer", he underlined in allusion to this question. ►

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New peace process

At another point in the interview, the Lehendakari was questioned about his opinion concerning whether President Zapatero should try to open a new peace process in this new legislature, following the latest murder committed by ETA. In this sense, Ibarretxe recalled that while “all Spanish Presidents” have spoken to ETA and that the terrorist group has spoken “with Spanish Presidents”. “ETA has never spoken with any Lehendakari”, he emphasised.

After declaring that “we have never opposed any dialogue between Spanish Presidents and ETA”, Ibarretxe said that he could not understand why Zapatero refuses to speak with him about the same issues he discussed with ETA.

“Beyond the question of whether a new peace process must be opened or not, what Zapatero must do now is to speak to me and negotiate a political solution for the future of this country, so that we can present this to the Basque Parliament and afterwards make a joint call for a referendum so that Basque society can decide”, he highlighted.

Concerning this point the Lehendakari was categorical and warned that he will never allow ETA to represent the Basque People in any political negotiation and that “we do not need their authorisation to begin a dialogue between parties”. “Should ETA be allowed to take the initiative when it comes to offering the hope of a solution?”, the Lehendakari wondered, and at the same time refused to even contemplate that the terrorist group should be allowed to decide “when Zapatero and I should talk and about what”.

Ibarretxe used this occasion to refer to the latest murder by ETA, two days before the elections, which cost the life of the ex-socialist councillor for Mondragon, Isaías Carrasco. The Lehendakari insisted that this action highlights the “cowardice and contemptuousness of ETA” and demanded that the terrorist group, which he said “has totally lost its way”, to stop “tarnishing” the name of the Basque People and not to use this as justification for its crimes.

Once again the Socialists win general elections characterised by a two-party system

The nationalist parties will play a leading role in the coming legislature

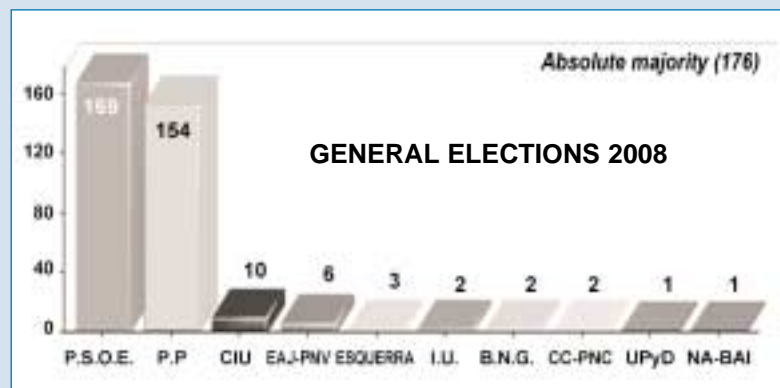
The results of the last General Elections held on March 9 to the Spanish Congress and Senate, were also analysed by the Lehendakari and members of his government, who recognised that the results were not good for the Basque tripartite government.

In the Basque Autonomous Community, the General Elections produced an ample victory for the

losing, were able to increase the number of their representatives by 6 with a total of 154 deputies. José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero is, therefore, President of the Spanish Government once again for another four years.

Just after the results were announced, the Basque Government recognised that the results obtained by the three parties that make up the government were “not as good as had been expected” but recalled that they were the results of general elections and not at an autonomous community level.

The same idea was repeated later



Socialist Party of the Basque Country and in addition to consolidating its position as the first political force in Alava and Gipuzkoa, the Socialists won in Bizkaia for the first time, snatching the lead from PNV. The PSE is also the dominant political force in the three capitals of the Basque Community.

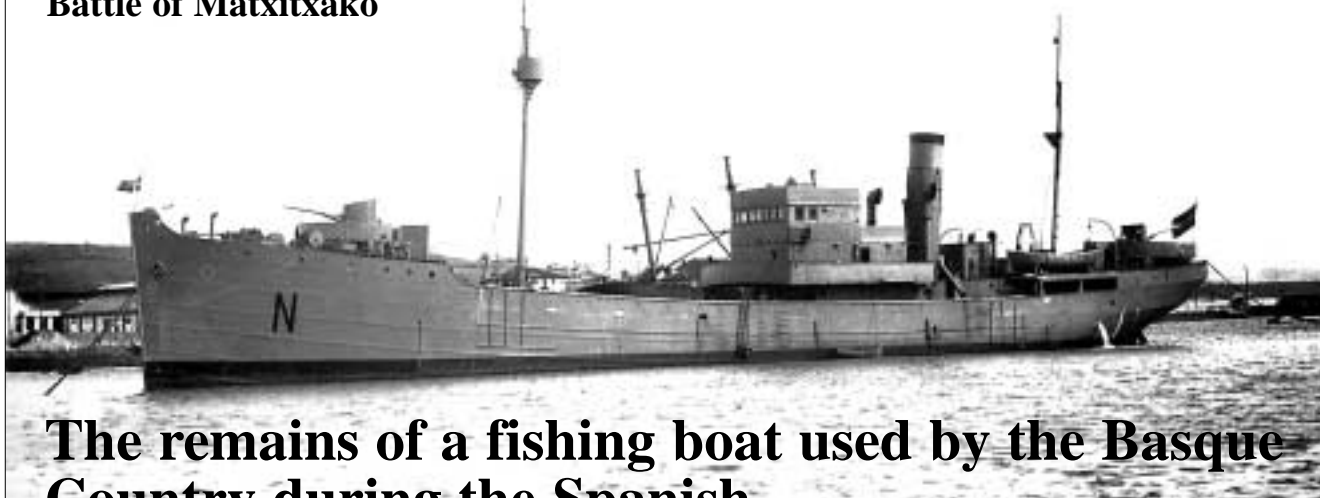
In total, the Basque Socialists won 9 of the 18 seats allocated to the Basque Community in this Spanish Parliament (two more than at the last elections), compared to the six seats obtained by PNV, who lost one, the three seats of the PP, who also finished with one seat less, and the loss of the only representative gained by EA four years ago.

In the State, PSOE was the clear winner of the elections and won 169 seats in Congress (five more) compared to PP who, despite

by the Lehendakari himself, who recognised that the results had been “bad” and also criticised the attitude both of the PSOE and PP for wishing to use “the votes they had asked for Rajoy and Zapatero to punish the Basque Government, the Lehendakari and the PNV”.

After pointing out that “we all share the responsibility both for our successes and for our failures”, Ibarretxe recommended that no one should “feel sorry” and should “look to the future”. He went on to declare publicly that “we are hopeful about the future and 2008 will probably see the greatest efforts ever to break the deadlock and to reawaken the interest of those members of society who have become disenchanted with politics because we are not giving them solutions. And they are right”, the Lehendakari declared.

All indications point to it being the mythical “Nabarra”, which fought in the Battle of Matxitxako



The remains of a fishing boat used by the Basque Country during the Spanish Civil War discovered off the coast near Bermeo

Teams of divers will inspect the wreck in the spring to confirm its identity

There is every chance that it will be the “Nabarra”, but confirmation is not possible at this stage. The remains found recently by Basque Government specialists off the coast of Bermeo, of a “bou” type boat may be those of a boat used by the Auxiliary Fleet of the Basque Country during the Civil War.

Everything suggests that it may be the “bou”, which was sunk in 1937 with some of its crew by Franco's cruiser “Canarias” in the Battle of Matxitxako, although definitive verification will not be possible until a team of divers inspect the wreck and take samples this spring.

If it is the “Nabarra”, this would be a historical discovery of major relevance given the importance attributed by historians and experts to the Battle of Matxitxako, considered by some to be the “most epic and heroic battle in the Civil War fought at sea”.

Story of a discovery

Specialists of the Azti Tecnalia Foundation, which belongs to the Basque Agriculture Department, identified the remains of the wreck last summer while they were preparing



3D recreation of the wreck found off Bermeo

maps of the seafloor. It lies at a depth of approximately 100 m and is in relatively good condition. A subsequent exploration carried out last February with a remote control submarine vehicle allowed specialists to check the data discovered and confirmed that the winch, handrail, anchors and portholes coincide with those of the “Nabarra”. The length, 65.40 m, also coincides. This, together with the fact that the wreck is split into two at the stern, plus the fact that the “Nabarra” sank by her stern, makes it highly probable that this is in fact the remains of the mythical warship.

However, conclusive proof is yet to be found as it has not been possible to find the bow cannon, as the area where it should lie is severely deteriorated. One hundred percent confirmation that it is indeed the “Nabarra”, will only be possible when the conditions at sea improve and specialist divers can extract conclusive evidence (ship's bell, personal remains, etc.).

An unequal and heroic combat

On the morning of March 5 1939, the “Nabarra”, a cod fishing boat converted for use as a warship and belonging to the Auxiliary Fleet of the Basque Country, fought an unequal battle in the seas off Cape Matxitxako with Franco's cruiser “Canarias”, equipped with powerful artillery and a thousand men. The “Nabarra” formed part of a convoy of several “bous”, sent to escort the merchant ship “Galdames”, which was sailing from Bayonne to Bilbao with 173 passengers and three tonnes of nickel coins minted in Belgium for the Basque Government. The “Canarias” had sailed from the El Ferrol naval base in order to intercept the merchant ship.

For more than three hours, the “Nabarra” was able to hold its own against the armour-plated battleship but finally the “Canarias” scored a direct hit on the “Nabarra's” boilers. Before sinking, its commander, Enrique Moreno, authorised the crew made up of 49 “gudaris” to abandon ship. Some of them did so, while others preferred to go down with the ship and their captain. The survivors were condemned to death at first and then pardoned later by Franco for the bravery they had shown in combat.

The Basques, the greatest music lovers in the Spanish state

A study carried out by the General Society of Authors reveals that the inhabitants of the Basque Autonomous Community are the greatest music lovers in the Spanish state, as an immense majority of the population (73.5%) confess that they listen to music on a daily basis and only 7.8% say they have “never” or “almost never” listened to music over the last year.

According to the National Health Survey, groups such as Oreja de Van Gogh and writers such as Benito Lertxundi, Kepa Junquera and Joaquín Sabina are included among the musical preferences of Basques who show an inclination towards pop music, followed by rock and classical music.

The lower the age, the higher the percentage of music lovers, rising to 76% in the population



Bruce Springsteen scored a great hit with the Basque public during his last world tour.

of 19-20 year olds.

Moreover, according to the National Health Survey, young Basques spend the least amount of time in front of the TV, consume the lowest amounts of video games and spend the lowest numbers of hours surfing the Internet. This survey, which relates the excessive use of these products to sleep disorders, reports that the consumption of children and adolescents in the Basque Country (from 1 to 15 years of age) does not exceed 3 hours a day on weekdays.

World premiere in Bilbao of the latest composition by Mike Oldfield

The famous musician Mike Oldfield, chose the atrium of the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao for the world presentation in his new composition “Music of the Spheres” before a small audience made up mainly of specialist journalists who had come from all over the world to attend the live performance.

In order to present his new piece, comprising 14 compositions that form part of a single work, the British composer was accompanied by the Symphonic Orchestra of the Basque Country, the New Zealand soprano, Hayley Westenra and the Choral Society of Bilbao, who played an important part in the performance.

The performance ended with a long ovation by the audience in recognition of this new composition by the writer of the mythical “Tubular Bells”, who has described his “Music of the Spheres” as his first work of classical music.

In brief

The location for the Basque National Library has been decided. This will be housed in the Koldo Mitxelena building in San Sebastián, thanks to a major agreement reached between the Basque Government, the Provincial Council of Gipuzkoa and the Town Hall of San Sebastián to reorganise the cultural installations in the city. The agreement also involves transferring the collections of the Basque Film Library, the Cinema Unit of Donostia Cultura, the Koldo Mitxelena exhibition rooms and the Arteleku to Tabakalera, the future International Contemporary Culture Centre of San Sebastián, which by 2013 aspires to become the centre for visual culture in Gipuzkoa.

Two exhibitions organised by the Guggenheim Museum are included among the most visited exhibitions in the world last year according to a list drawn up by the London based art magazine The Art Newspaper. These were the retrospective exhibition of the works of the last decade of the German artist Anselm Kiefer and the didactic essay on the scenario of contemporary Basque art entitled “Cartographies of Contemporary Art in the Basque Country”, commissioned expressly by the Basque film library to analyse the development of Basque art from the end of the forties to our days.

Basque cuisine reaches China thanks to the initiative of the chef Jon Alaña will open the first Basque restaurant in the city of Shanghai. The new restaurant will be called Kuluxka and there this young chef will offer the most select dishes of traditional Basque cuisine, although, in view of the preferences of the Chinese public, the star item on the menu will be cod in green sauce.

Hollywood has purchased the rights for the United States and Latin America of the Basque animated film in three dimensions “Black to the Moon”, which is currently at the production stage. The film represents the most ambitious project of the Basque production company Baleuko, which has already received a Goya award and several nominations for a number of its animated productions. On this occasion, the directors of Farcor Studios of Hollywood have discovered the appeal of the Basque production company for all kinds of audiences.