

Pioneer of the idea of Europe

Jose Antonio Aguirrek ondotxo zekien Euskadik zaila izango zuela bere onarpen politiko osoa lortzea, Europako beste edozein herrialdeen modura. Estatista zen eta ezagutzen zituen horrelako helburu politikoek aukerak eta zailtasunak. Oso gazte hasi zen Agirre politikan, Primo de Riveraren diktaduraren azken urteetan, 1930. urtean, 25 urte zituela. 26 urterekin Getxoko Alkate izango da, 27 urterekin Madrilgo Korteetan Diputatu eta 32 urterekin Lehendakari.

José Antonio de Aguirre," according to his eldest son, Iñaki Aguirre, "was anything but naive. He knew only too well that attaining full political recognition for Euskadi as a European nation in the new political organization of postwar Europe would be extremely difficult. His first goal was to maintain Basque home rule, which had been granted during the Spanish Republic, and, if possible, increase it to a national and then European level. He conceived different constitutional formulas for Spain based on federate and confederate systems. He was a statesman who understood the possibilities but also the limitations of a project of such depth. He also knew that Euskadi could not remain outside of Europe, and that Euskadi would definitively lose everything if it did not get on board the European train."

It was at the headquarters of the Basque Government in Paris that the Basque Council was created, as was the Spanish Federal Council of the European Movement. Aguirre decided that the latter would be headed by Salvador de Madariaga, prestigious Spanish liberal thinker and staunch believer in Europe, but with a centralist mentality, in order to see how far they could play the European card to unite anti-Franco groups of all types in overthrowing the dictatorship. "Because," added Iñaki Aguirre, "if the European integration experience was economically, socially and politically successful, sooner or later it would prevail over European countries still under

Europe as a political and economic horizon

"Aguirre and the European Horizon" is the generic, and perhaps somewhat enigmatic, title of a course offered through the University of the Basque Country/Euskal Herriko Unibertsitatea summer course program. It is taught by Iñaki Aguirre Zabala, eldest son of the first Lehendakari and Chair of International Relations of the UBC/EHU.

José Antonio de Aguirre died in 1960, which means he was witness only to the first steps of European integration with the signing of the founding treaties of the European Communities in 1951 and 1957. This is the reason behind the course instructor's decision to use the expression "European horizon." As Professor Aguirre explains, "It was mainly a long-term anticipation of the future policy of Europe by visionary, courageous and generous people, the founding fathers of Europe, including Jean Monnet, Robert Schuman, Alcide de Gasperi and Konrad Adenauer, among others. In any case, for us Europe is still out of reach on the political and economic horizon, even with the EU elections in June, the

Irish presidency, and the passing of the Draft Treaty establishing a European Constitution."

"During the World War II postwar period José Antonio de Aguirre left a clearly European mark and vision of the future on the Basque Government and on the democratic forces supporting the institution in general, championing the creation of a federation between the peoples of Europe. And although he did take part in the intellectual and political debate at the beginning of the project, he himself was witness only to the very inception of the European integration process. The project, which is now made up of twenty-five Member States, is a huge success for an economic and political adventure previously unheard of throughout world history. The adventure that began over half a century ago has now blossomed into the European Union, following the geographic European outlines and ideas familiar to Aguirre's generation," points out Iñaki Aguirre.

The course is designed to look back on the life and political legacy of José Antonio de

Aguirre on the centennial of his birth on March 6th 1904. However, it is also conceived as an opportunity to build on his ideas for the future peace and freedom of a united Europe and for the economic and political future of Euskadi in a united Europe. This perspective encourages today's witnesses, whether scholars or politicians, to take part in the course "Aguirre and the European Horizon."

Prospective course

The course, as we can see, is not exactly a course on History – although it is certainly present. Instead, it is a prospective course, in other words a chance to reflect on the politics of the future of Europe and on how stateless nations like Euskadi fit into the scheme of things.

The more history-oriented lectures will be led by the team of International Relations experts working with Professor Aguirre from the University of the Basque Country/Euskal Herriko Unibertsitatea.



Members of the Basque Government Office at the 1945 Aberri Eguna.

the yoke of dictatorships. And these countries would then change governments and democratize – precisely what did eventually happen, although much later."

José Antonio de Aguirre's most visionary period was as a pioneer of the idea of a united Europe. His idea of Europe included the political recognition of all of nations, even those peoples caught between the threads woven by history. This period was seen as early on as 1943, when from New York he wrote a pragmatic doctrinal text for the European postwar period titled *Coordinación de nacionalidades europeas* (Coordinating European Nationalities). According to Iñaki Aguirre, "Aguirre's sights were set way beyond the present. Those were times of world war. In the wake of periods of crisis

circumstances conducive to democratic revolutions and major institutional changes are often set in place continent-wide; the collective future has yet to be built and everything seems possible. Following World War II, with all totalitarian dictatorships gone, or so it was envisaged, it was not inconceivable in a democratic Spain for there to be, for example, a confederation in which nations like Euskadi, Catalonia or Galicia could carry more political clout, together with other stateless European nations such as Flanders or Scotland. All of this would also be possible in a new Europe about to embark on a federally inspired unification process. It was, without question, an unrepeatably moment in history, during which Euskadi made its voice heard in both America and Europe in spite of enormous limitations. But the beginning of the Cold War, the persistence of the Franco dictatorship and the progressive narrow-mindedness of states and their monolithic concept of sovereignty would soon dash all hopes."

Mayor, Deputy, Lehendakari

Entre la libertad y la revolución (Between Freedom and Revolution) is the title of a book written by José Antonio de Aguirre just before the 1936 elections on what happened in the five year period from 1930 to 1935. In this extensive book the man who would become the first Lehendakari of Euskadi tells about all of his activities as politician, deputy and leader of the pro-statute of autonomy campaign in the constitutional framework of the Spanish Republic. At that time Aguirre was already

In the first lecture, Iñaki Aguirre will recall the personal relations that the first Lehendakari had with some of the pioneers of the "Idea of Europe" and with the founders of the European Communities.

Alex Ugalde will present the second lecture, explaining the evolution of Basque Europeanism from the period between the wars, when some Basque nationalist intellectuals were in favor of pan-European projects, to the post-world war period, when Basques actively participated in the European Movement.

José Luis de Castro, European specialist, is slated to give the third lecture, which will concentrate on both the past and the present. The talk will cover the more doctrinal or ideological aspects of José Antonio de Aguirre's federalists concepts, interpreted from the perspective of the current situation in Euskadi and Europe.

The program will be rounded out with a presentation by Scottish Professor Michael Keating, expert on the subject of nations in



Iñaki Aguirre Zabala, UBC/EHU Professor and Chair of International Relations.

Europe. Keating will approach this ongoing and age-old debate by looking at how states without nations fit into the European Union. Professor Keating, who is currently working for the European Institute in Florence, is the author of "Nations against the State," a book which focuses on the cases of Scotland and Catalonia and has become a bestseller.

The last two lectures will also center on contemporary issues and will be presented by two political figures.

Josu Jon Imaz, president of Euskadi Buru Batzar of the Basque Nationalist Party (EAV/PNV), will speak on "The legitimacy of José Antonio de Aguirre his political generation's Europeanism for Basque nationalism today." Josu Jon Imaz, former European Union deputy, is very knowledgeable on the subject of Europe and his personal commitment to the European project is widely known.

Lastly, Luc van den Brande, former President of Flanders – a country that enjoys full constitutional recognition in the federal structure of Belgium, will also take part in this course. Van den

Brande will discuss the place of peoples and stateless nations in the European Union. He is presently Senator in Belgium and Member of the Flemish Parliament and was a former member of the EU Convention on the Future of Europe responsible for drawing up the Draft Treaty establishing a European Constitution.

active in intellectual and European political circles with Christian and pro-European tendencies..

José Antonio de Aguirre's political experience began early on, coinciding with the end of the Primo de Rivera dictatorship in 1930, at the age of twenty-five. At twenty-six he was Mayor of Getxo, at twenty-seven, Deputy to the Spanish Cortes, and Lehendakari at the age of thirty-two. His record is

still hard to beat, although Landaburu, for example, was deputy when he was only twenty-five. "They were very young men. I refer to Aguirre's generation, as Leizaola used to, as 'the generation of 1930,' which was when they actually went into politics, not in 1936, like people often say nowadays." Iñaki Aguirre adds, "It was a generation of highly educated, well-read Basque nationalist politicians who also left behind a large amount of text, for the most part written during their long years of exile. It included my father, as well as Javier Landaburu, Manuel Irujo and Jesús Maria Leizaola, to name just a few of the leading nationalist politicians."

The generation of 1930 brought about the ideological modernization of the Basque Nationalist Party, which up to that point was still staunchly denominational, following the designs of the party's founder, Sabino Arana.

However, party doctrine needed to be adapted in order to bring it into the Christian Democrat fold, along the lines of parties created during the years leading up to World War II.

During that period José Antonio de Aguirre and his generation found their primary doctrinal sources in the social doctrine of the Catholic Church, in the abundant writings on social Christianity, and in the position of Belgian Cardinal Mercier on the German invasion of his country in the first world war, which was of huge doctrinal influence among the social



July 1937. A meeting with Catalanian President Lluís Companys and the Generalitat.



July 1937. Aguirre meets with Catalanian President Lluís Companys and the Generalitat.

democratic and nationalist circles of the time. Such inspiration would later nurture the Christian Democratic parties of Europe, bolstered by other contributors, such as the French philosopher Jacques Maritain, who Aguirre know personally. In New York years later, Aguirre would meet Paul Van Zeeland, an important figure in the history of Belgian Christian democracy. Together they took part in pro-Europe

events organized in New York by Count Richard Coudenhove-Kalergi, founder in the period between the wars of the Pan Europe movement, precursor to what would later become a united democratic Europe.

Even to his political adversaries, José Antonio de Aguirre was seen as a skillful politician able to rally a consensus despite ideological discrepancies. Iñaki Aguirre underscores some of his father's most noteworthy political achievements:

"The first Basque Statute of Autonomy in history, outcome of his personal negotiations with Socialist leader Indalecio Prieto; presiding, in times of war and during his long years in exile, over a multi-party yet cohesive Basque Government; his political work in the Americas first and later in Europe geared toward attaining a minimum degree of unified action between supporters of the

Spanish Republic living in exile, at the time highly divided, particularly with regard to international organizations like the United Nations and pro-European movements; the personal impetus he offered in consolidating Christian Democratic parties in Latin America and in organizing an international Christian Democratic umbrella group in which they would have representation. In short, he was a man who knew how to work – and how to get other people with different or even diametrically opposed ideas to work together on causes he considered just."

**Agirre
kontsentsuzalea zen,
irizpide desberdinen
arteko adostasunak
bilatzekoaren
aldekoa. Garai
haisetako politikoek,
baita kontrakoak
zirenek ere, bere
trebetasuna
azpimarratzen zuten.**