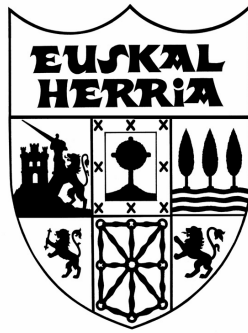


UDALBILTZA[®]

GENERAL ASSEMBLY



**POLITICAL MANAGEMENT
REPORT**

Basauri, 8th November 2003



UDALBILTZA®

A little over four years ago, we met at the Euskalduna Conference Centre in Bilbao on 18th September 1999 to bring to life and set the course for UDALBILTZA, the Assembly of Municipalities and municipally-elected Councillors of Euskal Herria. In the course of that first Assembly, we established a whole series of principles that would guide our activities, and several of us were elected as members of the Executive Board of this institution for a four-year term of office.

The time has therefore come to stop and take stock of the activities developed thus far and to elect new management that is able to take over the baton and continue taking firm steps towards achieving our objectives. This is essentially what the task of today's Assembly entails and is the reason why we have convened it today here in Basauri.

UDALBILTZA came into being four years ago, full of strength and hope. And please allow me to reveal now that, despite all the vicissitudes we have experienced, despite all the hardships and unfair criticism, those of us here continue to maintain that strength and hope and continue to believe in the need for and viability of this, our institution.

UDALBILTZA came into being when ETA was still maintaining its "ceasefire", and in many fields and institutions, we municipally-elected councillors and parties we represent - EAJ-PNV and EA - worked hard to consolidate a situation of "non-violence," of peace, of respect for all human rights for all individuals and of the development of an Euskal Herria in harmony with and respect for the will of its citizens. Because, even if it is true that at that time different acts of "kale borroka" (street violence) persisted, the victims of which in many cases were municipally-elected colleagues of ours, it is also true to say that Basque citizens were able to see that the long, dark

tunnel towards the normalization and pacification of Euskal Herria started to give off an encouraging ray of light.

Soon after UDALBILTZA had taken its first steps, ETA decided to terminate its "ceasefire" in December 1999. In January 2000, it resumed its terrorist attacks with the murder in Madrid on the 28th of that month of Lieutenant-Colonel Blanco. This constituted a seriously mistaken change in strategy – first and foremost, due to its irreparable and atrocious human consequences and, secondly, owing to its political consequences that led to a split in the *active collaboration* between *abertzale* (Basque nationalist) parties, in view of the insufficient response offered by the then Euskal Herritarrok (EH) as a result of these violations of human rights.

We should recall this and keep it in mind, because when we continue requesting *active collaboration* and *joint work*, it is necessary to once again reiterate the fact that fruitful, positive work towards developing a People can only be based on solid criteria and ethical principles involving the scrupulous respect for the rights of all individuals. Because here and now, in a modern, strong, developed European society such as the Basque one, nothing that fails to be based on democratic foundations and on respect for all individuals will be able to yield good results. ETA is surplus to requirements and gets in the way of progress, and the citizens of Euskal Herria demand its disappearance. It is surplus to requirements because its activities fail to respect the most basic of human rights – that of the right to life. It gets in the way of things because it throws a spanner in the works of collaboration between *abertzale* parties and of the development of an Euskal Herria in peace, coexistence and prosperity among the Peoples of Europe and the world.

Please allow me to remind you and reiterate a series of ideas and principles approved by UDALBILTZA on 28th March 2000, with the regrettable abstention of the then Euskal Herritarrok (EH). In my opinion, they clearly and accurately summarize our view of the problem. We stated thus:

1. That national construction must be sustained via the use of democratic channels, freedom and the will and decision-making powers of citizens, in so doing rejecting the use of violence and respecting human rights without exception at all times.

2. That it is the Basque citizens – men and women - who constitute the subjects of the Basque nation, and that the free and democratic exercising of the will of citizens does not allow for the imposing of immovable frameworks or freedoms imposed by force.

3. That ETA is hindering Basque national construction. The outrages attributed to it fail to respect either human rights or the will of citizens. We demand that it allow Basque society to construct its future in peace. That would be its wisest and bravest decision. That it should let Basque society do the talking and should cease its activity. Violence and national construction are incompatible, as are democracy and imposition.

4. That UDALBILTZA is going to continue along the path it has embarked on, developing its plan of action. That it will work towards achieving the objectives set out by making use of all the means at its disposal, always on the path towards national construction based on the voluntary participation of municipalities and municipally-elected councillors and on a democracy free of impositions.”

As I said, the then Euskal Herritarrok (EH) abstained. It maintained a politically irresponsible and escapist attitude in view of the evidence of flagrant violations of human rights, many of which municipally-elected councillors and colleagues of ours from other parties had to endure and continue to endure, and to whom I wish to send my very best and warmest wishes. Their right to defend their own ideas and projects in freedom is also our own right and freedom.

In view of this situation, the EAJ-PNV and EA parties decided not to develop *active collaboration* with the so-called *izquierda abertzale* (Basque nationalist left) and agreements in the Basque Parliament and in numerous town councils were broken off, while the activities envisaged in the Lizarra/Garazi Agreement and in the Batera Platform were suspended. As far as UDALBILTZA was concerned, we waited for a sensible period of time to see how things evolved. EH, rather than facing its responsibilities, remained politically resistant to change, promoted the setting-up of its own Assembly of municipally-elected Councillors and ensured that the consignment of aid the Basque Government had earmarked for our institution was not forthcoming. All this meant that we felt compelled to remove the EH councillors from UDALBILTZA.

For our part, we continue with our work, and have thus been developing our Working Plans during 2001, 2002 and 2003, as my friend and colleague Jesus Mari Agirrezabala, Vice-President of UDALBILTZA and Mayor of Deba, will be informing you about in a few minutes.

A few days ago, I stated that the Basque Parliament elections on 13th May 2001 and the recent municipal and provincial elections reaffirm the path we have embarked on. I think that citizens have corroborated the basic principles we have maintained over these past few years: no to violence, the active defence of human rights and also the defence of self-determination of the Basque People – in other words, defence of the fact that it is citizens, in this case, Basque citizens, who should take full responsibility for and have the right to determine their own future within the context of an increasingly united Europe that must respect the identities of all and every one of the Peoples of Europe.

Clearly, over these past two and a half years, the attitude of the Spanish Government has involved developing a regression in the political and cultural order against Euskal Herria and against its identity. From the enactment of the sectarian *Ley de Partidos* (Law governing Political Parties) to different bans, including clamorous attacks against the most important mark of identity of the Basque soul - our language, Euskera – by campaigns against Basque nationalism and a reactionary, nineteenth-century concept of European construction. We are denied our right to be a People, a modern, open-minded, caring People in harmony and peace, one that wishes to develop its full potential and identity in an increasingly inter-related and globalized world.

I wish to refer to all this now.

On 4th July 2002, we municipally-elected councillors and those from other institutional areas of Euskal Herria deposited a document in Madrid in which we condemned the new *Ley de Partidos* which resulted in the banning in March of this year of the HB/EH/Batasuna political parties. The way we see it, this law and the ban itself constitute a clear attack against ideological freedom and political pluralism, to the extent that political parties have been banned due to the content of their projects. Neither social tension nor the despair caused by ETA violence, nor the possible crimes committed by a certain political association, justifies leaving a part of our society

without political representation; it also seriously undermines the set of guarantees governing the legal-penal system, because it is individuals rather than political parties who commit offences.

UDALBILTZA also condemned and condemns the police and judicial operation against the Assembly of municipally-elected Councillors of Batasuna that was put into practice at the end of last April because, irrespective of any discrepancies regarding condemnations or not of violence and despite the fact that we removed the elected representatives of Batasuna from our institution, these courses of action meant putting restrictions on the defence and dissemination of political projects and a new turn of the screw against the system of public freedoms.

Special mention should be made of the closure of the Basque language daily newspaper *Egunkaria* and of the recent action taken against major sectors and companies that are working towards the normalized development of our language – Euskera – and of our culture. The presumption of innocence has been violated, as have basic principles of the Rule of Law, Euskera has been criminalized and the financial collapse of companies and families has been brought about, even resulting in bankruptcy.

All these actions, in addition to the odious pre-election campaigns against Basque nationalism we have endured and are currently enduring, form part of a strategy of a scope that seeks the political, social and cultural destabilization of Euskal Herria. They are attempting to make tense, put pressure on and give rise to even more acute confrontation at the heart of our People. To this end, they attack all things Basque, Euskera, ideological freedom, political pluralism and all projects that are legitimately based on the development of an integrated, open-minded and plural Euskal Herria – and Euskal Herria that is increasingly self-determined and less dependent on powers that are alien to the will of Basque citizens.

And, dear colleagues and friends, I say *attempt* because we at UDALBILTZA are convinced that they are not going to achieve this. We at UDALBILTZA are going to continue maintaining our commitment in favour of a Euskal Herria in peace, condemning violence as a tool for achieving political goals and ignoring isolationist strategies that attempt to ban ideas and destabilize our People. And the fact is that we at UDALBILTZA are sure there is a society that yearns for peace and rejects violence, a plural society that wants dialogue and debate without fear, a mature society that seeks new

majority consensus in pursuit of new frameworks and relations involving coexistence among Basques and between Basques and our neighbours, and a politically and culturally sound society that is not afraid of facing the future.

And the future has already commenced. On 25th October last, the Government of *Lehendakari* Ibarretxe submitted its Agreement for Coexistence which, despite attempted legal-political hiccoughs, we are sure will be discussed and debated normally at the heart of Basque society and in the Basque Parliament itself. We at UDALBILTZA wish to declare our contentment with and confidence in this initiative which for us is extremely encouraging, and are convinced that it will contribute towards debate, dialogue and discussion in pursuit of a Euskal Herria in peace - and one that will experience economic, social and cultural progress.

UDALBILTZA made its contribution to the work carried out by the Special Commission on Self-government of the Basque Parliament. This constituted one of the first frameworks for debate to give rise to this initiative. UDALBILTZA declared in this Parliamentary Commission that legal-political frameworks are tools which are subordinate to the political, economic, social and cultural welfare of peoples and individuals, rather than the other way round; that these frameworks are articulated in the interests and at the service of both peoples and individuals; and that they must contribute towards their development and evolution. Therefore, political frameworks must be accommodated to the free and responsible will of citizens and be based on the decision-making capacity of the peoples and individuals that comprise them.

The predominant principles of the European integration process patently show us this and constitute a clear example to follow.

The Right to Self-determination of the Basque People proclaimed by UDALBILTZA is fully in keeping with the underlying political logic and philosophy existing in the entire European integration process – and all this despite the fact that some Spanish nationalists insist on unfairly stating the opposite. Let us wait and see.

Europeanism, as an expression of the desire to overcome the feudal division of the Continent and put an end to its confrontations, emerged during the Renaissance with the birth and subsequent development of the modern state. However, the putting into practice

of this *Europeanism* would become embodied in ways and forms characterized by domination, imposition, standardization by force and the fragile balance of confrontation and rivalry among States and Peoples.

Indeed, by monopolizing the use of force, the modern state gave rise not only to a re-arranging of feudal chaos, but also an intensification of war in terms of its relations with others. Thus, there existed an evident state imperialism that went beyond any sentiments in terms of Peoples and diversities, at the same time creating artificial states without real foundations.

The connection between the system of European states and the series of constant wars that took place illustrates this: those that confronted the Houses of Austria and France in the 16th and 17th centuries until the outbreak of the Second World War itself.

The economic crisis of the 1930s and the emergence of Hitler, Mussolini and Franco totalitarianism destroyed the spirit and, with it, dashed the hopes of the League of Nations and the initial Europeanist proposals put forward by the Count of Coudenhove-Kalergi and the French Foreign Minister, Aristide Briand. Totalitarianism, imperialism and ideas imposed by force would once again give rise to serious confrontation among Europeans. The consequences in Europe and in Euskal Herria of the 2nd World War and of other conflicts on a lesser scale have been horrendous: on a human level, the loss of millions of lives and tens of thousands of refugees; on an economic level, incalculable losses and the gargantuan task of reconstruction; and, on a political level, the attempt at genocide in terms of Basques' identity and the loss for Europe of an entire major role on the international stage.

However, this situation and the geopolitical consequences of war constituted the definitive drive towards the unification process of Europe. Tired and exhausted of fratricidal wars, deprived of colonial empires, dependent on the United States for their security and threatened by competition from new industrial powers, there were just two options available to European nations – survival or decline.

Europe opted for survival. It acted step-by-step and, from a political point of view, by basing the European integration process on simple and profoundly democratic principles that UDALBILTZA defend – free adherence or association, non-violence, non-imposition and political imagination – to create new institutions and forms of political relations that meet the objectives of peace, coexistence, cooperation and stability for both peoples and citizens. This is the so-called *community method*: step-by-step, via free decision-making and acceptance, enabling an imaginative and bold mechanism based on solidarity and cooperation to be created that would make it impossible to return to the old infernos of war and confrontation between Peoples - learning to get to know each other, to be recognized, to be respected, to engage in dialogue and to be appreciated, and sharing sovereignty and creating positive bonds via freedom and respect, which does not mean that each one would have to renounce their personality, their identity and their aspirations, or that differences and diverse opinions would have to be excluded, but rather that a genuine will to be understood and find positive commitments between Peoples should be forged.

This meant a move away from relations based on force and rivalry between States and Peoples that were characteristic of previous centuries, towards other new ones involving cooperation and free constructive integration among equals. It meant a move away from States and Peoples that compete with each other and confront each other towards other *cooperative* and *partner* States and Peoples, by dismantling borders – a symbol of confrontation – and creating space for relationships in freedom, cooperation and respect. It meant overcoming the former concept of the modern state which based its *raison d'être* on rivalry and on elements such as borders, armies, currency and foreign relations.

UDALBILTZA wonders why this formula, which is acknowledged as being successful for Europe, cannot be used as a basis for relations between Euskadi and Spain, between Euskadi and France and between Euskadi and Europe.

The feeling of identity that UDALBILTZA defends for the Basque People goes beyond legal or interim political border-related norms. Feelings of national identity cannot be pushed aside or spurned by any decree, law or constitution. In an increasingly integrated Europe, it should be accepted naturally that every citizen is entitled to have the sense of belonging and identity they so wish.

One of the self-interested clichés most used by some politicians, historians and press leader writers is the systematic disclosure of the fact that a reduction in the number of states is a constant in the evolution of history over the last two centuries in Europe, and that this trend is an undeniable synonym for peace, stability and progress. Well, that idea is radically false. There are more and more states on the old continent – a product of the desire on the part of nations and Peoples to be provided with their own state, and there are fewer and fewer empires or multinational states. Markets are becoming globalized, borders are being dismantled, we have a single currency, and yet, the number of states – which is a synonym for a nation's own identity – is increasing in Europe. We only have to note the reality of the situation:

- 1871: 20 states
- 1900: 23 states
- 1914: 26 states
- 1920: 32 states
- 1930: 34 states
- 1970: 35 states
- 2000: 46 states

And history proves that when a nation gains its independence it never goes backwards and that the new status, due to its *national coherence*, does not evidence either economic problems or problems regarding political stability, but rather, the opposite. This is not the first time that Europe has been enlarged, nor will it be the last. Because Europe, like its own Peoples – among them ours, the Basque People – is in reality undergoing a permanent gestation, development and a search for new scenarios of peace, stability, improvement, respect and progress, just like life itself and the individual history of each and every one of us.

On the other hand, there are those who tend to oppose the concepts and rights deriving from the terms *people* and *citizen*, by trying to get across the notion that there exist two contradictory realities. Well, it is necessary to underline the fact that collective rights are none other than a logical derivation and natural extension of individual rights. These are the two sides of the same coin, which are closely linked. In this sense, UDALBILTZA points out that there are no collective rights without a guarantee of individual rights, but that individual rights are not full ones if they fail to respect collective rights.

The only thing that those who continually cite citizens' rights, individual rights and even caring internationalism in opposition to collective rights in the Basque case do is make an attempt to conceal their Spanish or French brand of pro-state nationalism, given that rights of *people* are in fact attributed to Spanish or French citizens. This idea is clearly contradictory and reflects the fact that they are nationalists and that their nation exists, even though they may try to conceal this. That nation, however, is not the Basque one.

UDALBILTZA respects their Spanish or French sentiments and that their nation is Spain or France. At the same time, however, it also demands on a European level for Basque sentiments that it be admitted that the nation defended by UDALBILTZA is Euskadi and that, politically, we do not feel either Spanish or French, but rather, Basque and European.

If you will allow me, I should like to leave you with a clear message: UDALBILTZA is an institution that, as well as being democratic, legitimate and Europeanist, is absolutely necessary. We are municipally-elected representatives of the seven territories of Euskal Herria and we must act as such. Yet as well as being mayors and councillors who must take care of our respective municipalities, we must be aware of the fact that we are elected Basque representatives belonging to a single People and must also work hard towards achieving this goal.

Acknowledgements:

I should like to thank the mayor of Basauri, Rafa Ibarгүйen, for all the help he has provided us with in order to be able to hold this 3rd General Assembly in this municipality.

Thank you also to all the colleagues who have formed and form part of the Executive Board of UDALBILTZA. It has been an unforgettable political and human experience for all of us.

And thank you also to all of you on behalf of the Executive Board, for placing your trust in us to manage and administer this institution. I hope we have not let you down.

Bihotz, bihotzez, mila esker.