

Aurkezpena

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Opening letter

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The evolution of the end of the 20th Century and the beginning of the 21st were conditioned by two factors of major import in the international arena: European integration and globalisation. There can be no doubt that the last two decades have witnessed a growing movement in international trade and a clear trend towards globalisation in several orders, albeit particularly in the world of economics, culture and communications, and macro-regional political structures such as the European Union, MERCOSUR or NAFTA, to name but some. In turn, the desire to build this new international order with other peoples and cultures requires new alliances and instruments to bring such objectives to fruition.

This evolution converges with the changes which generally speaking are determining the configuration of international society as interdependent and transnational, where classic state structures are being questioned and the State is no longer the exclusive figurehead in international relations. On the one hand, the contribution of supranational structures with strong decision-making powers and a major influence in States' foreign and domestic policies, and on the other the emergence of very decentralised structures with broad powers, show that the concepts of authority and

power are becoming increasingly more disperse, and call for a redefinition of sovereignty.

Within this trend towards progressive globalisation, the local and the singular does not only manifest its relevant vitality through an attitude of self-defence, but also claims participation in the structuring of a new international order, demanding that the personality of peoples, Stateless Nations and substate organisations be respected and also recognised by suprastate echelons.

In this context, Euskadi is showing a special international dynamism which is evident if we consider that at the moment all the Departments of the Basque Government, as well as the economic and social partners, are engaged in some type of activity abroad. Being a small country allows us to be flexible and adaptable to

different and changing circumstances. But at the same time, this same dimension renders us more vulnerable to such international changes, thus requiring a coordinated and proactive action consolidating our pre-emptive capacity in order to push on towards an integral Basque foreign policy.

However, Euskadi's international vocation is no overnight thing. In the midst of the Civil War, the Basque Government had already begun to

develop its own foreign relations policy. The driving principles were the first Ministerial Declaration of October 7, 1936, which may be summarised in the following points: to establish "good relations" with countries that respected "the sovereignty and the rights" of the Republic and Euskadi; to establish links with "the Peoples" that uphold "democratic forms of government"; and particularly with countries where there were "Basque Communities". From the outset of its mandate, the Aguirre Government showed a clear commitment to projecting Euskadi abroad. The following year, 1937, saw the opening of Centres abroad and appointments of delegates, prioritising relations with everything that represented institutional or decision-making power in Europe and America. The management of international activities fell to the cabinet overall, although the Lehendakari played a decisive role.

## The foreign action of the Basque Government

The creation of Basque Government Centres abroad made it possible to articulate a compact network of contacts and relations at different levels, which proved very useful during the war and post-war years, likewise promoting the international projection of the Basque people on a hitherto unheard-of scale. In this regard, mention must be made of the Centres in Paris, London and Brussels and, albeit with different characteristics, the representations in New York and Boise, the Geneva project, which fell through, and the Centres in Argentina, Ecuador, Mexico, the Dominican Republic, Venezuela, Cuba, Uruguay, Chile, Colombia, Panama and Peru. In the Spanish State, Centres were opened in Madrid, Barcelona, Valencia and Alicante.

These were the historic beginnings of the foreign relations maintained by this first Basque Government in the war era. In the reference to its activities, collected in the Report "The Foreign Action of the Basque Country 1980-2003"\* mention is made, among others, to contacts with the Diplomatic Corps, particularly of the United Kingdom, France, the USSR, the Vatican, the United States and Argentina; negotiations between the Basque Government and the Spanish Francoist Government for the exchange of prisoners; relations with governments, and more specifically with regard to the sending of reports to European and American cabinets; the acquisition of products for supplies, international airlines and the creation of companies in other countries; control of maritime borders, migration services; asylum by the Basque Centres in the Spanish

State for Spanish and foreign citizens; visits to the Basque Country by diplomats, journalists, work on foreign exposure, the publication of books and magazines/journals, the organisation of cultural tours, the creation of the Basque Red Cross and the International League of Friends of the Basques, etc.

With this spate of activities, which greatly surpassed the powers awarded by the Statute of Autonomy, it is understandable why it was said more than once that the Basque Government of the time resembled a Foreign Office, led decisively by the Lehendakari Aguirre himself, although there was also a Secretariat for Foreign Affairs under Bruno Mendiguren. At that time, the Government acted "as an independent and sovereign power".

When the Government went into exile, it is clear that a great part of its activity targeted foreign affairs, simply because it could not deal with domestic issues. The collaboration with the Allies throughout the Second World War to fight the forces of the Axis was one of the essential parts of the foreign activity of the Basque Government. After the Second World War, the Basque Government in exile played a major role in the process of building Europe. This action was mainly led by the Lehendakari and Javier de Landaburu.

In 1945, the Lehendakari Aguirre made an unofficial visit to the Conference of San Francisco to prevent Francoist Spain from joining the United Nations. Similarly, on May 21, 1946, accompanied by Jesús Galíndez and Antón de Irala, he held

an interview with the first Secretary General of the United Nations, the Norwegian Trygve Halvdan Lie, to whom he delivered the "Memorandum from The Autonomous Basque Government to The Sub-Committee of The Security Council", which expounded aspects of Basque history, the creation of the Government of Euskadi and the political and social situation after the victory of the Francoist regime.

No less important was his work in disseminating Basque culture, his teamwork with Catalans and Galicians in the reformulation of a new State model, and his efforts for the Basque Government to be definitively recognised by the International Organisations.

Six decades on, local and international problems are totally different. But the trends towards internationalisation and globalisation mean that public and private institutions should coparticipate in the common destiny, while solving problems arising at local level at the same time.

This is the perspective from which the current Basque Government has decided to back a foreign affairs strategy - officially approved by the Cabinet of Ministers last March -, which addresses, among other elements, the opening of Centres outside Euskadi, defining priority geographical areas of activity.

In these pages we would like to explain what this strategy consists of in greater detail, and the role played by the current Basque Government Centres abroad.

\*By CASTRO RUANO J. L. and UGALDE ZUBIRI, A. "The Foreign Action of the Basque Country (1980-2003)". IVAP. Basque Government. 2004.