

A politician with vision

**Jose Antonio Agirre Europako ideiare
aintzindarietariko bat dela esan
daiteke baina horretaz aparte,
politikazalea zen, barru-barruan
politika berea sentitzen zuen gizon
horietakoa. Eusko Jaurlaritzako Kanpo
Harremanetarako idazkari nagusia eta
Agirre Lehendakariaren iloba den**

**Iñaki Aguirre Arizmendi bere
testuetan murgildu da eta bere
osabaren ibilbidea ulertarazi dezakeen
entresaka egiten saiatu da: ondorengo
lerro hauetan, beraz, ikerketa lan
honetan jasotako testu
interesgarrietako batzuk laburbiltzen
saiatu da aldizkaria.**

[IÑAKI AGUIRRE ARIZMENDI, SECRETARY GENERAL FOR FOREIGN ACTION, BASQUE GOVERNMENT]

José Antonio de Aguirre's European vision at a time when European institutions were only a pipe dream, his participation in politics and his active role in the international Christian Democratic movement, coupled with forced exile, put him in a privileged position to become involved in some of the new European tendencies created after the second world war. Iñaki Aguirre, Secretary General for Foreign Action of the Basque Government and nephew of Lehendakari Aguirre, takes an in-depth look at the rich biography of the first Lehendakari.

His world of personal relations in the Basque, Spanish and international arenas; his intense activity as Mayor of Getxo, while at the same time spearheading the pro-Statute movement among Basque Town Councils; his involvement in the Spanish Cortes in Madrid and later his role as Lehendakari; his affiliation and participation in the federalist movements of Europe; his thoughts on human values, general politics and particularly the future of Europe; his organizational skills and ability to create a government above and beyond partisan ideologies – although not without problems: these attributes are just some of the reasons why today Aguirre is considered one of the most highly accepted figures in recent history among the Basque people.

Along with his writings, are the activities he carried out and his surroundings, the "I and my circumstances" coined by Spanish philosopher Ortega y Gasset. Sometimes these were local or regional, other times national or even international. Therefore, I am going to concentrate on the more outstanding aspects of his personality and his political philosophy. In this sense, perhaps the first thing to look at is his own public confession regarding his personality "(...) because I'm not the type of person to say one thing here and another thing there. (...) I never try to avoid responding to accusations made about me." He went on to say: "I have just come back from visiting all of the nations in America and I may be the only person who

has the rare privilege of never having argued with anyone. Not with this man or that man or any man. No one. I can visit the different factions into which the republican cause is sadly divided and maintain contacts with all of them. And I plan on keeping them up. In these times, what triumphs in the chancelleries is the truth. Don't ever think of anything without it."

To Aguirre the approach to nationalism as a force for change and constant progress in defending the freedom of a nation and is therefore a struggle against absolutist concepts in general. In this sense, although its origins go back earlier than the nineteenth century, it is then that "the phase of liberation of people who want to live their lives got underway, a process that continues in this century and which will not end until justice is recognized for all those who see themselves as a people or nation with the legitimate desire to contribute to building a common culture and heritage (...). Such a wide array of peoples contributes to adding color to human splendor (...). The happiness of future society is dependent on solving this situation." But without excluding anyone, without egotistic demands that are only benefit the Basque people or certain political tendencies, because "if the final governmental acts are based on parties and not people, the difficulties seen so far will only become greater."

His concept of the task of politics is therefore universalistic: "we want freedom for our people, but we also want – whether free or deprived of freedom, but much more so if free – to open our arms up to all men, to all peoples in Humanity"; in another section he wrote: "Our nationalism has to be universal if we don't want it to become egotistic and stingy and become the cause of disputes between peoples."

State and suprapstate

If I had to summarize the thought of José Antonio de Aguirre in three phrases, they would be "Basque unity," "ability to decide one's own future" and "defending



Pictured above with Frenchman Robert Schuman, one of the founders of modern Europe. Berlin, March 23rd 1956

democracy around the world," the latter understood as a common right with room for improvement, as is everything else in this world.

Looking at the present, I would venture to say that perhaps the most important thing is not defending the sense of identity, but rather a combination between this sense and the ability to plan society with other people's sense of identity, creating sociopolitical structures for attaining personal and social aspirations. Champion of universal principles, José Antonio de Aguirre denounced the attitude often held by major powers which see rights according to their geopolitical interests, or nations that defend the rights of peoples far from their borders and not those of the peoples within their own countries. "(...) The malice or convenience of powerful states forces all of those noble justice and rights principles to be applied outside of their own borders", or only the rights of states created already or granting such states more rights than they grant their own nationalities, or partial rights, like the right "to cultural autonomy, when there is no possible cultural autonomy without the corresponding political autonomy." To José Antonio de Aguirre, "the problem of nationalities will be resolved only with political freedom, that is, with by government itself and by the recognition of fundamental rights: the right to security." Therefore, he felt that "the problem of nationalities should, together with the problem of people and their rights, enter in the positive international arena, (...) omitted until now because the mere suggestion enraged countries interested in denying the reality of the problems...".

But for José Antonio de Aguirre this decentralizing trend was not exclusive to Third World peoples or others aspiring to a greater amount of freedom or even independence. In this changing world the problem was no longer "only one affecting backward peoples, but also advanced and progressive nations, which see no other solution for their future health and safety than to join a common supranational organization." He went on to say that "this path toward unity means the necessary cession of certain powers which correspond to the sovereignty of each state. Such a cession faces violent opposition in sectors which thrive on the memory of past

glories as if history were stuck in those times. A small Europe, so-called despite the one hundred and seventy million inhabitants, came into being to overcome these difficulties. In Aguirre's view "Our position has always been decidedly in favor of European integration, and within our possibilities we have collaborated from the beginning in bodies created to promote Europe, (...). However, like all problems associated with trying to restore freedom, there is no better solution than one's own efforts," without waiting for "I don't know what kind of illusory help."

José Antonio de Aguirre firmly believed that any political problem had an appropriate solution as long as there was political and popular will. He felt that nothing was unchangeable, that nothing other than people had absolute value and that any political structure was viable. In his words "In a Europe that wishes for peace and wants to have its own organization, it is inconceivable for there to be oppressed peoples among its nations. Federation is, therefore, a path to freedom because it gives rise to a commitment among equals. When significant changes are introduced to the old concept of state sovereignty, political philosophies geared to the future strive to sanctify and bring together the national freedom of peoples making it compatible with participation in the broadest areas of political and economic activity. Guaranteeing the future of nations, particularly the smaller ones, lies precisely in these larger suprastate structures (...). They must leave the domestic framework behind and enter into the international arena, serving the interests of the citizens."