

# BASQUE NEWS

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*The Lehendakari defended the Plebiscite Law before Parliament meeting in plenary session and stated that "there is no way back".*

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## The Basque Parliament approves the Plebiscite Law for Peace and the Agreement submitted by the Government

# The Lehendakari declares that coexistence between peoples is based on "free association and not on imposition"

**Before Parliament he declared "He who divides the people is not the one who asks the question but the one who prevents the question from being asked"**

On June 27, the Basque Parliament passed the Plebiscite Law submitted by the Government in order to ascertain, on October 25, the opinion of the citizens of the Basque Country concerning the opening of a negotiation process to ascertain peace and political normalisation.

Lehendakari Ibarretxe, who was given the task of defending the text approved by the tripartite government, declared that he felt "moved" and "proud" to present on "this historic day" and for the first time an initiative which proposes that Basque society be consulted directly "as an expression of the right of the Basque People to decide their own future in the 21st century". "Today's date will forever be engraved in my heart" –he said.

Before the Basque Parliament meet-

ing in plenary session, Ibarretxe declared that coexistence projects between peoples should be based on "free association and not imposition" and insisted that plebiscites, as a formula for the direct participation of our citizens, strengthens the democratic system. "He who divides the people is not the one who asks the question but the one who prevents the question from being asked", he declared categorically.

### 10,000 consultations in the USA

The Lehendakari also criticised the attitude of leading members of the Partido Socialista and Partido Popular who have threatened to stop the consultation from taking place "at any price" and asked "what kind of democracy

forbids any kind of consultation of public opinion?"

He went on to remind members of the Basque Parliament that plebiscites are used extensively in Europe and in the world as a form of participation in the process of political decision-making and cited as examples Switzerland, Bavaria, Austria and the United States, where in 2003, more than 10,000 consultations took place. He also mentioned a recommendation approved by the Ministerial Committee of the Council of Europe in 2001 to 44 member states, including Spain, according to which "if it involves stimulating the participation of those who have a direct and determined interest in a specific question, then plebiscites are the ideal formula". ►

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Referring to the controversy concerning the legal basis of the plebiscite, the Lehendakari defended the legality of the project presented by the Basque Government, "as it is a popular, non binding consultation and not a referendum". He also recalled that "similar consultations are allowed in other Statutes of Autonomy, without the need for any modification of the Constitution.

### Respect the agreement between Basques

Ibarretxe went on to say that Basque society is tired of the political stalemate and "fed up with the violence of ETA" and for this reason, "has the right to demand that we all find a solution through dialogue".

He pointed out that the aim of the two questions posed in the consultation is to ratify an ethical commitment against violence, in similar terms to those contained in the Ajuria Enea Agreement and in the Congress of Deputies, in May 2005, and for all political parties to reach a democratic agreement on the right to decide, which shall be respected by the State, "unlike what has happened up to now". "We must be able to decide to live together in harmony, because if we not free to take a decision on co-existence, there is no freedom, it is imposed."

He also recalled that the President of the Spanish Government has refused to speak and negotiate with him the same questions that he was willing to reach agreement upon with Batasuna and ETA during the peace

process in Loyola.

Finally, the Lehendakari once again stressed that "irrespective of today's debate and whatever happens on October 25, "the door is open for the Basque People to decide their future" and expressed his conviction that the right to decide of the Basque People "is a road on which there is no return". "The door is permanently open and no one will succeed in closing it, however many legal and political obstacles and delays they may wish to put in the way. They will never succeed in doing that", he declared firmly.

Once the Plebiscite Law has been approved in the Basque Parliament, it will be subject to the usual procedures for its application. The Spanish Government and the Partido Popular, however, have already announced their intention to appeal to the Constitution Court. Should the appeal be accepted, the court could pronounce that the Law be suspended for a maximum period of five months. (More information: [www.euskadi.net](http://www.euskadi.net)).



*The Lehendakari (on the left of the picture) listens to questions from citizens.*

### A few days before the meeting of Parliament in plenary session

## Ibarretxe responded to questions posed by members of the public

A few days before the meeting of Parliament in plenary session to debate the Plebiscite Law, the Lehendakari met a large number of citizens at the Kursaal Centre in Donostia to respond personally to the questions they wanted to ask about the consultation. Ibarretxe also had the opportunity to read some of the comments on questions made by members of Basque society through the citizens participation initiative Konpondu.net set up on the Internet by the Basque Government.

Before more than 700 people, mainly participants in the different forums organised through Konpondu, the Lehendakari expressed his pleasure at the level of maturity and serenity with which members of the public have received the consultation and declared that, "unlike politicians", they consider it "normal" to be consulted on this issue and that there is no reason "to be so dramatic".

The Lehendakari gave a detailed account of the Law that was to be debated later in the Basque Parliament and answered the doubts and questions posed by citizens via the Internet over the last few days.

Ibarretxe denied the accusations of the Partido Socialista that the Law did not contain any clear rejection of the violence of ETA, and declared that the first question in the consultation attempts to "put ETA in its place" and to tell it "to cease its activities once and for all".

Responding to a question about the legal nature of his proposal, Ibarretxe denied the illegality of the consultation and declared that he was in favour of changing current legislation "if this is necessary", and the fact that the central government has announced its intention to prevent the consultation from taking place "shows the weakness of the State" and "a lack of respect" for democracy.

Concerning his political future, the Lehendakari declared that if Basque society fails to support this initiative "I will go home without any fuss and with my mind at rest".

**The Government and Provincial Councils sign an Agreement to increase public investments over the next four years**

## **13,000 million euros to activate the Basque economy and create 20,000 jobs**

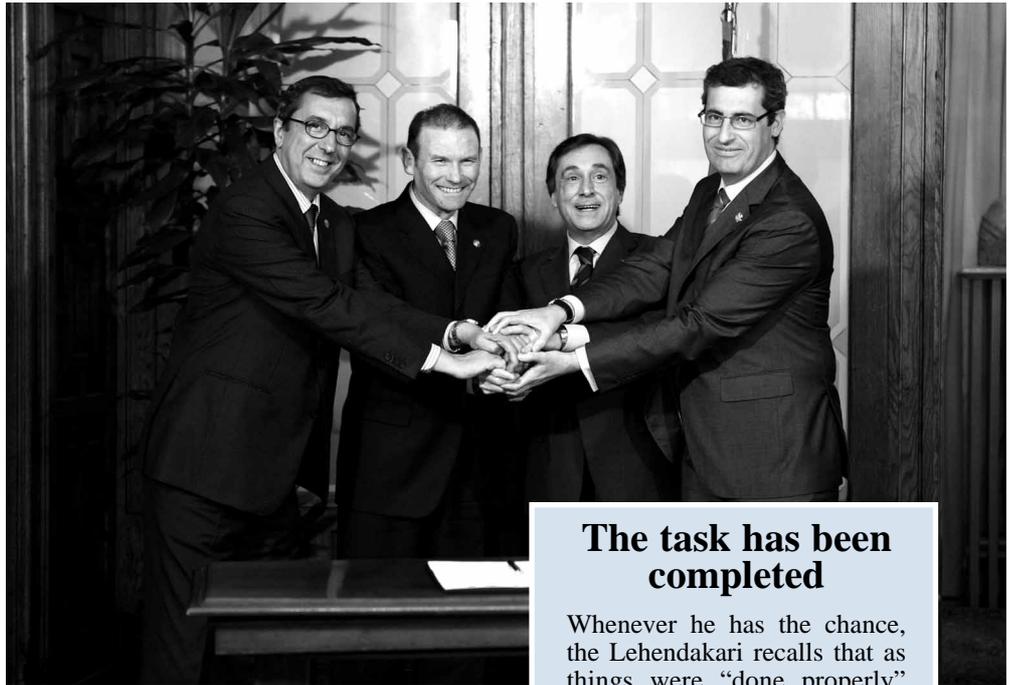
The Basque Government and the Provincial Councils of Alava, Gipuzkoa and Bizkaia have initiated a programme designed to promote the Basque economy, generate employment and improve productivity. Lehendakari Ibarretxe and the Presidents of the Provincial Councils signed an inter-institutional agreement at Ajuria Enea, the official residence of the Lehendakari, to allocate 13,000 million euros to efforts intended to provide incentives for public investments over the next four years. Moreover, the investments provided for in the agreement will create 20,000 jobs of which 14,000 will be direct.

With this important measure, Basque institutions intend to offset the current worldwide "deceleration" of the economy by initiating measures intended to maintain rates of activity and economic growth. To do this, a number of projects already underway will be speeded up and new projects will be initiated.

Projects such as the Donostia railway, lines 2 and 3 of Metro Bilbao, the General Roadway plan of Alava, the new Steel Technology Excellence Centre, and the extension of the Bahías de Bizkaia Regassification Plant, the construction of four new hospitals and several river channelling projects, are some of the initiatives affected by this agreement, which excludes the work on the Basque high-speed railway, as this project does not have a specific financing plan.

### **Horizon of confidence and security**

Following the signature of the Ajuria Enea Palace Agreement, the Lehendakari indicated that the plan demonstrated the "leading role" of this country



### **The task has been completed**

Whenever he has the chance, the Lehendakari recalls that as things were "done properly" when the economy was good, this means that today the effects of deceleration will be less felt in the Basque Country.

The Basque economy grew 3.1% in the first three months of the year, above the rates recorded in neighbouring countries and the forecast is that growth will stand at 2.5% over the coming months. Moreover, the latest figures offered by the Basque statistics office, Euroestat, place the per capita income of Basques at 141% of the average for Europe, five percentage points more than one year ago.

Unlike what is happening in other communities, the Basque Country continues to generate employment thanks to a sound and competitive industrial fabric, a diversified economic structure with less dependence on real estate and to the fact that small and medium-sized companies continue to have a relatively low level of debt.

from an economic and social viewpoint and linked this major initiative to the "efficient management" of Basque institutions over recent years. In his opinion, this has enabled the government to provide resources to "accelerate" the creation of infrastructures and at the same time foster policies of social solidarity, which is "our main priority".

"When things are going well it is essential to save in order to have the resources to invest when times are bad", the Lehendakari pointed out. He also offered the example of family economics to explain in what way the investments provided for in the Agreement are to be financed. "In addition to ordinary tax collection, we will take out all our savings and incur debt", he pointed out.

The purpose of all of this is to offer Basque citizens "guaranteed stability" and create a situation of "confidence" in economic sectors "and the world as well" because "this is a serious country", the Lehendakari emphasised.

## The Basque Country inundated the Zaragoza Expo

On June 29, the Basque Country inundated the Universal Exhibition, which is being held at this time in Zaragoza, under on the theme of water. On that date, a large contingent of representatives of Basque institutions, headed by the Lehendakari, travelled to Zaragoza in order to attend a large number of events organised by the Basque Government for Basque Country Day.



The day began on the waters of the river Ebro with regattas of fishing boats. Some of these competitions will count towards the official ACT league, which for the first time has been held in a place other than the Cantabrian sea. In terms of spectators, which included a large number of the enthusiasts who had travelled from the Basque Country to attend, the event was a great success.

Following the race, the focus of attention switched to events in the Basque Country Pavilion, where, as in the case of the Expo as a whole, water

is the main theme. From the ceiling of the Pavilion hang 10,000 fine methacrylate tubes that imitate the effect of the *sirimiri*, the Basque word for "drizzle", as well as eight umbrellas through which one can see

the natural resources of the Basque Country. Moreover, Basque rivers are carved out of the wood of its walls and through a number of peepholes installed in them, visitors can select a number of the most representative landscapes of the Basque Country.

Water was also the theme of the speech given by Lehendakari Ibarretxe, who used the verses of an old poem by Joxe Antonio Artze "Iturri zaharretik edaten dut. Ur berria edaten, beti berri den ura betiko iturri zaharretik", which

means "the old Basque people are forever new because every day they continue to drink fresh water from the old spring".

The Basque Country Day came to a spectacular finale with the concert offered at the Zaragoza Auditorium by the Basque soprano Ainhoa Arteta, who sang, accompanied by the Bilbao Symphonic Orchestra, the "Vallde-mosa Songs" by Antón García Abril with words by the writer Antonio Gala. The Orfeón Donostiarra also took part in the concert with the piece "Cuadros Vascos" by Guridi.

### It was not the Bou Nabarra

It could have been the Bou Nabarra, but in the end the latest investigations carried out by teams of divers this spring have ruled out that the wreck found off Cabo Matxitako belonged to this mythical ship of the Auxiliary Marine of the Basque Country, which was sunk with a large number of its crew in 1937 by Franco's cruiser Canarias (see no. 110 of Basque News).

Although the identity of the wreck is still unknown, it corresponds to a ship used for transporting iron ore. It is of a similar size to that of the Nabarra, although its forecastle is 5 metres shorter than the mythical fishing boat. Now, investigations will now concentrate on determining the identity of the ship, as there is no record of any boat of these characteristics having been sunk in this area.

## The number of Basque speakers continues to increase

Among the Basque population aged over 16, the Basque language continues to forge ahead and is spoken by more people, 137,200 people precisely, since 1991. These figures were provided recently by the latest Sociolinguistic Survey conducted by the Basque Government, which reveals that in the Basque Autonomous Community the number of people who speak and use Basque has increased considerably. This increase in the bilingual population has also been recorded in Navarra, especially among young people, although the rate of growth is slower than in the Basque Community. In spite of the gradual decline in the use of Basque, in Iparralde, the downward movement has slowed and there are hopeful signs.

The survey is carried out every five years, with the main aim of determining the sociolinguistic situation of the Basque Country by analysing the level of linguistic competence and the use of the Basque language, as well as attitudes in favour of its promotion.