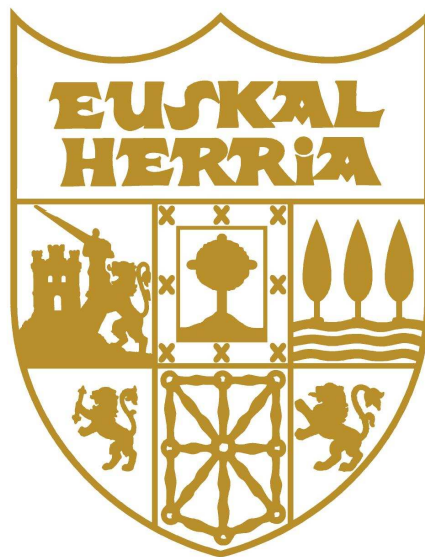


I. GENERAL ASSEMBLY

UDALBILTZA[®]



EUSKAL HERRIKO UDAL
ETA UDAL HAUTETSIEEN BILTZARRA

ASSEMBLY OF MUNICIPAL REPRESENTATIVES OF EUSKAL HERRIA

Bilbao, the 18th of September 1999

In the course of the meeting held in the Euskalduna Palace, those councillors present made public their first public declaration together with the setting-up of Udalbiltza.

The Basque people have forged their history throughout a complicated thousand-year process and have shaped a Euskal Herria with both common and diverse characteristics from the Aturri (Adour) to the Ebro Rivers.

There are almost three million of us Basques settled over the more than 20,800 square kilometres which make up the seven territories. The recent past of our people, marked by wars, impositions, forced action and abolitions of unreturned rights, means that at the threshold of the 21st century, Euskal Herria would appear to be located between two states that deny it its national identity, with a dismantled political and cultural reality and an uneven asymmetrical economic and geographical evolution. Yet Euskal Herria maintains the will to carve out its own path in history, and we find ourselves faced with a new situation and in conditions to enter a new phase in the exciting task of the national and democratic construction of Euskal Herria. And it is undeniable that, as in the case of previous stages, this duty and the corresponding effort demand the incorporation of municipally-elected councillors and a prominent role to be played by the institutions on a local level.

In meeting in Iruña (Pamplona) on the 6th of February last, the mayors and councillors belonging to the territories of Lapurdi, Zuberoa, Navarra, Alava, Vizcaya and Guipúzcoa, declare their will to shape a Basque national institution with the aims as contained in the declaration itself.

The national reality. The decision taken was based on the firm yet simple premise of understanding. On the one hand, we are Basques and, over and above the divisions and separations that deny and conceal our national reality, it is necessary to formulate an instrument which while bearing witness to our existence as a people, also serves to make progress in its construction. On the other hand, an attempt was made to respond suitably to the responsibility that the citizens of Euskal Herria had placed in the hands of their municipal representatives, by promoting relations among the Basques of the seven territories.

Following the municipal electoral process put into practice this last month of June in four of the Basque territories, and once preparatory work carried out by the Permanent Committee elected in Iruña and dealing with the proposal is formulated, we mayors and councillors of Euskal Herria present at this act have decided to make that political will our own and build the first national Basque institution, under the name Euskal Herriko Udal eta Udal Hautetsien Biltzarra-Udalbiltza, an institution whose definition derives from the objectives set by the municipal representatives in the Assembly of 6.2.1999, in which we ourselves take on the commitment to work towards said objectives and achieve their putting into practice.

Therefore, the activity and functioning of Udalbiltza shall be geared towards:

1. Declaring the existence of Euskal Herria as a nation.
2. Contributing towards the political structuring of Euskal Herria by bearing witness to its territoriality and in the hope of embracing the municipal representatives of the seven Basque territories within a common framework.
3. Promoting the national construction of Euskal Herria, this being understood as being a dynamic and democratic process sustained by the free participation and decision-making of all Basque citizens.
4. Making progress in the process of constructive inter-relations among the municipalities of all territories, making an agreed plan of action among municipal representatives possible in areas such as language, culture, sports, the environment, the organization of territory, economic development and social welfare, etc.

5. Projecting the existence of Euskal Herria in the international field as a distinct nation in its own right, and its will to act as such in the future shaping of Europe and in its institutions.

Udalbiltza is thus set up for the citizens of Euskal Herria, in terms of a unitary, representative, democratic and territorial institutional reference point, linked to the municipal elective mandate, and which should serve as a framework for reflection, analysis and promotion of the different aspects which make up Basque national construction.

Udalbiltza symbolically and in practical terms expresses the territoriality of Euskal Herria. Udalbiltza shall make it possible to act as a nation. Udalbiltza shall enable the existence of the Basque Nation to be visible before the world. For we municipally-elected councillors de Euskal Herria, Udalbiltza becomes a political and institutional reference point, in such a way that its decisions shall provide guidelines for our daily activity in town halls, in which we are attempting to turn initiatives, recommendations and criteria established by the Assembly into reality. Udalbiltza must contribute decisively towards municipal management becoming involved actively and with specific actions geared towards achieving the objectives of the National Institution.

Udalbiltza and its Executive Committee elected today commence their activity linked to these objectives and, to do so, the first and most urgent task is to know in what situation they are starting from, to obtain the most accurate picture possible of the current social, economic and cultural reality of Euskal Herria as a whole.

We need to have data, statistics, economic guidelines population pyramids, etc., but that refer to the seven territories as a whole; this is a non-existent global diagnosis at the present time because Euskal Herria has never been allowed to look into its own mirror.

Furthermore, each of the different objectives set require specific or individual treatment, whereby Udalbiltza, in terms of its internal organization, is to be equipped with work groups which set, develop and carry out the most suitable measures in order for what today is a statement of intent to be given practical expression as soon as possible.

Open to all

In this commitment, we shall encourage work in common with other institutions and economic, social and trade union agents, and we shall cooperate with all those initiatives that promote the integral development of our people. It cannot be in any other way. National construction must be open to participation by all citizens, and such continuous communication and collaboration shall constitute the main feature of the activity of Udalbiltza. Moreover, it shall be initiated right away. Euskal Herria as a democratic project requires an institution such as Udalbiltza because it helps to determine the political character and its territorial scope, an essential source of its survival as a people.

Yet this project also needs to define the internal organization of the different territories and the institutional model on which the former is to be founded, to which Udalbiltza, from the privileged position of the municipalities, shall help in analysing and debating under the principle of respect for the personality and regimes of the historic territories. In putting these tasks into practice, we are going to try hard in order for the project of national construction of Euskal Herria that we are advocating and of which this foundational act of Udalbiltza forms a part, to be perceived by Basque society not as a confrontation or division or imposition, but rather as a process of integration; this should be based on recognition and respect among people and territories, as well as on the free adherence on the part of Basque citizens and from the fact that the sense of belonging to a same cultural, linguistic and political community unites us. We are Basque municipally-elected councillors and we believe in the Basque nation.

We invite Basque citizens and the other municipal representatives to play a leading role in this historic moment in order for Euskal Herria, being the owner of its present, to in the near future become a political character with its own identity in the international community. We have hope and the capacity to work in order, by establishing certain foundations for common political action that is unprecedented in the history of our People, to overcome resistance to change as regards state structures which refuse to accept any operative political reality other than their own. The future of Euskal Herria belongs to the Basques. It is time for our people.

Zorionak Euskal Herria! (Congratulations Euskal Herria!

Udalbiltza

Euskal Herriko Udal eta Udal Hautetsien Biltzarra.

Euskalduna Palace, Bilbao, on the 18th of September 1999

