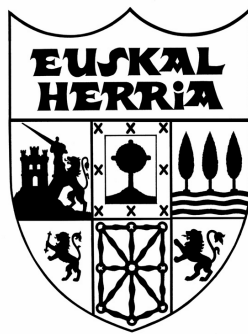


UDALBILTZA[®]

GENERAL ASSEMBLY



**POLITICAL MANAGEMENT
REPORT**

Donostia, 13th April 2002



UDALBILTZA®

Dear colleagues and guests. Egunon!

Egunon and welcome to this General Assembly of UDALBILTZA that we are holding today in the Kursaal here in Donostia.

This is the first General Assembly since UDALBILTZA emerged on 18th September 1999 at the Euskalduna Conference Centre in Bilbao. It is also the first one since the municipally-elected councillors of Batasuna (Euskal Herritarrok at the time) decided to abandon this institution and set up their own forum.

We have, essentially, set out three objectives for this Assembly today: firstly, to reassert the validity and continuation of the principles that inspired the emergence of UDALBILTZA and for the Executive Board to report on the steps we have been taking over these difficult past two and a half years; secondly, to set out the Work Plan we have scheduled for this year and, thirdly, to adopt an institutional declaration about the political situation we are experiencing today in Euskal Herria.

Many events have taken place since that 18th September 1999. At times it turns out that events unfold at such a speed and are of such importance that some superimpose themselves over others; events cover up previous ones. This runs the risk of giving rise to forgetfulness as regards many essential aspects and details and, even worse, can bring about a loss of global perspective about the situation, which can lead us to carry out inaccurate analyses and fail to put suitable measures and policies into practice.

To this end, please allow me to provide you with a superficial overview of the political context in which UDALBILTZA came into being.

On 18th December 1998, ETA declared a unilateral, unconditional and indefinite ceasefire. From that moment onwards, a period of great hope and excitement commenced to which ETA's decision to stop killing made a major contribution. Despite the persistence of different acts of *kale borroka* (urban riots) whose victims in many cases turned out to be municipally-elected colleagues of ours, Basque citizens were able to observe and verify that there started to be a flicker of light at the end of the long dark tunnel of the normalization and pacification of Euskal Herria.

The response on the part of democratic *abertzalismo* (Basque nationalism) to this situation was to redouble our efforts, where possible, to consolidate that situation of détente and channel it definitively towards a scenario where there could be normalization and total peace for all and every one of us.

During this period, town halls entered into institutional partnership agreements with the *izquierda abertzale* (Basque nationalist left) – an aspect that had hitherto never been able to be properly come to fruition due, among other reasons, to the climate of violence and the inadequate response and attitude on the part of HB/EH/Batasuna in view of those acts that constituted a blatant violation of human rights.

One of the courses of action that this climate of ceasefire made it possible to develop was to set up the UDALBILTZA institution.

- A municipal-based institution: an aspect clearly connected to the municipal tradition of democratic *abertzalismo* – a democratic *abertzalismo* “attached to the street and to citizens” at the service of Basques and the political, economic, cultural and social “yeast” of this People, as shown at other important times in our history.
- A municipal-based institution also because it is officially approved, exists and is deep-rooted in all the Basque territories. UDALBILTZA is therefore a testimony to the territoriality of Euskal Herria - a clear natural, national, cultural and linguistic reality, albeit one that is politically divided into three communities located within two states, and one which is socially and economically imbalanced.

- A democratic and fully legitimate institution, as we mayors and councillors who form part of UDALBILTZA have obviously been elected at the polls and we enjoy total legitimacy to represent our citizens and to collaborate with and develop our different projects, taking Euskal Herria as the *raison d'être*.
- A modern institution because Europe is drawing increasingly closer together and more open from within and where natural communities and citizens are tending to become developed over and above artificial borders, in which we Basques also have the right to develop as a People.

In short, it is an institution whose main objective is, on a municipal level, to help and facilitate Basques from all the territories of Euskal Herria to freely develop those initiatives and projects that they consider to be positive and appropriate for their welfare and for their development as a People.

And all the above assuming various fundamentally basic principles, among which special mention should be made of one which we approved at our constituent Assembly: ***"To promote the national construction of Euskal Herria, understood as being a dynamic sustained process involving the free participation and decision-making powers of all Basque citizens,"*** As should be obvious, this is an idea that demands the defence of the fundamental rights of all persons and the active condemnation of any violation of human rights.

We met for the first time with all these objectives in Iruñea on 6th February 1999, and afterwards at the Euskalduna Conference Centre in Bilbao on 18th September of the same year, in order to give more substance to the institution. All the municipally-elected councillors of Euskal Herria were invited to this open, plural announcement.

From the outset, UDALBILTZA has been the brunt of numerous attacks and countless instances of manipulation on the part of some political forces and some sections of the media, both Spanish and French. Time and time again they tried to topple UDALBILTZA and attribute characteristics and stances to it that were both untrue and not in line with what would be stated in successive statements or stances. These were the same forces that, during the ceasefire period, also set about hindering the process and failed to contribute to *détente*, such as moving Basque prisoners closer to Euskal Herria, and as a result of whose provocation ETA itself would ultimately and incomprehensibly give in to.

However, despite everything, the first steps taken by UDALBILTZA were full of enthusiasm and hope, and collaboration on the part of councillors at the heart of the institution started to become very fruitful.

From the first few weeks, the institution's Permanent Committee and Working Groups were set up, involving around thirty municipally-elected councillors charged with an arduous and complicated task – we should not forget that we practically started from scratch. And the drawing up of the Working Programme based on what had been decided at the Euskalduna Conference Centre would progress at a fine rate.

1. Collapse of the ceasefire and its consequences

Regrettably, in December 1999, all citizens became aware of a piece of news that, as has been subsequently proven, would have pernicious human and political consequences: ETA broke off the cease fire that had been declared on 18th September 1998 and which, as has been stated and among other things, had enabled the *izquierda abertzale* to put together a series of partnership agreements in different institutions, including UDALBILTZA.

The collapse of the ceasefire was confirmed in Madrid on 21st January 2000 with the killing of the Lieutenant Colonel Blanco. Fatal attacks also took place, even affecting our colleagues – municipally-elected councillors – as we have recalled at the beginning of this Assembly. In view of the inadequate response offered by Euskal Herritarrok (EH) with regard to these outrages, EAJ-PNV and EA then approved the principle of non-development of "active collaboration" with this political group as a result of the former's failure to modify its attitude. This principle was put into practice via the immediate suspension and subsequent collapse of the agreement at the heart of the Basque Parliament with EH, the suspension of activities envisaged at the heart of the Lizarra-Garazi and Batera Declarations Batera and the collapse of municipal agreements. Logically, this principle was also reflected in UDALBILTZA.

2. EH fails to evolve

On 28th March 2000, the Permanent Committee of UDALBILTZA approved and Institutional Declaration with EH abstaining, the fundamental points of which I should like to remind you of here, owing to their importance and topical nature:

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.”

Despite many other aspects, the fact that EH/Batasuna attempted, as they had previously declared, to open up UDALBILTZA to all political sensibilities while at the same time failing to use any sound judgement or moral and human reflection with regard to killings, coercion and attacks that those very same councillors were being forced to endure, proved to be hugely inconsistent.

This abstaining and escapist attitude on the part of EH resulted in the "*sine die*" suspension of the General Assembly of UDALBILTZA scheduled for 27th May 2000 at this very same Kursaal Conference Centre in Donostia. From that moment onwards, the Permanent Committee would be confined to approving its Working Programme for the year 2000, which had practically been drawn up by that time, with a time being set aside for verifying any possible evolution in the world of the *izquierda abertzale* in terms of their stance towards violence.

EH not only failed to vary its stance, but in fact reacted by organizing an Assembly in September 2000 with the supposed aim of promoting UDALBILTZA. Only EH councillors and some from Abertzaleen Batasuna (AB) attended the Assembly. A few days later, EH organized its own working groups and an original, distinct corporate image for that new Assembly. Parallel to this, the inconsistent and incomprehensible lack of attendance on the part of EH in the Basque Parliament enabled the PP, PSE-PSOE and UA to approve a green paper in which the Basque Government was urged not to release the 25 million pesetas approved for UDALBILTZA in the General Budget for the year 2000.

It very soon became apparent that EH was not trying to promote the work carried out by UDALBILTZA, but rather was trying to create its own Assembly.

In view of all the above (insufficient response with regard to violence, creation of its own Assembly and an irresponsible lack of attendance at work carried out in the Basque Parliament), EAJ-PNV and EA decided to dispense with and expel EH from the political management of UDALBILTZA and from its instrumental association, Udalbidetako Elkarlan Elkarteak.

3. EH, excluded from the management and administering of UDALBILTZA

On 22nd November, EAJ-PNV and EA agreed at the Permanent Committee meeting of UDALBILTZA to set up an Executive Board charged with politically administering and running the institution and that EH should be excluded. At the same time, the General Assembly of Udalbide modified its articles of association so that all municipally-elected councillors who wished to form part of UDALBILTZA would have to sign a declaration in active defence of all human rights of all citizens.

Over those same days, the Provincial Councils of Bizkaia and Gipuzkoa approved the release of the funds committed to UDALBILTZA amounting to 93 and 64 million pesetas respectively. On 9th February 2001, the new Executive Board of UDALBILTZA approved the first projects for awarding grants in favour of Euskera in Iparralde and Nafarroa, thus kick starting the implementation of its working programme.

Lastly, on 24th February 2001, EH ended up doing what had been clear since September of the previous year – it organized its own Assembly, assuming the representation of UDALBILTZA.

4. UDALBILTZA 2001 Working Programme

During 2001, with all the well-known political and financial difficulties I have referred to above, UDALBILTZA focused its work on its internal organization (offices, basic infrastructure, etc.), and on the implementation of its working programme.

The following courses of action, among others have been developed in the 2001 Working Programme:

In terms of internal organization, special mention should be made of the purchase of the head office in Iruñea and the rental of a link-up office in Donostia. As regards staff and in addition to the grants currently available to us, we hope to contract two people on a temporary basis so as to ensure the continuity and monitoring of our work.

In terms of operative programmes, activity has focused mainly on making contact with those citizens' sectors that require aid and support in order to develop their activities in areas such as Euskera, education, the media and culture.

In the field of Euskera, the work carried out by UDALBILTZA has focused on those territories where the situation facing our language is more precarious and is in need of special attention. Thus, our efforts have concentrated on supporting education and cultural sectors and the media that carry out work involving Euskera in Iparralde and Nafarroa.

The following associations have been supported in Iparralde:

- UDA-LEKU: an association that organizes leisure time for students from Iparralde in Euskera by means of home stays and exchanges with other schools from Hegoalde. This association has also carried out work to keep a kindergarten in Euskera open.
- IKAS-BI: a parent-teacher association that promotes Euskera within the state education on network. It has been helped with funding home stays for students, exchanges with students from Hegoalde and with funding text books in Euskera in subjects such as mathematics and the publishing of the *Nanai* school magazine.
- EUSKAL HAZIAK: an association that promotes teaching in Euskera within the private or Catholic school network.

As regards the media, EUSKAL IRRATIAK radio received aid for the renewal of its infrastructures. This radio network groups together the following radio stations that broadcast in Euskera: Gure Irratia, Irulegiko Irratia and Xiberoko Botza, and this aid has helped to markedly improve the broadcasting conditions of their programmes.

Culturally, the GARAZIKUS received our support for the publishing of a six-monthly guide to cultural events organized in Iparralde and delivered to all homes.

Special mention should be made of the fact that, when providing this support, UDABILTZA has always relied on the participation and knowledge of our colleagues, the municipally-elected councillors of Iparralde, who do not necessarily form an integral part of our institution. Contacts have always proved to be fruitful and coincided with the need to increase clear collaboration. We have a huge joint task ahead of us and, in terms of respect and freedom, I am sure this work will produce very tangible results.

In Nafarroa, we have also had a bearing on these same areas. Nobody should try to conceal the fact that the situation experienced by Euskera in Nafarroa is also a very delicate one. In an institutional declaration made by UDALBILTZA, we had already pinpointed the need to promote and defend Euskera and we urge the regional authorities of Nafarroa to respect the linguistic rights of its citizens, considering Euskera as source of cultural wealth and a language that, far from dividing citizens, constitutes a heritage that belongs to all of us.

Thus, the specific courses of action embarked on have been as follows:

- Euskara Kultur Elkargoa: this is an association that promotes Euskera in Nafarroa. Our specific support materialized in the form of aid for the setting in motion of the "Artekaria" initiative. This service, which involves the work of two lawyers, focuses on the defence even in court of the linguistic rights of the citizens of Nafarroa, especially with regard to Euskera.
- SORTZEN: support has focused on the "Euskaraz mintzo" programme, involving the organization of games and activities among students and parents in Euskera outside teaching hours. The aim of this programme is to also promote the use of Euskera outside the classroom and to purposefully involve parents of students.
- EUSKALERRIA IRRATIA: a radio station in Euskera that mainly broadcasts in the county of Iruñea, although it also reaches Betelu and the Sakana Valley. In any event, these are the most Basque-speaking areas in Nafarroa. Our assistance has enabled them to greatly modernize their systems of organization by digitalizing the radio station and purchasing an ISDN line, which has markedly improved the quality of broadcasts.

Broadly speaking, I also wish to draw attention to the assistance we have provided to Udako Euskal Unibersitatea (the Basque Summer University), with a view to organizing summer courses in Iruñea and Biarritz which have proved so successful and become so renowned in Euskal Herria, via work carried out over several years.

Also as regards Euskera, UDALBILTZA signed an agreement with Euskal Soziolinguistika Institutoa (SEI). Via this agreement, this institute is completing a survey about the degree of usage of Euskera in our municipalities. This study, which will be distributed among all

the towns of Euskal Herria, will enable we municipal authorities to gain specific knowledge about the degree of usage of Euskera in our municipalities so as to then take the steps needed to effectively increase such usege.

Lastly, please allow me to refer to the 2004 project to commemorate the thousandth anniversary of the coronation of King Sancho III the Great. The FORO IRUN XXI and EUSKOKULTUR cultural associations of Iruñea are the promoters of this commemoration to which we have lent our support. The specific activities to be developed are:

- The creation of a cantata, the words for which Euskal Herriko Bertsozaleen Elkarte has collaborated on;
- The creation of a play that reflects the atmosphere and lifestyle in Euskal Herria at that time.
- The organization of a competition to write a historic essay on society at that time.
- And the erection in collaboration with the Town Council of Hondarribia of a monument in honour of Sancho III the Great on the top of Cape Higuier, the physical meeting point from where the three Basque communities of the Autonomous Region of Euskadi (CAV), Nafarroa and Iparralde can be made out.

With all the above, we are simply attempting to raise the awareness of Basque citizens about the fact that around the year 1004 there also existed a Basque society, in its own way and within its own context; this society spoke Euskera, organized itself internally in freedom and maintained relations with its neighbours – all this with Sancho III the Great at the helm, who the Moors referred to from the time of his coronation as the “Lord of the Basques.”

As regards this year 2002, in a few minutes I shall explain the working programme we are going to be developing. This programme contains numerous important initiatives in terms of Euskera, tourism, the economy, culture and close collaboration between our municipalities.

Dear colleagues, municipally -elected councillors of Euskal Herria:

The path taken to reach this point has not been an easy one. We have endured criticism, lack of understanding, a certain political weakness and loss as far as our forecasts for financial income is concerned.

However, I should like to clearly get across the fact that those of us who make up the Executive Board of UDALBILTZA continue to believe in the potentiality, necessity, democratic legitimacy, modernity and positive nature of this project.

The needs for constructing a Euskal Herria which is increasingly politically, socially, economically and linguistically integrated are major ones. Yet our commitment, the commitment of this Executive Board, is sufficient to take up this challenge.

And that is what we ask of you, that you continue supporting this institution. We ask for your support and your involvement in UDALBILTZA. We know that we all have a lot of things to do and will experience some difficulties along the way in helping to financially sustain this institution, but you should also know that there are different ways of collaborating and that a continued effort and awareness-raising is both fundamental and essential for UDALBILTZA.

Because, as we stated in our 2001 *Aberri Eguna* (Patriotism Day) manifesto:

"We are municipally-elected councillors of the seven Basque territories, we believe in the existence of a people with its own history and will, with shared and complementary cultural, territorial, linguistic and social and cultural realities.

We recognize that we are within that reality and we seek to shape a political community that is increasingly more related to, more caring, less dependent and more a master of its own future via knowledge, mutual respect and free adherence.

1. An unequivocal commitment to humanitarian principles and in defence of the rights and freedoms of the individual.

The right to life and the dignity of the individual constitute the basis of our way of interpreting reality, politics, society and our aspirations and strategic projects.

We express that solidarity and defend that dignity, to which all of us are entitled without exception, in our towns and neighbourhoods, beside all the victims and those people who are senselessly threatened by ETA. We are municipally-elected councillors and we want to especially be on the side of those councillors who are being threatened and their families.

2. Basque social and national construction must be sustained via the use of democratic channels, via freedom and via the will and decision-making powers of citizens, in so doing rejecting the use of violence and respecting and being respected at all times without exception with regard to the human rights of all individuals, including those deprived of freedom. Violence and national construction are incompatible. Means and ends are joined by a single axis: exclusively democratic political action.

ETA violence, in addition to being ethically and morally execrable and destroying peaceful coexistence, helps both objectively and effectively to favour the strategy pursued by those whose aim is to historically hinder and prevent Basque nationalists from freely developing a project based on a country that is master of its own destiny.

3. Basque citizens –men and women – constitute the subject of the Basque nation. The free and democratic exercising of the will of citizens does not allow for the imposing of immovable frameworks or freedoms imposed by force.

We are also the most ancient people in Europe, and we speak a language – Euskera - that constitutes the only living testimony to European prehistory, a country located between two states that is trying to overcome the consequences of the systematic denial of its national identity. These are consequences that have given rise to a political and cultural reality in tatters and a demographic and economic evolution that is both asymmetrical and disparate.

4. With the conviction that an appreciation of freedom makes a people strong, by definitively banishing violence, individual and collective intimidation from our midst, peace becomes our priority and national and social construction our legitimate project.

We have hope and the ability to work. We believe in the men and women of our nation. Whether Euskadi-Euskal Herria becomes the leading player of its present and master of its future depends on us."

Eskerrik asko