

## Aurkezpena

PATXI BAZTARRIKA



## Opening letter

Deputy Minister for Language  
Policy of the Basque Government

**B**asque society and government agencies have made a huge effort over the past twenty-five years to revive Euskara. The Basque language in Euskadi today has made considerable advances compared to its circumstances in the 1980s. Twenty years may seem like very little time indeed, but the fact of the matter is that in 1981 only one out of every five Basque citizens spoke Euskara, whereas twenty years later a third of the population now speaks the language. This spectacular leap forward means that there are now 200,000 additional Euskara speakers.

Moreover, the increment in the bilingual population is across the board in terms of age, although it is important to point out that the younger the age group, the higher the percentage of bilinguals, clearly influencing the transmission of the language. 60% of the population between five and fourteen years of age is bilingual.

Euskara has reached new spheres and levels; it is now commonly heard at home, in the community, the media, government, business and commerce, the workplace and in academia. However, knowing the language and actually speaking it are two different matters, the latter sorely lagging behind. Therefore, it is vital to continue working towards promoting the use of Euskara if we want to become a truly bilingual society.

# Euskara reaches out

Euskara, just like any other language, belongs to those who speak it, in addition to forming part of the cultural heritage of all humankind. At the dawn of the third millennium languages have gone global. At the beginning of the sixteenth century, in the first book published in the Basque language, Bernat Etxepare wrote "euskara jalgi hadi mundura" (Euskara, open up to the world). Today his words ring true more than ever before. The old borders have disappeared; today's world is an open place in which all of humanity benefits from interaction. This is why the Basque Government contributes to the promotion of Euskara and Basque culture both within and beyond our borders. Among other activities we want to strengthen collaboration with Euskal Etxeas to spread the Basque language and reinforce the university language assistantship program under way.

These activities, promoted by the Basque Department of Culture, are slated to come under the umbrella of

the future "Euskadi Institute." Approved by the Basque Parliament, the mission of the new agency will be to promote Basque language and culture abroad, and will therefore absorb the activities we have been responsible for until now.

The language assistantship program in American and European universities falls within the framework of "Euskara Munduan," a program administered by the Basque Department of Culture through the independent institute HABE. Euskara Munduan is in charge of developing and certifying Euskara courses for adults taught beyond the borders of Euskal Herria. There are currently thirteen universities in Europe and the Americas that have included Euskara and Basque culture in their curriculums.

Together with university programs, Basque language and culture classes offered at Basque clubs are key to ensuring the future of our cultural legacy. We recognize and greatly admire the efforts made by Basque centers around the world in spreading an appreciation for Basque language and culture. We want the Basques of the diaspora, the men and women who make up our "eighth province," to know that Basque society is proud of their efforts and determination. And we want to work hand in hand to reach out and build the future of our language and culture, no matter where we are in the world.