



## The Diasporisation of the Basque Country

My dear Lehendakari Urkullu, presidents of the assemblies of Álava and Bizkaia, representatives of the provincial authorities, the Basque parliament, universities and the world of Basque culture, Euskal Etxeak delegates from more than twenty countries on four continents, ladies and gentlemen.

Once again I have the privilege, the honour and the responsibility of giving a speech at the World Congress of Basque Communities Abroad. Of course, at the first five congresses the focus was on the Basquisition of the diaspora, taking this to mean primarily the maintenance of Basque culture and language away from here, the Motherland or Ama Lurra. The greatest challenge has always been how to attract the generations born in the diaspora to a common Basque identity, at the same time as gaining their loyalty to one of its different diasporic forms of expression.

The efforts made at previous congresses remain valid, and we must always keep them in mind, because scenarios of final victories do not exist. Keeping up Basque culture around the world is much more than a one-off task, it is a perpetual process, and I am sure the continuity of the Basque identity will continue to be, to a greater or lesser extent, the central theme of future congresses like this one.

For this sixth edition of the Congress of Communities I have been encouraged to take the opposite perspective, i.e. the diasporisation of the homeland. To start with, there are multiple causes of diasporisation in Euskal Herria – not just one – and the impact of these varies in turn depending on particular contexts. It is not the same to talk about the Bizkaia coast, the Gernika area or the Baztán valley – areas with enormous Basque emigration over the centuries – as it is to talk about Portugalete, Irún, Pamplona or Tudela. Nor has the impact been the same in Iparralde or in Hegoalde, due to the differences in the respective colonial and imperial histories of the two states (Spain and France) in which they are situated. As it is not possible to deal with all the variables in play in a single talk, I am going to limit myself mainly to the Autonomous Community of Euskadi. And within this region, nor am I going to venture into the maze of the differences in diasporisation between rural Euskadi and urban Euskadi, or between the left bank of the Nervión and Rioja Alavesa.

Recently, progress in both means of transport and communications have brought with them a revolution in relations between the Motherland and its ancient diasporas. A century ago, the act of emigrating meant an almost complete break with one's home and place of origin. Contacts, which were of course sporadic, were through letters which took months to arrive; and the hope of a visit home, or final return there – if this ever happened – usually materialised after years, if not decades, of absence. Anybody who returned had lost the notion of the development of the society and culture of their place of origin. Completely anachronistic views of the Basque Country were preserved in the diasporas. For instance, linguistic forms that had fallen into disuse in the Motherland were preserved, and of course

there was no possibility of incorporating its neologisms. This was so much the case that an emigrant who returned home (not to mention their descendants) might in many cases seem an oddity in the eyes of their contemporaries who had not emigrated. Even their speech, whether in Basque or Spanish, would sound strange. It goes without saying that at that time the diaspora counted for little in the Basque mentality and public life.

Today, on the other hand, an emigrant with a minimum of interest can follow the news from their homeland every day on the Internet; they can call their relatives once a week, and even go back home for a visit once a year. Moreover, if they are among the new Basque diasporas which have settled in other European countries they can visit home much more often; they can even afford "weekend" visits. Likewise, people here can afford the same luxury in relation to their friends and relatives abroad. They can keep in touch with them by Internet or by taking a plane... All this leads us to state that relations between the Basque diasporas - both traditional and modern ones - and their homeland have changed completely. One of the consequences of this phenomenon is precisely the diasporisation of society in the Basque Country.

There is also another contemporary source of diasporisation in this country which does not involve the Basque diaspora as such, but another type of historical migration. I am referring to that of the immigrants who came to the Basque Country from other parts of the Iberian peninsula attracted by the industrialisation of the Basque economy. It is well-known that this process began in the second half of the nineteenth century and went on for generations, up to the present day. These groups have formed their own diasporic communities - the Castilian community, the Asturian, the Andalusian and so on - and have their own cultural associations. They are very similar to the Basque cultural associations and Euskal Etxeak founded by Basque emigrants and their descendants in their host countries. The Iberian communities resident here, as well as their associations, represent another diasporisation of the Basque Motherland.

While these Iberian communities represent traditional or historical immigration to Euskal Herria, there are other migratory movements that must be taken into account. They are due to the new wave of immigration arising from the changes that have come about in modern Europe. Partly, they are due to the policy of free movement of workers between countries in the European Union, though also to the enormous daily migration of refugees from wars in the Middle East or poverty in Sub-Saharan Africa and some Latin American countries. A short stroll through the streets of Bilbao, Donostia, Iruñea, Baiona or Gasteiz is enough to meet many people of different colours. In Etxalar, where I lived in the 1970s, the only outside population influences then were the Spanish civil guards and border police, plus the pigeon hunters in autumn; all of them, civil guards, police officers and hunters, were groups that were temporary residents, just like the pigeons themselves. Today there are four Romanian families living in Etxalar, who work making thermal socks at the firm Lorpen. It also employs seasonal workers it brings over from Romania to work at the firm for six months a year. Which means that in a Basque-Navarrese village of just over eighty people we have the beginnings of an incipient Romanian colony.

These new diasporas have not been in the Basque Country long enough to form their own cultural associations. But it is to be expected that in the future, as they settle, they will found their respective Ecuadorian, Moroccan, Cuban, Columbian or Romanian associations. These communities represent another form of diasporisation of the Basque Country in the sense that public debate is constant, and news about their position and their future in this country are a source of interest.

Another factor in the diasporisation of the Motherland is the globalisation that is creating "new" Basque diasporas, both within Spain and France and in other European countries. This is the case with England, Italy, Belgium, Holland, Denmark and so on. It is also the case in other countries further away, such as Dubai, South Africa and China, countries with emerging economies.

On the other hand, the "new Basque emigrant" to the traditional destination countries still exists. I am referring to the individual who sets out from the Basque Country to Buenos Aires, Santiago de Chile, Mexico City or New York to work there temporarily for a multinational. Rather than a destination in which to build a permanent future, this is a provisional stay of short duration in a world - today's - in which having a passport is more important than having an identity card from a particular country. All these phenomena are debated endlessly in the Basque media, and are therefore making people here increasingly aware that the world is getting smaller and more compact by the day.

I would like to consider the impact of the contemporary relationship between Basque institutions and its diasporas. Eusko Jaurlaritza has been working for years with a rather modest budget of assistance for the Basque diasporas spread around the world. It provides programmes of social assistance for needy individuals and funds to pay for stays for young people from the diaspora in the Basque Country and to foster the Basque language in Basque centres abroad, as well as subsidies for other needs among Basque cultural associations and Euskal Etxeak around the world. The other side of the coin is the use made by Eusko Jaurlaritza of contacts with key people in the diasporas to build relations with the institutions and businesses of the host countries and so foster exports of Basque products and investments abroad, as well as foreign investments in the Basque economy.

All these activities represent recognition by Basque institutions of the importance of the diasporas, and this recognition is synonymous here with knowledge of the outside world. This is partly due to the open, democratic debate on the use of public funds in this country, but it also reflects a certain feedback from the diasporas to the Motherland. Thirty or forty years ago in the Basque Country little or no notice was taken of the Basque diaspora. The change that has happened since then represents a further diasporisation of this society.

I would highlight as two examples of this the university programmes organised by Boise State University in the seventies in Oñate and those of USAC in the eighties in Leioa and Donostia. Iñaki Galdos told us on Wednesday afternoon what the Boise-Oñati exchange meant. As regards USAC, over the three decades of its existence, it has sent more than nine thousand students to the Basque Country (including several thousand Basque-

Americans). USAC also serves as a bridge between the Basque Country and the United States for an annual exchange of academics (both lecturers and students). Those who go from here come back converted by the experience into individual sources of diasporisation of this society.

Quite a few of you went to Boise in late July and early August this year to attend the famous Jaialdi that is held there every five years. Like a baby, it started out as a small, unique event without any clear hopes about whether it would carry on. This year's Jaialdi was the seventh. The event started up in 1987, around the same time as this Congress of Basque Communities Abroad was set up (in 1995). Both initiatives shared the primary mission of preserving and promoting Basque culture. And over time the holding of Jaialdi has become an institutional extension of the Basque Country itself. Like this congress, Jaialdi is now a full-scale international event attended by thousands of Basques from all parts of the different Basque diasporas. However, the most striking news is the increase in the number of people from Euskal Herria travelling to the festival in Boise. Last July endless family reunions took place in Boise, mine among them. I spent several months in the Goitiandia farmstead in Aulestia in the seventies and my 85 year-old Basque sister Matilde attended the Jaialdi. In the restaurant in Boise where we met that day, there were three generations of "Goitiandias," eating together... According to some estimates, over five thousand residents of the Basque Country went to Boise this summer. Until Jaialdi were held, the biggest event for the Basques in North America is estimated to have been the First National Festival in 1959 in Sparks, Nevada. About three thousand people are said to have attended that festival (compared to thirty thousand at the Jaialdi in Boise), and the vast majority of them were from the western United States. The Basques who travelled from Europe to that event in Sparks probably came to less than a hundred.

Also, the events organised around the Jaialdi say a lot about the interest aroused by the diaspora in the Basque Country itself. Lehendakari Urkullu attended, together with the minister of education and culture and several members of her team. He himself presided over a public event to welcome and congratulate the organisers of the Jaialdi. Also, in Boise he announced for the first time in public the theme for this year's congress, the diasporisation of the Basque Country. The official programme began with his words.

Moreover, ex-lehendakari Ibarretxe presented the English version of his book about the future of the Basque Country. The premier of Bizkaia, accompanied by two assembly members, had his own agenda. Andoni Ortuzar, president of the Basque Nationalist Party, gave a speech to a large number of sympathisers about the future of the party and of the Basque Country...

All these events were attended by some of the leading figures in Basque politics, and they were organised in Boise. The mayor of the city, Dave Bieter, also took part. Dave Bieter is the son of a Basque-American whose parents emigrated to Idaho at the beginning of the twentieth century from Bizkaia, and has spent a long time in the Basque Country; Today he is a Basque speaker. He also attended the organised events. The central theme of the speeches by all the politicians was the unfettered right of the Basque people to decide their

political future within or outside Spain. The fact that all this took place in Boise reflects not only a recognition from the Basque Country of the importance of its diaspora, but it is also another side of the diasporisation of the Basque Country.

I would like to end with a clear example of the diasporisation of this Motherland, without even leaving the building. The Congress of Basque Communities Abroad, held in the Basque Country every four years, is public recognition of the importance the Basque Country attaches to its diasporas. After more than five centuries of emigration to every inhabited continent on the planet, and many of its islands - as in the case of my own Ama Lurra, Ireland – there are now more “Basques” outside the country than in it. I can think of no better illustration of the degree of diasporisation of Euskal Herria.

Thank you for your attention. Eskerrik asko

**William A. Douglass**

Emeritus professor at the Centre for Basque Studies at the University of Nevada