



**Speech by the Lehendakari (President) of
the Basque Government
Juan José Ibarretxe Markuartu
in the United States Institute of Peace
(USIP)**

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Introduction

The declaration of a permanent ceasefire by ETA on March 22nd this year was reported in all the European and international media. A real opportunity has emerged to resolve the Basque conflict, the last political conflict, of this nature, in the heart of Europe. In the speech made by the Lehendakari (President) of the Basque Government, invited by the United States Institute of Peace of Washington, Mr. Ibarretxe gives a response to the following questions:

What is the importance of the declaration of the ceasefire by ETA and what are the reasons that have led to it?

Who are the Basque people?

What are the issues of the Basque conflict? And what are its origins?

Which two problems need to be addressed to resolve the Basque conflict?

What are the phases for dealing with the Peace process and the difficulties involved?

How can the underlying political problem be solved? What is the key to the resolution of the Basque conflict?

How can the International Community collaborate to help definitively solve the Basque problem?

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Content

I. A historic opportunity to resolve the last political conflict of this nature in Europe.

We have come to share a moment of hope

- 1) Last March 22nd the Basque, Spanish, European and International media reported one of the most hoped for and desired pieces of news by Basque society: ETA formally declared a permanent ceasefire of its armed actions.
- 2) Following the culmination of the peace process in Ireland, the declaration by ETA opens up a historic opportunity to attempt a resolution of the Basque conflict, the last political conflict with these characteristics in the heart of Europe.
- 3) Before going into greater detail on the conflict, please allow me to explain who the Basque people are and why it is important for us to come to Washington to share this moment of hope for Peace with you.

The Basque people, an ancient people in the vanguard of European society

- 4) The Basque people have been part of Europe since its origins. Anthropologists and historians state that the Basques settled at the western end of the Pyrenees, which have separated the present States of Spain and France, since prehistoric times. According to José Miguel de Barandiarán, a Basque anthropologist of international prestige, the Basques evolved from the prehistoric men that lived in the area. We are therefore considered one of the most ancient people of Europe.
- 5) *Euskera*, the native language of the Basques -the most ancient language in Europe- is a language of Pre-Indo-European origin whose roots are lost in prehistory. In the Basque territories of the Spanish State, Euskera is an official language, as is Spanish. However in the Basque territories of the French State, Euskera is spoken but not officially recognized. The language represents a living testimony of our identity and our will to survive.

- 6) The Basque people, as reflected in the Encyclopedia Britannica, are located in seven territories that are presently articulated in three different political and administrative realities, divided between the French and the Spanish States by the border along the Pyrenean mountain range. On the French side there are three Basque Territories without a regime of autonomous government. On the Spanish side, the other four Basque Territories are grouped into two autonomous regions: the Community of Navarra and the Basque Autonomous Community.
- 7) Throughout history, the Basque people have had to emigrate for political, economic and social reasons. Today it is estimated that there are at least six million people of Basque descent in a number of countries around the world, particularly in South America. Universal figures of Basque origin, such as Juan Sebastián Elcano, the first man to navigate around the globe; St Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Jesuits; René Cassin, father of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Nobel Peace Prize winner; Francisco de Vitoria, the father of International Law; Simón Bolívar, the liberator of South America, and so many other, more recent, figures such as Balenciaga, Unamuno, Pío Baroja, Chillida, and Oteiza have been the best ambassadors of a peace-loving people with an enduring entrepreneurial spirit.
- 8) The Basque people have not shut themselves away from the course of events in Europe. We are a people in the vanguard of Europe. The Basque Autonomous Community, home to 2,200,000 people –that is, three-quarters of the Basques- stands high in European rankings of welfare, life expectancy and levels of education, above countries such as Germany, France, Great Britain and Spain. Our per capita income stands at 30,000 euros, 25% above the European average, that is, approximately 36,000\$ at the current exchange rate. Applying the methodology of the Human Development Report prepared by the United Nations, the Basque Country would be among the top 10 countries in the world ranking for human development.
- 9) The Basques have also played an active role in the history of the United States for over 100 years. At the end of the 19th century there was already evidence of Basque settlements in the colonization of the western States. Miguel Leonis, known as “el vasco”, was one of the legendary founders of California. In 1885 the first publications in the Basque language appeared in the area of San Francisco and Los Angeles. At present there are around 60,000 Basque-Americans across all the States of the Union, but particularly in California, Idaho, Nevada, Washington and Oregon. Basque-Americans

have almost 40 centers and official associations under the umbrella of the North American Basque Organization. As an anecdote, I can tell you that a Basque-American, Frank D. Carranza, used the Basque language to trick Japanese counter-espionage during the Second World War, and it was a Basque phrase which helped to give the order, in code, for the landings at Guadalcanal.

- 10) Perhaps one of the greatest admirers of the Basques and their system of Government was none other than John Adams, the second President of the United States. He quoted the Basques as an example of democracy in his speech defending the Constitution of the United States. He thus described the Basques in 1786:

“This extraordinary people have preserved their ancient language, genius, laws, government, and manners, without innovation, longer than any other nation of Europe...”

There are strong and long-standing links of friendship between the Basque and American peoples, so we certainly could not turn down the kind invitation by USIP to share this moment of hope.

Why has ETA declared a permanent ceasefire?

- 11) Since 1968 -the year in which ETA committed its first attack with loss of life- until March 22nd this year almost 40 years of violence have gone by. During this time, ETA'S terrorist attacks have led to the loss of 859 lives with thousands of other people injured, threatened and subject to extortion. Furthermore the violence has caused almost one thousand people to be arrested, selective killings of ETA militants by paramilitary anti-terrorist groups, the closure of certain media and the banning of Basque political parties that have not expressly condemned ETA, as well as the denunciation of acts of torture by international organisations such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International.
- 12) The violence has not only led to pain and suffering but also to extreme social tension and division. ETA's terrorism has had negative effects on the economy and has constituted a major problem for the Spanish State and, by extension, Europe as a whole.
- 13) In the past a number of attempts at negotiation have been made between the Spanish State and ETA to put an end to the problem of violence. The two most recent took place in 1989, in Algeria, when the Socialist Felipe González was President of Spain, and in 1998, in Switzerland, when José María Aznar was President. Both attempts failed, among other reasons, because two different problems were confused: the problem of the violence of ETA and the solution of the Basque political conflict.

- 14) What reasons have led ETA to declare a permanent ceasefire now? What factors are behind this decision?

First, pressure from Basque society, demanding peace from ETA. It is worth noting that all the sociological surveys made over the last few years indicate that 9 out of 10 Basques are against violence.

Second, the new international scenario after the terrible attacks against the World Trade Center in New York on September 11th 2001, and the consequent political, police and judicial pressure against any kind of terrorism

Third, the new scenario in the Spanish State following the Islamic terrorist attack in Madrid on March 11th 2004. Following this tragedy, ETA took the decision not to commit attacks on people and began a period of discrete conversations authorized by the new President of the Spanish Government, Rodríguez Zapatero, who has shown a greater disposition towards dialogue than his predecessor Aznar.

And *fourth*, the new political scenario that has opened up in the Basque Country following the approval of the Proposal for a New Statute of Free Association with Spain by an absolute majority of the Basque Parliament in December 2004. The Proposal was rejected by the Spanish Parliament but it has laid the groundwork for the solution to the Basque conflict.

II. The Basque conflict. A historic problem of a political nature that has existed for 170 years

- 1) The configuration of the Kingdom of Spain in the Middle Ages, as happened in other European States, was achieved through the conquest of other neighboring kingdoms. The Basque Territories maintained a peaceful political co-existence, first with the Kingdom of Castile (into which they were incorporated) and later with the different Kingdoms of Spain, based on respect for the Basque *Fueros* (Charters), that is, the laws and customs that allowed the Basques to maintain their identity and their own model of self-government.
- 2) This relationship, based on mutual respect, came to an abrupt end after two civil wars, the Carlist wars of 1836 and 1839. From then on, the Spanish State imposed the constitutional unity of the monarchy on the Basques and proceeded to abolish their Charters and system of self-government by force. *“The political problem is born”*.

- 3) Basque nationalism emerged 111 years ago in 1895 as a democratic political movement to demand freedom for the Basque People, to defend their identity and to recover their *Fueros* -the right to govern themselves according to their own laws-.
- 4) The Basque People only recovered part of their political autonomy in 1936, during the Spanish Civil War caused by the Fascist uprising led by General Franco. Franco's eventual dictatorship brought with it the complete abolition of Basque autonomy, the persecution of the Basque language, prison, exile, and the repression of many thousands of Basques.

In this atmosphere of repression ETA emerged as a violent response to the dictatorship similar to other movements of national liberation at the time.

“The problem of violence is born”.

- 5) During the Franco dictatorship, the first Basque Government remained in exile. Its President, José Antonio Aguirre, was received by the American people in 1941. The headquarters of the Basque Government was set up in New York, where President Aguirre was Professor at the University of Columbia until 1946. That same year, on May 21st 1946, President Aguirre denounced the repression exercised by the Franco dictatorship on the Basque Country to the first Secretary General of the United Nations, the Norwegian Trygve Halvdan Lie, and formally submitted the “Memorandum from the Autonomous Basque Government to the Sub-Committee of the Security Council”.
- 6) The end of the dictatorship and the recovery of democracy in Spain led to the approval of a new Constitution in 1978, which only received support from 30.8% of the population of the Basque Country. Later, the approval in 1979 of a second Statute of Autonomy for the Basque Country led to the creation of the Basque Government and its own Parliament. The Statute of Autonomy has served to administer a number of powers and competencies that have led to higher welfare for the Basques, but after 27 years, the immense majority of Basque society demand the negotiation of a new framework of relations with the Spanish State.
- 7) Recently, on December 31st 2004, the Basque Parliament approved a Proposal by an absolute majority for a new framework of relations with the Spanish State based on free association and mutual respect. The Proposal was rejected by the Spanish Parliament but is still on the table as an instrument that contains the basis for resolving the Basque conflict using an exclusively political and democratic approach.

III. The Basque conflict: Two distinct problems. Two different processes of solution.

- 1) Understanding the Basque conflict means recognizing the existence of two distinct problems that require different interlocutors and different processes of solution. They are problems and processes that are undoubtedly related and have elements that link them, but they must not be confused.
- 2) On one hand there is the problem of the violence of ETA, which requires different treatment with its own interlocutors.

Then there is the existence of a political problem that requires its own process of solution, one that involves the recognition of the right of the Basque People to decide, and whose main protagonists, therefore, are Basque society and Basque political parties.

IV. The solution to the problem of violence. The Peace process. Interlocutors, phases, difficulties

- 1) The peace process requires that institutions and society itself accompany and support all the victims of terrorism, through the ethical recognition of their situation and the redress of the economic and moral damage caused by the violence.
- 2) The main protagonists in the solution to the problem of violence are ETA and the Spanish Government. However, the Basque Government and the Basque political parties are necessary agents to drive and facilitate progress in the process.
- 3) The phases of the process can be structured in three stages:
 - *Verification* of the permanent ceasefire. This stage will be considered completed, as the Spanish Government has announced, this June, three months after the declaration by ETA.
 - *The beginning of formal dialogue* between interlocutors of ETA and the Spanish Government, following the verification of the permanent ceasefire.
 - *A process of one-off agreements* and the gradual solution of the problems of the prisoners and ‘technical’ aspects of decommissioning weapons. This process will have a certain similarity to the Irish process, which led to the definitive laying down of weapons by the IRA.

- 4) The main *difficulties* of the Peace process, in the light of negative experiences in the past, are of two kinds:
 - The lack of flexibility in the application of prison policy.
 - Possible violent acts by uncontrolled groups who are unhappy with the process.

V. The solution of the political conflict. The process of Normalization. Interlocutors, phases, difficulties.

- 1) Obviously, to be able to solve the political problem it is first necessary to recognize its existence. The political problem is defined by the existence of a large majority of Basque citizens, -8 out of 10 according to all the sociological studies- who demand the right to decide their own future freely and democratically. In other words, to recognize the existence of the Basque people and their right to decide.
- 2) The main protagonists in the solution of the historic problem of a political nature that exists with the Spanish State are the Basque political parties, as the legitimate representatives of the will of the people and, in the final analysis, Basque society.

The political problem must be solved if we want to achieve a model of peaceful co-existence between Basque Country and Spain for the 21st century, based on free adhesion and not imposition.

- 3) The process for resolving the political conflict has, as I understand it, four phases:
 - *Multi-party dialogue.* Multi-party talks that include all political and territorial sensibilities. Without exclusions.

Prior to the configuration of the multi-party talks it will be necessary for all the parties to agree on the methodology, the content, the interlocutors, the decision-making process and the schedule. Without this guarantee the multi-party talks could fail.
 - *An integrating agreement.* An Agreement for Political Normalization that envisages the “right to decide” of the Basque People, requires a broad majority as a basis for peaceful co-existence in the future. The objective of maximum possible consensus should be pursued, but nobody’s veto can be accepted.

- *Democratic verification.* The Agreement reached in the multi-party talks must be validated by Basque society. Basque society has the right to be consulted and democratically express its opinion on the result achieved in these talks.
- *Negotiation and Agreement.* After the Agreement and its democratic ratification, a process of negotiation and agreement with the Spanish State should be initiated to incorporate the democratic will of Basque society into the legal system, making use of the clauses within the Spanish Constitution that recognize the historic rights of the Basque People, and also the International Agreements on Civil and Political Rights and the International Agreement on Economic, Social and Cultural rights, both ratified by the Kingdom of Spain.

4) What are the *difficulties* involved in solving the Basque political problem?

In my opinion, and from a strictly political perspective, there are five types of difficulties:

- The first is that the Spanish Government might not recognize that all political projects can be defended and developed in a peaceful manner, in line with democratic principles.
- The second is that there could be parties that are not willing to take part in the multi-party talks.
- The third is that there may be parties that do not acknowledge the existence of a political problem that needs to be resolved.
- The fourth is that Basque society could be prevented from democratically verifying the Agreements reached.
- The fifth is that a narrow and inflexible interpretation of the Spanish Constitution may prevail that would make it impossible to incorporate the will of Basque society into the legal system.

VI. The right to decide: The key to the solution.

- 1) *“The Basque people have the right to self-determination. This right lies in the power of its citizens to decide freely and democratically their political, economic, social and cultural status, either providing themselves with their own political framework or sharing, wholly or partially, their sovereignty with other peoples”.*

This is Article 1 of the Declaration approved by an absolute majority of the Basque Parliament on February 15th 1990.

The recognition of the right of the Basque people to decide their own future and the commitment to exercise this right through pacts and negotiation is the key to the solution. This has also been understood by the State of Idaho, which on March 11th 2002, formally approved “Senate Joint Memorial No. 114” in support of the right of the Basques to self determination.

- 2) The right of Peoples to decide, that is, the right to self-determination, recognized in International Agreements on Human Rights, is not just a right applicable to ex-colonies; it is a right that is inherent to all the peoples of the Earth. It has been invoked by UNESCO as a fundamental instrument for the prevention of violent conflicts, and was put forward for the first time by President Wilson after the First World War as one of the basic points in order to avoid further violent conflicts between the nations of the world.
- 3) The right to self-determination has also been the basis for the configuration of Europe as we know it today. The process of national emancipation of many peoples in Eastern Europe after the fall of the Berlin Wall and their later adhesion to the new Europe, freely and voluntarily, would not be understood without the right to self-determination. Indeed -just three weeks ago- on May 21st the People of Montenegro exercised, in a peaceful and democratic manner, the right to self-determination to solve a historic problem of a political nature in the very heart of Europe.
- 4) The right to decide and the obligation to reach agreement have been clearly recognized as the key to resolve other conflicts of identity and belonging in modern and advanced societies, as in the case of Quebec and Canada. This is the best reference example that can be applied to solve the Basque conflict, exclusively based on Human Rights and democratic principles.

VII. The role of the International Community. A fundamental contribution to the resolution of the Basque conflict.

- 1) The main protagonist in finding a political and democratic resolution to the Basque conflict is Basque society itself. Nevertheless, the experience of other similar conflicts in Europe and the world have shown us that the support, collaboration and “thrust” of international organizations and civil movements is a basic element in the resolution of political conflicts.
- 2) In this sense, we appreciate the declarations of support for the Peace process in the Basque Country made by both the European Union and Pope Benedict XVI. In my opinion it would be an important boost if the United Nations expressly declared itself in favor of a resolution to the Basque conflict.
- 3) Finally, the active involvement of experts and institutions operating on an international scale would be a fundamental contribution to the resolution of the conflict, by endorsing the peace process and political normalization in the Basque Country..it is necessary to create an international network of individuals and institutions that would actively support the peace process and political normalization in the Basque Country.

In closing, we have come to share a moment of hope with you. While international support will complement the critical work that lies ahead, we are very conscious that the work is ours to do, and the future ours to decide.

Rest assured that we are prepared to make the most of this historic opportunity.

Thank you.

Conclusions

- 1) The declaration of the ceasefire by ETA last March 22nd opens up a historic opportunity to resolve the Basque conflict, the last political conflict of this nature in Europe.**
- 2) The Basque conflict is a historic problem of a political nature that has existed for 170 years.**
- 3) Resolving the Basque conflict means addressing two distinct problems:**
 - The problem of the violence of ETA**
 - The political problem of relations between Basque Country and Spain**
- 4) To solve the problem of ETA it is necessary that ETA and the Spanish Government to enter into dialogue to bring about an end to the violence, in three phases:**
 - Verification of the ceasefire**
 - Beginning of formal conversations**
 - Solution to the problem of prisoners and the ‘technical’ aspects of decommissioning of weapons.**
- 5) To solve the Basque political problem it is necessary to recognize the existence of the Basque people and their right to decide their own future.**

The protagonists in solving the Basque political conflict are Basque society and the Basque political parties, which need to address a process in four phases:

 - Multi-party talks without exclusions**
 - An Integrating Agreement on the right to decide and relations between all the Basque Territories**
 - Ratification of the Agreement by Basque society**
 - Negotiation and agreement with the Spanish State on incorporating the will of Basque society into the legal system.**

- 6) **The right to decide and the obligation to reach agreements are the keys to the solution of the Basque conflict, in a similar way to how the conflict between Quebec and Canada is being solved, that is, applying an updated interpretation of the right to self-determination and democratic principles.**

- 7) **Support from international organizations is an essential contribution to the fair and democratic resolution of the Basque conflict.**

“Peace can only last where human rights are respected, where the people are fed, and where individuals and nations are free”.

The Dalai Lama