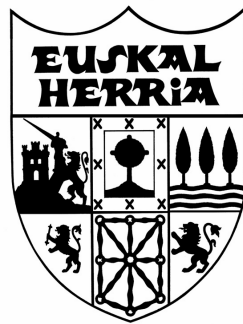


**UDALBILTZA<sup>®</sup>**

**GENERAL ASSEMBLY**



**ASSESSMENT of ACTIVITIES**

**Basauri, 8<sup>th</sup> November 2003**



# UDALBILTZA®

Dear colleagues and guests,

Over the next few minutes I should like to inform you about the specific, tangible and, in our view, very useful and positive activities we have developed during our time on the Executive Board of UDALBILTZA.

The activities carried out by UDALBILTZA over the last four years have focused on:

- Laying the foundations of the association's own assets and administrative infrastructure
- Funding and supporting numerous projects devoted to promoting Euskera, education, culture and the history of Euskal Herria, especially in Nafarroa and Iparralde
- And UDALBITLZA promoting two major programmes of its own

The President of our association, my friend Jon Jauregi, has commented in detail about the political vicissitudes experienced by UDALBILTZA over these last four years, which has compelled us to develop intense, wide-reaching work with very limited means at our disposal.

It goes without saying that during the ETA "*ceasefire*" and the consequent institutional agreements in town councils and in other authorities, the potential for funding we were anticipating was considerable. The end of that "*ceasefire*" led, in addition to the loss of human life as a result of subsequent terrorist attacks – obviously the main effect – to widespread political frustration, a clear deterioration in terms of our peaceful coexistence, albeit especially so among the "*izquierda abertzale*" (Basque nationalist left), and a clear loss of funding previously anticipated by UDALBILTZA.

Despite this, we have received contributions from town councils over these last four years, from the Provincial Councils of Bizkaia and Gipuzkoa in the year 2000 and from the Basque Government in the years 2002 and 2003. On behalf of the Executive Board of UDALBILTZA, we wish to convey our most sincere thanks to all of you and to the previously-mentioned public institutions for the effort made, with the conviction that this effort will be extended over the coming years – an effort we are sure has been worthwhile, as I shall try to explain now.

In the field of internal organization and infrastructures, our efforts have been channelled into purchasing our head offices in Iruñea as a basic tool and as an essential condition for setting in motion any institution. The offices are located in Calle Nueva in Iruñea, in the heart of the capital of the Old Kingdom. And the *ikurriña* (Basque flag) now flies from its balconies beside the flags of Nafarroa and Europe. Our head offices are complemented and backed up by another smaller operative office in Donostia, which we have acquired on a rental basis.

In terms of staff, we have two people employed at our head offices in Iruñea. Their duties are varied, but focus on receiving the numerous requests for assistance that we receive and on developing our own programmes, as well as maintaining our website and relations with the media. They work efficiently and effectively and I also wish to convey my gratitude to them.

As regards communication and in addition to maintaining habitual contact with the media in order to inform society about our most important activities, last April we launched our website. This site, published in Euskera, Spanish, French and English, contains the details of the structure, objectives and activities carried out by UDALBILTZA in its different sections. However, it also represents an essential tool for the purpose of conveying useful information about our activity to the Basque Diaspora.

We have also started to publish a news bulletin entitled UDALBILTZA BERRIAK. This bulletin is sent to all mayors and councillors in Euskal Herria, irrespective of whether they maintain a presence in UDALBILTZA.

Over these last four years we have received constant requests for assistance. We have tried to deal with these needs in the best possible way and, we believe, with optimum results. Most requests have been related to our language – Euskera – and culture, and have been mainly from Nafarroa and Iparralde. In other words, from those territories of Euskal Herria where our language and culture are weakest, as has once again been made apparent in the latest socio-linguistic survey into the situation regarding Euskera conducted by the Basque Government.

UDALBILTZA, as it had already stated in its 2001 Declaration on the occasion of the European Year of Languages, wishes to express its concern with regard to the situation being faced by Euskera and Basque culture in Nafarroa and Iparralde.

For us, Euskera is the heart and soul of our People. Euskera is a legacy of thousands of years that has been passed down to us from generation to generation. It is the oldest language known in Europe, the Basques' own language and a treasure in terms of culture and linguistic heritage of all citizens of Euskal Herria and of the whole of Europe.

For this reason, we should like to point out that it is the basic responsibility of democratic authorities to guarantee and protect the linguistic rights of citizens and, in particular, promote policies in favour of minority languages. In Euskal Herria, the language that is facing the most difficult situation is Euskera, in comparison to Spanish and French. Consequently, we ask the public authorities from all the territories of Euskal Herria to make a special effort to ensure and support the learning and suitable use of this language on the part of all citizens who wish to do so.

In this sense, we are both ill at ease with and wish to express our concern about the idleness on the part of authorities in Iparralde and the activities carried out by the Regional Government of Nafarroa against the promotion, normalization and use of Euskera. In the case of the Regional Government of Nafarroa, it is acting against its own law governing Euskera in addition to attacking the Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights - by denying the citizens of Nafarroa the right to be recognized as members of a linguistic community by making its public use difficult, by undermining the right to conduct relations and associate with other members of the Basque linguistic community and by

preventing them from exercising their right to preserve and develop their own culture. As regards Iparralde, we join the request made by the political leaders grouped around the BATERA platform to award official status to our language in these territories.

As well as acting against our own language and culture, some decisions go against the citizens of Nafarroa and Iparralde because they attempt to bring about a social and political split, when these societies have on more than one occasion made a firm commitment to bilingualism and linguistic and social coexistence.

We at UDALBILTZA ask all social, cultural and economic agents, all institutions and all political parties – especially with regard to the citizens of Nafarroa and Iparralde – to assume responsibility for defending the right of citizens to know and use Euskera and to take the steps needed in the interests of achieving this objective, to take genuine steps towards the normalization of Euskera so as to ensure that it is learned and to promote its use.

And we also wish to encourage all citizens and institutions of Nafarroa and Iparralde to make a firm commitment in favour of Euskera and Basque culture. At the dawn of this new millennium, in a globalized world, all languages and cultures should have their place; ours – Euskera – too. Linguistic and cultural plurality is enriching for all of us. Euskera, the historic heritage of Euskal Herria, belongs to all of us. Nobody can try to monopolize it. It belongs to all of us and it is the duty of all of us to safeguard, promote and develop it.

We at UDALBILTZA have always been very clear that Euskera constitutes the heart and soul of our People and a medium that brings us together and unites us. That is why the bulk of our activities, funding and assistance have focused fundamentally on our language.

Please allow me to mention some of these activities. We have funded numerous media in Euskera such as magazines and radio stations, in both Nafarroa and Iparralde. We have helped to develop a legal service in defence of linguistic rights in Nafarroa through Euskara Kultur Elkargoa (EKE). We have helped to develop the Udako Euskal Unibersitatea (UEU) summer university. We have helped sectors of

education in Euskera such as SORTZEN IKASBATUAZ in Nafarroa and UDA-LEKU, IKAS-BI and EUSKAL HAZIAK in Iparralde. And, in particular, we have also helped to develop and build new *ikastolas* (Basque schools) in Iparralde and Nafarroa through SEASKA and the Nafarroa Ikastola Federation respectively.

We have provided 450,000 euros in grants to SEASKA, and have made the extension and renovation of the Hasparne Ikastola viable, as well as building the new *ikastola* in Donibane-Garazi, which will be officially opened on 13<sup>th</sup> December next.

In Nafarroa, we have managed to partly alleviate the financial difficulties to which the Navarrese authorities have subjected some small *ikastolas*, many of which are located in the so-called non-Basque-speaking zone, by providing 390,000 euros in grants. And this year we have made the construction of the Arangoiti Ikastola in Irunberri-Lumbier financially viable, despite the unfortunate suspension of *Nafarroa Oinez* (the annual pro-*ikastola* festival in Nafarroa) due to adverse weather conditions. Please believe me when I tell you that it is extremely poignant and moving to see the self-denial and effort being made in Iparralde and Nafarroa by parents of children who want them to learn Euskera and learn in Euskera. They are find themselves in a situation that is very similar to that experienced in the Basque Autonomous Region in the 1970s: carrying out "auzolan" activities (loosely translated as community work), giving up their work and leisure time and making major financial sacrifices – all because their children are recovering something that was unjustly usurped from them, which their grandparents used and led their lives in: Euskera.

Our most sincere acknowledgement and applause goes out to them because they are proving that learning Euskera and learning in Euskera is a synonym for intellectual and cultural enrichment and is a synonym for greater professional options for their children, as well as forging and consolidating the heart and soul of our People.

We should like them to know that we at UDALBILTZA, as an expression of our municipal solidarity with the seven *herrialdes* (territories) of Euskal Herria, are planning to intensify t – if possible – convinced that we are here to do what our fellow citizens of Nafarroa and Iparralde demand of us, and we are sure that working on a day-to-day basis will

bear its fruits and results. This is what really working in favour of the territoriality of Euskal Herria means.

However - dear colleagues - UDALBILTZA has not only tried to meet demands for assistance; we have also set in motion two major programmes of our own, which we should like to refer to here. These are the Twinning Programme between Municipalities of Euskal Herria – HURBILTZEN – and the Euskal Herria Itinerary Programme, XENDRAK.

HURBILTZEN is a programme that attempts to help set up twinning agreements between the municipalities of Euskal Herria in order to strengthen bonds among Basque citizens.

As we all know, twinning agreements between municipalities and cities is a practice that has been carried out for several decades now. Many of you, many of your municipalities, have gained wide and enriching experiences in this sphere of activity.

Twinning took on special importance during the 1990s. The firm commitment on the part of the European Union certainly contributed to this, as this type of agreement was viewed as being a major element in the gradual creation of a single space on our continent – in short, in the creation of a united Europe while at the same time respecting its diversity, a space in which citizens could move freely, be able to conduct business and travel, etc. while also fundamentally having the chance to relate to each other, get to know each other and develop and share values in pursuit of the creation of a common European identity.

In this respect, we only need to recall one of the sentences and ideas that best reflects this feeling and spirit – an idea that was conveyed by one of Europe's founding fathers, the distinguished Jean Monnet, who asserted with both conviction and farsightedness when referring to the great objective set out via the unification of Europe that: *"We are not forming coalitions of states, we are uniting men."*

Euskal Herria is rich and plural. Our territories have their own characteristics and also some which are common to all of them, and these have been forged over centuries of history. There are numerous aspects that provide evidence of the fact that we form a historic community – not only because of geographical proximity, not only because the dynamics of European integration and the consequent dismantling of borders brings us together, and our economic, commercial and cultural relations are increasing naturally, but rather fundamentally because we share basic values (such as democracy, peace, freedom and respect for human rights) and, of course, because we also share characteristics that define us as a People, such as Euskera.

One of the main objectives set out by UDALBILTZA is that of developing a Euskal Herria with increasingly close bonds among its citizens, its municipalities and its territories. We are at the service of the citizens of Euskal Herria, at the service of the comprehensive development of the citizens of Euskal Herria as individuals. We want, seek and work towards a Euskal Herria of citizens.

Therefore, the HURBILTZEN programme promotes twinning agreements between the municipalities of Euskal Herria, the aim of which is to enable Basque citizens to cultivate their relations in order for us to get to know each other better, appreciate each other, collaborate and share values and projects that we have in common – with an open-minded, respectful and participatory spirit and via an approach that is fully in keeping with the European integration process involving the dismantling of borders and the construction of bonds of solidarity, mutual awareness and joint work.

For some months now we have been working on several experimental partnership projects, in which over twenty town councils are taking part from all the territories. These are: Artea, Asteasu, Ataun, Azkaine, Azpeitia, Bakio, Beasain, Deba, Getxo, Heleta, Kanbo, Lazkao, Lekunberri, Lesaka, Muskiz, Oion, Ordizia and Sara. There are also other town councils that are willing to take part and have already started to

take the first steps: Bertizarana, Ituren, Lapuebla de Labarca, Milafranga, Mungia, Sunbilla and Urruña.

We are trying to ensure that at least one municipality from the Basque Autonomous Region, one from the Autonomous Region of Navarre and another from Iparralde take part in each twinning. These partnership agreements are led by the town councils, who are responsible for promoting them and acting as mediators. However, it is the Basque citizens via different associations and cultural, economic, social and sports groups, etc, who play the leading role in these twinning arrangements.

The most common issues in twinning groups are: Euskera, education and schools, youth, senior citizens, municipal management, sports, tourism, leisure, gastronomy, home-made products, music, dance, painting and handicrafts. Each municipality chooses the areas and partnership projects according to their needs, their interests and their will.

We yearn to construct and weave bonds of solidarity with respect and in freedom, yet while being aware that we are making our contribution to a world, a Europe and a Euskal Herria in peace, freedom and harmony.

That is why I encourage you all to get in contact with our secretary's office and declare your interest in taking part in the twinning agreements of the HURBILTZEN programme – this will no doubt benefit your own citizens and you will also be helping to develop an increasingly integrated and strong Euskal Herria.

We Basques have always been considered to be great travellers. Most of the time, we have embarked on voyages out of necessity, to seek new lands and more fertile business for our families; at other times, we have travelled to satisfy that quality is so common among us – curiosity and the challenge of taking part in great adventures. We are now proposing something different: a journey through Euskal Herria, journeying around the country, to enable we Basques to come closer together, to get to know our roots and our people.

«XENDRAK, Euskal Herrien bideak» is a cultural project which is intended to endure over time. It involves the setting up of a system of seven routes that cover, rather like a close-woven network, Araba, Bizkaia, Gipuzkoa, Nafarroa, Lapurdi, Baja Nafarroa and Zuberoa. The way in which this project came about makes it unique – it came into being on a grass roots level, via the municipalities themselves and with the participation of many of them, via the institutions that are closest to citizens.

The singular nature of Euskal Herria lies in the originality of its language, of its mythology, of its culture, and in its capacity to adapt to changes in all walks of life - a society that constitutes the expression of the dialectics of life.

The geographical variety of the country (one continental part and another peninsular part: sea and mountains, Atlantic and Mediterranean) has also been reflected in its cultural diversity. The great surges of people that have taken place in what today we refer to as Euskal Herria have left their mark on this land and created an infinite variety of landscapes. The green Atlantic north is complemented by the long Mediterranean side; the breezes across the Bay of Biscay are complemented by the highland karst areas where snow remains for half the year.

XENDRAK proposes a slow, relaxed journey from place to place, people to people, to enable us to reach the most hidden corners of this land, discover the soul of neighbouring towns and villages and appreciate their riches first hand.

That is why we wish to go beyond what is patently obvious and ask this simple question to all Basques: Do you know? Do you know a Euskal Herria that isn't so apparent, that doesn't appear in postcards, that doesn't get lost in colourful language that is well away from the motorways? And as a result, here is another question: Do you want to know? Are you ready to journey to the inner workings of the Basque soul? Do you want to know the untold stories, the places we can only guess about, the names that are hidden between the lines?

For some, XENDRAK will be an invitation; for others, a challenge; and for all of us, a humble yet significant step towards getting to know each other more and better.

The map you are holding is none other than the first milestone in this ambitious project which, by dint of hard work, will no doubt be a resounding success. It remains for the Executive Board that we shall be electing in a few minutes to continue developing the project via new media: a more detailed guide to all the routes, a website with live images of the itineraries, signposting, and the organization of events that will bring XENDRAK to life and ensure that we Basques will get to know each other and Euskal Herria better, always from the perspective of being aware of the fact that we belong to a People.

And I should like to end by expressing my most sincere hopes and trusts in UDALBILTZA and in its work and need.

Because, as we stated in our Institutional Declaration at our 2<sup>nd</sup> Assembly held in Donostia on 13<sup>th</sup> April 2002:

*"We propose a political project based on solid, genuine foundations, being aware of the fact that projects involving social and political transformation require planning, time and maturing, social trust and the free adherence of Basque citizens.*

*We share a common objective and commitment to providing Euskadi-Euskal Herria with a framework of sovereignty in which its capacity to decide for itself in a globalized and inter-dependent world is ensured. In this sense, our will is a strategic one, as is our determination to respect exclusively democratic, peaceful and political channels."*

Mila esker denei.