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The Basque Country within Spain and Europe: Basque Nationalist Party Proposals during the Spanish Transition to Democracy (1975–1980)

ABSTRACT

This chapter examines the public discourse of the Basque Nationalist Party (the PNV) following the end of the Franco dictatorship in Spain (1975–80). It highlights an important transitional period during which the traditional ethnic and religious criteria of 'Basqueness' gave way to a wider political understanding of identity. The political demands of the PNV centred on the restoration of the historical rights of the Basque People to self-government. The party's aim was twofold: to reinforce the consciousness of a Basque identity, while simultaneously justifying its involvement in the newly emerging Spanish democracy. The wider European context had a defining influence on the party's self-understanding and the way in which it framed its political agenda. The chapter concludes with an epilogue on the development of Basque nationalist discourse and its political project over time.

As recently noted by Anwen Elias and Ludger Mees, stateless nationalist and regionalist parties 'have in common their shared demand for a reform of the territorial structure of the state in which they operate, in order to provide some kind of self-government for a distinctive territorial community' (2017: 133). This is the case today and has been in previous historical periods, particularly in times of transition to democracy. The Basque nationalist movement made this kind of demand for territorial reorganization at the end of Franco's dictatorship.[1]

The aim of this chapter is to describe the discourse produced during the process of transition to democracy in Spain (1975–80) by the Basque

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Nationalist Party (known by its Spanish initials, 'PNV'), which represented the moderate wing of Basque nationalism.[2] In particular, it focuses on the place that the PNV thought the Basque Country ought to have, both within Spain and in Europe. The party endeavoured to achieve a higher degree of self-government for the Basque Country by relying on its *fueros* [historical rights].[3] The Basque Country was on good terms with the Spanish state and sought to find a 'natural' fit within the European environment. While it acknowledged the contribution that migrants had made to its welfare (and its ethos) in the past, it maintained with varying success but unwavering determination its own ethnic and cultural distinctiveness as a 'nation' within the wider nation of Spain.

This chapter discusses how that determination manifested itself after Franco's dictatorship. It highlights an important transitional period during which the historical ethnic and religious criteria of 'Basqueness' gave way to a wider political understanding of identity, an understanding which, while (re)claiming its distinctive nature, also agreed to remain within the Spanish state, with its sights set on Europe. The *fueros* were a key component of the

2 The PNV was founded in 1895 by Sabino Arana, who advocated the secession of the Basque territories from Spain and France and their reorganization as an independent confederation.

3 The various Basque political cultures throughout history have interpreted the *fueros* very differently. As Professor Coro Rubio affirmed, the *fueros* have been regarded as 'normas consuetudinarias garantes del modo de vida tradicional' [customary rules that guarantee the traditional way of life], 'códigos liberales' [liberal codes], 'restos del Antiguo Régimen' [remnants of the old regime], 'modelos de descentralización' [decentralization models], 'compendio de libertades democráticas y expresión del derecho de autogobierno del pueblo vasco' [a compendium of democratic freedoms and an expression of the right of self-government of the Basque people], etc. It is a polysemic concept that has undoubtedly acquired significant symbolic value over time, according to Rubio (2012). Most prominent among these meanings is that of 'símbolo de las libertades del pueblo vasco' [symbol of the freedoms of the Basque people]. Following Eider Landaberea, remembrance of the *fueros* began to take shape with their abolition in 1876 and since then 'los fueros han estado presentes en los debates políticos más relevantes de los siglos XIX y XX' [the *fueros* have been present in all the major political debates of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries] (2018: 199).

PNV's definition of 'national identity' and of its proposal for the territorial organization of a democratic Spain.

The first section briefly discusses the changes brought about by the death of Francisco Franco and the internal reorganization that the PNV underwent at the time. The second section analyses the discourse of the demands for the restitution of the historical rights of the Basque people generated by the PNV. The third section examines the party's proposals for the role that they saw the Basque Country playing within both Spain and Europe. The chapter concludes with an epilogue on the development of Basque nationalists' discourse and political project over time.

Reorganization of the PNV in the New Historical Context

The death of Franco in November 1975 opened a new political era in Spanish history, one which the PNV had long awaited and prepared for, having spent years calculating and analysing the behaviour that they should adopt in this new period, estimating their chances, their choices and every potential consequence.[4] They had adopted a moderate strategy in the previous decade. The party had made small advances through a pragmatic policy of limited co-operation with Spanish democratic forces, both in the Peninsula and in Europe. This long-term strategy was aimed at ensuring the PNV's active role during the post-Franco political era. They had planted the seeds for the future, and that future had finally arrived.

4 The party had moderated its demands over several decades, focusing on developing a Statute of Autonomy for the Basque Country, an objective that it achieved in 1936. After Franco prevailed in the civil war, the leaders of the PNV and many of its members had to take refuge abroad, a point which marked the start of a forty-year exile. The most exhaustive and complete study of the history of the PNV is undoubtedly that by Santiago de Pablo, Ludger Mees, and José Antonio Rodríguez Ranz (1999–2001).

In the late 1960s the PNV underwent an internal reorganization to prepare for the new political scene. Their command centre was relocated from Paris and the French Basque Country to the Spanish Basque Country. A generational handover took place, and the relations between party leaders on both sides of the border deteriorated. Disagreements arose not only from the lack of communication that geographical distance caused, but also from differing political slants: those in exile were more open to co-operation with others, whereas those in the Spanish territory were more radical and uncompromising. These two tendencies coexisted within the PNV from very early on. One was more radical and sought independence, and the other was more pragmatic in its approach. This has led experts to use the metaphor of the pendulum to explain the historical oscillation between these two positions (Pablo 1999–2001).

At the end of the 1970s, the PNV's goal was to appear as an approachable, young and attractive party, shaking off the traditional image of anachronism and exile. ETA (*Euskadi ta Askatasuna* [Basque Country and Freedom])[5] was born in 1959 and their message appealed to a large part of the PNV, particularly the young members of *Eusko Gaztedi* [Basque Youth], who were already vocal in criticizing what they perceived as their elders' modest ambitions.[6]

The key landmark in the process of restructuring and ideologically updating the PNV during the first few years of the transition to democracy was the National Assembly held in Pamplona in March 1977. There, the party reasserted Sabino Arana's founding principles, kept the motto he devised, *Jaungoikoa eta Lege Zarra* [God and Old Law] and strove to present themselves as a Basque people's party with mass appeal. As they sought

5 All translations are my own. ETA has been the subject of a large number of academic studies, the most noteworthy being those by Domínguez Iribarren (1998), Elorza (2006), Fernández Soldevilla and López Romo (2012), Garmendia (1996), and Jáuregui (1985).

6 The influence of historical leaders such as Juan Ajuriaguerra, Manuel Irujo, Jesús María Leizola, Jesús Solaún, etc., did not vanish overnight, but a new generation of young leaders had largely taken the helm: Mikel Isasi, Luis María Retolaza, Xabier Arzalluz, Joseba Leizaola, Pello Irujo and others, whose names would become better known, particularly after the death of Franco.

legitimacy for the new era after a record of fighting against Francoism alongside the defeated Spanish Republic they highlighted their near-century of history, in contrast to the recent hodgepodge of new political formations, stressing its democratic ethos and the continuity of its political project.

However, notwithstanding efforts to defend this ongoing political project, the connection with the founder's ideological proposals was now irreversibly damaged, as the party's identification with Christianity was set aside and the integration of migrants from within Spain was accepted.[7] In this way, the race-based, essentialist definition of the Basque people was abandoned; 'no lo constituye la sangre ni el nacimiento, sino la voluntad integradora, la impregnación cultural y la aportación a su desarrollo en cualquier orden de la vida' [they were no longer defined by blood or birth, but by the will to become a part of the community, by cultural permeation and by contributions to development in all orders of life]. Independence was not mentioned at this stage, although references to an 'Estado vasco autonómico' [autonomous Basque state]' left this open to interpretation.[8] This eclectic proposal was their way of bringing together the variety of internal schools of thought and preserving the allegiance of those who might feel tempted by other new proposals of the Basque nationalist scene.

The Discourse: Reclaiming Historical Rights

The choice of the phrase 'autonomous Basque state' was in itself a declaration of intent in which ambiguity was valued over specificity. This could be interpreted as a demand for a high degree of autonomy from Spain, but also as a call for independence. For the PNV, a potential 'Basque state' required the construction of a network of relationships with other peoples

7 Alfredo Crespo has stated that by doing so, 'el PNV parecía establecer una ruptura' [the PNV seemed to have established a break (with the past)]. In his view, the party's modernization process 'estuvo guiada las más de las veces por criterios pragmáticos' [was mostly guided by pragmatic concerns] (2012: 287 and 290).

8 EAJ-PNV (1977).

in the Spanish state, within the context of a 'Europe of the Peoples', where *Euskadi* [the Basque Country] would finally find its rightful place on an equal footing with the other peoples of the continent.

In the words of the nationalist leader Xabier Arzalluz, the central point of the party's discourse was the demand for 'los derechos propios de los vascos' [the rights belonging to the Basques] (*fueros*), which became the recurring theme of the PNV's discourse during the early years of the transition to democracy.[9] For the party's support base, fighting to recover such historical rights provided a legitimate reason to participate in the Spanish political transition process, for this would allow them to recover what had once been taken away from them.

The Basque people (defined as 'cuantos viven y trabajan en Euskadi' [all those living and working in the Basque Country]) were the intended subjects of those historical rights. Thereby Sabino Arana's racist and essentialist definition was explicitly set aside. There was now a Basque people who had a set of defining ethnic, historical, linguistic and cultural features of their own:

> [V]ascos que tienen sus derechos de los que no pueden apartarse si quieren vivir como tales. El vasco no olvida y reclama los suyos, y pretende, como todos aquellos pueblos que tienen conciencia de su ser, realizarse lo más ampliamente posible.
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> [Basques who have some rights that they cannot give up if they want to live as such. Basques do not forget their rights, but instead demand them, and intend, as do all peoples with a consciousness of their own being, to find fulfilment in the widest possible sense.][10]

Recovering the sovereignty that the *fueros* once granted would therefore provide the Basques with a sense of their 'political being'. In other words, the traditional charters enabled a centuries-old definition of a very specific Basque national identity and of their communal will.

The transformation of an ancient legal code into the basis for a modern political campaign required, in the first instance, a reconstructed narrative

9 Xabier Arzalluz (1976). PNV's rally at Frontón de Anoeta, Donostia-San Sebastián, December 1976, *El Diario Vasco*, 7 December, p. 8.

10 Interview with Gerardo Bujanda (1977), a member of the EBB (executive committee of the PNV) (*El Diario Vasco*, 5 March, p. 10).

of the past to affirm the existence of a distinctive political identity. At a time of change, hope and opportunity (of which the party was fully aware), it was necessary to 'recover' and update the history of a people thousands of years old, as that history shaped the connection between the past (the original sovereignty), the present (the fact that they were the same people with the same rights) and the future (the advances to be made in their self-government). This narrative gave the PNV's discourse the desired continuity and legitimized their political project.[11]

In their analysis of the past, the PNV identified two historical epochs: the first witnessed the supremacy of the 'modernos reinos europeos' [modern European kingdoms], interpreted by Basque nationalists as 'formaciones políticas heterogéneas, en las que coexistían bajo una misma Corona entes políticos de estructura diferente y de desigual vinculación con esa misma Corona' [heterogeneous political formations, with political entities that had a wide range of structures coexisting under the same rule under varying degrees of relation to the Crown]. Such was the case of the Crown of Castile, under whose influence several political units coexisted: Álava, Vizcaya, Guipúzcoa, and later, also Navarre. Their coexistence rested on a pact between these units and the Crown, which saw its power diminished by the mere existence of the pact. During this period the Basque community enjoyed a high level of self-government.[12]

According to the PNV's thesis, the rise of so-called 'nation-states' produced by the application of the doctrines of the French Revolution put an end to this period of coexistence. The birth of the nation-state brought about centralized, homogenized communities which lost power in favour of central governments and stopped being subjects of law in their own

11 The argument about the traditional charters also played a central role in the discourse of the Basque right during the early transition to democracy. Both the PNV and UCD (Unión de Centro Democrático) used the reference to the *fueros* as 'pieza clave de sus distintas maneras de entender y definir la idea de nación y la idea de España' [a key part of their different ways of understanding and defining the idea of nation and the idea of Spain]. But while for the PNV the *fueros* justified the existence of a Basque people as a subject of political rights, for the UCD it demonstrated a specific way of being Spanish (Landaberea 2018).

12 EAJ-PNV (1977: 33–9).

right, thus becoming a mere collection of individuals. From this point on, individual citizens became the subjects of law. For the PNV, the laws passed on 25 October 1839 and 21 July 1876 epitomized this change and culminated in a reduction of their power and the suppression of Basque historical rights.[13]

However, the time had now arrived to reclaim the rights that had once been taken away. The PNV's demands and their federal project (an adaptation of the traditional charters) provided the tools to achieve self-government. This was considered a right and not a privilege, 'un derecho de nuestro pueblo que nace de su propia identidad y que ya tuvo realidad en épocas anteriores' [a right of our people which stems from its own identity and which already existed in previous times], and was therefore a legitimate claim in a democratic landscape.[14] For the *jeltzales*[15] there was nothing revolutionary or extreme about this demand, since it only involved the Basque people exercising a right that they had previously possessed and which ought to be restored by the budding democratic system.

The essential first step was the formation of an autonomous government integrated into the Spanish state, together with retention of their original goal of building a Basque state. To achieve this as swiftly as possible

13 A law issued on 25 October 1839 confirmed the application of the Basque charters, preserved the 'unidad constitucional de la monarquía' [constitutional unity of the monarchy], and opened the door to a modification by parliament to further adapt their status to the conditions of the Spanish liberal state. Since the times of Sabino Arana, this law represented the loss of Basque independence in the eyes of nationalists. For the PNV the law issued on 21 July 1876 only made the situation worse, as it partially suppressed the charters and abolished the tax and military exemptions for the Basque provinces. Although it included no explicit abrogation of the charters, it was interpreted as such by nationalists and supporters of the charters alike (Rubio 2003).

14 *El Diario Vasco*, 2 June 1977, p. 13. Similarly, 'Euzkadi es una comunidad con personalidad propia, y tiene derecho a defender esa personalidad. Dentro de ese derecho, se encuentra el de determinar su propio status jurídico' [*Euskadi* as a community has a character of its own and has the right to defend this character and to determine its own legal status]. Stated by Juan Ajuriaguerra in the electoral campaign (*Deia,* 8 June 1977, p. 6).

15 Another name for members and supporters of the PNV. It derives from the motto of the party: Jaungoikoa eta Lege Zarra (JEL) [God and Old Law].

and as a way to start addressing the historical debt owed to the Basques the PNV supported efforts to draft a democratic constitutional text. Joining forces with other parties in the Assembly that shared their charter-based discourse, the PNV reached a compromise in support of the Spanish State of the Autonomous Regions,[16] a decision which would have aroused fierce opposition just a few years earlier. Participation in Spanish politics was justified by the demand for the restitution of the traditional rights.

First, the *jeltzales* demanded a constitution which would support the legal and political structure of a democratic state, the only possible environment for their project to thrive. Second, they called for it to grant the 'ejercicio de los derechos individuales y sociales y el control del poder y de quienes lo ejercen' [exercise of social and individual rights, as well as due control of power and of those who exercised it].

The PNV's concept of individual rights was inextricably linked with the rights of the community, since the former were to be exercised by the individuals belonging to the community of the Basques and operating through that community. Third, and perhaps most important, the constitution had to guarantee autonomy 'para los pueblos de Euzkadi, Catalunya, Galicia, Andalucía y demás pueblos, para que se estructuren conforme a su propio carácter, desarrollen su propia lengua y cultura y resuelvan sus problemas con arreglo a su propia manera de ser' [for the peoples of *Euskadi*, Catalonia, Galicia, Andalusia and others, so that they may organize according to their own character, develop their own language and culture, and solve their problems while remaining true to their own selves].[17]

The campaign slogan chosen by the party for the first democratic elections ('seguiremos donde siempre hemos estado' [We will remain where

16 This was the name of the new model of Spanish State developed in the period of transition to democracy. This model granted autonomy to the nationalities and regions within the State. Between December 1979 and February 1983, seventeen autonomous regions were created, each with its respective statute of autonomy. As argued by Elias and Mees (2017), the ambiguity of the 'State of the Autonomous Regions' encouraged the PNV (and also the Catalan nationalist party CiU, Convergència i Unió) to implement and expand self-government over the 1980s and 1990s (2017: 152).

17 Extracted from the PNV's campaign for the general election held on 15 June 1977 (*El Diario Vasco*, 26 May 1977, p. 16).

we have always been]) summed up their history and discourse thus far. It was specifically based on the Basque traditional charters, and continued to advocate 'los intereses del Pueblo Vasco allá donde se nos discutan' [the interests of the Basque people wherever they are challenged].[18] By asserting their idea of the old law, the PNV shielded their concept of community, which was modernized by the incorporation of federal notions.

The past and its codes of law also formed the basis for the second essential element of the discourse for the restitution of historical rights: territory. This is one of the defining elements of any nationalist project and represents the substrate on which to develop and preserve a community.

For the PNV, the ideal was a Basque territory that contained the four historical units included in the Spanish state (Álava, Vizcaya, Guipúzcoa, Navarre) and the three included in the French state (Lapurdi, Zuberoa and Lower Navarre). Despite their different characteristics, throughout history all seven have shared a set of institutions, rights, customs and traditions, notwithstanding various attempts to take them away. In the case of *Iparralde* [French Basque Country], this happened in the late eighteenth century, and in the case of the other four provinces, in the nineteenth century.[19] These territories were the home of the Basque community. However, despite the official discourse, during the process of transition to democracy the PNV mostly focused on the three provinces currently in the Basque Autonomous Community plus Navarre, omitting the provinces beyond the French border. What was at stake at that time was the future of the Spanish State, and that set some specific geographical boundaries to action and influence.

Navarre became central to the PNV's idea of a community, and constant references were made to this territory during the development of the

18 *El Diario Vasco*, 29 May 1977, p. 9.

19 In the case of Navarre, the PNV dates the beginning of the process to 1512, 'when we were conquered by the Duke of Alba' and Navarre became part of the Crown of Castile. This was stated by Carlos Garaikoetxea, who later became *lehendakari* [president] of the Basque government (*Egin*, 4 November 1977, p. 5).

Spanish Constitution and the period that preceded the arrangement into Autonomous Regions.[20] Navarre was the touchstone of the PNV's historical chronicle and their definition of a Basque community. However, this was precisely the main obstacle in the negotiations that led to the State of the Autonomous Regions, and the cause of the frontal opposition between the *jeltzales* and the Navarran UCD (Union of the Democratic Centre).[21]

The Place of the Basque Country within both the Spanish State and Europe

In the PNV's view, the seven Basque territorial units should be articulated on a confederal and a local basis. A territorial confederation would ensure full respect for the institutions and the particularities of each Basque region, and would also allow for some shared entities and a 'national' statute of autonomy (the nation being the Basque Country). This framework would enable the 'personalidad vasca integral' [integral Basque personality] to be preserved, and would provide the mechanisms for addressing financial, political and social issues as required, while maintaining Basque culture and the Basque language throughout the territory. This pact among Basques needed to be supplemented by another pact between the Basque territories and the new Spanish democratic State. The federal idea, as an updated version of the system outlined by

20 Furthermore, when confronted by other nationalist parties, the PNV insisted that the primaeval claim for the inclusion of Navarre in the Basque Country was their doing and nobody else's: 'no olvidemos que hace ya 85 años por vez primera se oyó el grito de Nafarroa, Euzkadi da, salido precisamente de este partido' [Let us not forget that eighty-five years ago we first heard the cry of 'Nafarroa, Euzkadi da' (Navarre is the Basque Country), which came from this party and none other]. This was stated by Carlos Garaikoetxea at a press conference after the ordinary National Assembly of the EBB held in Pamplona (*Deia*, 11 March 1978, p. 11).

21 For further information on the Navarran issue, see Baraibar (2004).

the charters, protected Basque identity and at the same time enabled an agreement with the emerging Spanish State.

The Constitution was the specific means for realizing the *jeltzales'* ideas, and very early on the PNV decided to become an active agent in the constitutional process and to run in the first democratic election held after Franco's death.

Euskadi within the Spanish State

Participating in the general election turned out to be a good decision. After the vote held on 15 June 1977, the UCD had a majority in the whole of Spain, and the PNV was the majority party in the Basque Country.[22] It appeared that the discourse woven around the demand for the historical rights of the Basques had reached a wide sector of the population, and the PNV had been given the support base to initiate the path to restitution through self-government.

However, problems soon arose in the process leading to the Spanish State of the Autonomous Regions, the first of which was the Navarran question. The irreconcilable proposals of Basque and centre Navarran parliamentarians hindered the negotiations between the Basque Parliamentarians' Assembly (established in June 1977) and the Spanish government. The agreement for a preliminary structure based on Autonomous Regions was reached on 30 December 1977, and two important decrees were signed on the following day. The first decree approved the Basque preliminary autonomous arrangement and came into force in January 1978; this led to the establishment of the Basque General Council (CGV). The second decree outlined the procedure for the possible incorporation of Navarre into the Basque Country in the future. For some nationalists, the fact that this incorporation did not take place immediately was interpreted as a concession from the PNV.

22 The PNV obtained 290,000 votes (approximately 29 per cent), which granted them eight members of Congress and four members of the Senate.

The party justified its decision on the grounds that a pragmatic approach was required at that particular time.

The Basque Country's preliminary autonomous arrangement was not particularly fruitful as far as the PNV's aspirations were concerned. Consequently, their efforts focused on the constitutional process, to ensure that provisions to guarantee Basque self-government in the future would be included in the Constitution. In December 1977, the rapporteurs submitted the bill to the constitutional commission. The parliamentary group formed by the PNV submitted 101 amendments, most of which rejected the model of a unitary State and demanded that the Constitution recognize the sovereignty of the Basque people. Title VIII, on the Autonomous Regions, and the First Additional Provision, referred to historical rights, which were the most important issues at this stage.

The definition of the Basque community brought to the constitutional debates by the PNV was difficult to adapt to the new political, legal and institutional framework in Spain. From the start, it was apparent that it would be highly problematic to articulate concepts such as 'soberanía original' [original sovereignty] and 'teoría del pacto' [pact theory] within the wording of a Constitution focused on the indivisible sovereignty of the Spanish nation. Aware of this situation, the PNV's spokesperson, Xabier Arzalluz, submitted an additional verbal amendment in June 1978, in an attempt to reconcile recognition of the Basque historical rights with the structure that was being outlined, which was based on Autonomous Regions. This second attempt also failed. Instead, the Commission approved a different verbal amendment, with the agreement of the rest of the parliamentary groups, which was included in the First Additional Provision: 'La Constitución ampara y respeta los derechos históricos de los territorios forales. La actualización general de dicho régimen foral se llevará a cabo, en su caso, en el marco de la Constitución y de los Estatutos de Autonomía' [The Constitution protects and respects the historical rights of *fueros* territories. This *fueros*-based system may be updated within the scope of the Constitution and the Statutes of Autonomy] (Larrazabal 1997: 361). Ignoring the guidelines of the EBB, Arzalluz voted in favour of this amendment because it guaranteed that the Constitution would refer to historical rights. He also submitted and defended the PNV's original amendment as an individual vote before the full Congress.

The PNV issued a statement on 21 June 1978 expressing its disappointment with the outcome of the constitutional debates. The party again justified Arzalluz's support for the amendment on the grounds that otherwise historical rights would not even have been mentioned at all. However, the statement criticized the amendment because it made the recognition of historical rights conditional upon their falling within the scope of the Constitution and the Statutes of Autonomy.

The PNV attempted to change the wording of the Provision by negotiating with the UCD and the PSOE [Socialist Party].[23] They even agreed with the PSOE on a proposal to replace the phrase 'en el marco de la Constitución' [within the scope of the Constitution] with one that stated that the Statute would be the 'norma institucional básica' [basic institutional rule], as provided in the Constitution. The UCD approved the PSOE's wording and even seemed to be willing to support the PNV's amendment related to an increase in the jurisdictional competencies of the Autonomous Regions, provided that the *jeltzales* voted against the right to self-determination defended by Euskadiko Ezkerra (EE).

The PNV kept its word, but when the amendment was brought to a vote in the Congress of Deputies the UCD opted for the wording of the Additional Provision that had been provided and approved by the Constitutional Commission, instead of the wording proposed by the PNV. The PNV's representatives were so angry that they left the Parliament building, so that when the Constitution bill was approved they were not present.

They continued to negotiate, but to no avail. On 5 October 1978 the Senate also approved the amendment that had been agreed by the Congress (the PNV senators voted against it and the PSOE abstained).

Then the Constitution had to be ratified by a referendum. The PNV's National Assembly had mixed views: they ruled out voting 'no' because the Constitution was a break-away from the dictatorship and it established the

23 According to Ludger Mees, 'el PNV actuó con firmeza y supo aprovechar hábilmente su papel que también los demás partidos le otorgaban como actor clave para la solución del "problema vasco"' [the PNV acted firmly and managed to make good use of the role that the other parties gave it as a key actor in solving the 'Basque problem'] (2013, 341).

rule of law and they also appreciated some of its positive aspects, such as recognition of the various nationalities within the State and the reference to the historical rights; however, they were unwilling to support a 'yes' vote because some articles in the Constitution were difficult for the nationalists to accept, and the PNV questioned the concept of the State envisaged by the constitutional provisions. They advocated abstention.

This was also a way to put pressure on the central government to increase the Basque Country's level of autonomy and to distance themselves from the nationalist left, which voted 'no'. The campaign for abstention was full of references to historical rights. 'Defiende los fueros: abstente' [Defend our historical rights: abstain] was one of the most common slogans. The referendum on the Constitution took place on 6 December 1978. Abstention was higher in the Basque Country than the Spanish average. Very high abstention rates were recorded in Guipúzcoa and Vizcaya, and less so in Álava and Navarra.

After the disappointment with the constitutional process, the PNV devoted their efforts to the preparation and approval of the Statute of Autonomy. The drafting of the Statute of Autonomy began in November 1978. The General Basque Council entrusted production of the text to the Assembly of Basque parliamentarians, and a Commission was appointed to prepare the first bill based on the project submitted by the PNV. The Commission included members of parliament from all Basque parties, except *Herri Batasuna* (left nationalist party) which excluded itself. At the end of December the Assembly of Basque parliamentarians officially ratified the text and submitted it to the Spanish Congress. The debate on the bill for a Basque Statute in the Congress began on 2 July 1979. The PNV had previously started to negotiate with the UCD and the PSOE, but relations with the former were tense. Ultimately, negotiations succeeded largely as a result of discussions between Adolfo Suárez (UCD leader, president of the government of Spain) and Carlos Garaikoetxea (the then president of the PNV's Executive Committee). An agreement was eventually reached on 17 July 1979 and the final version of the Statute was published in the Official Gazette of the Spanish Parliament on 1 August 1979.

The Statute was approved in a referendum held on 25 October 1979, a date which thus far, for the nationalists, had symbolized the end of

Basque independence. The PNV considered it 'un buen Estatuto. El mejor que podríamos haber sacado' [a good Statute. The best we could have got].[24] Still far from their ultimate ambition, this was nevertheless a fundamental step in the process, a time when 'se abren las puertas para cohesionar institucionalmente la Nación Vasca, dotándole de un importante instrumento para su autogobierno' [a door has opened for us to strengthen the institutions of the Basque nation, now that we have an essential tool for self-government].[25] Once the Statute was approved, an election for the Autonomous Regions was held in March 1980. Results once again backed the proposals made by the PNV, the party with the highest number of votes. Its leader, Carlos Garaikoetxea, became *lehendakari* of the Basque government and initiated the process of building the Basque autonomy. Several milestones were soon achieved, such as the creation of the *Ertzaintza* [Basque police force], the official recognition of *Euskera* [the Basque language] and the establishment of public media. With no time to waste, the symbolic elements were put in place: the *ikurriña* [Basque flag] and the *Eusko Ereserkia* [Basque national anthem], both conceived by Sabino Arana, which now functioned as identifiers of the Basque community.[26]

Euskadi in Europe

Continuing on from this first step in the PNV's discourse about the restitution of historical rights, that is, finding a place for the Basque Country within the institutions of the Spanish State, it was now time to move to the second step, as described in the document produced by the Pamplona Assembly. The ill-defined 'Basque State' mentioned in the document had to fit (along with other peoples of the Spanish State) into a Europe of the

24 Carlos Garaikoetxea, interview with *El Diario Vasco*, 3 June 1979, p. 3.

25 Document produced by the EBB (*Deia*, 22 December 1979).

26 Whereas the *ikurriña* was unanimously accepted, the *Eusko Ereserkia* was approved only by the PNV and the CDS. Other parties such as the PSE-PSOE, EE (Euskadiko Eskerra), and AP (Alianza Popular) favoured a different anthem, *Gernikako Arbola,* written by José María Iparraguirre (Pablo et al. 2012).

Peoples, which was advocated by the PNV so that *Euskadi* could be on an equal footing with the other peoples of the continent.

The reference to Europe was nothing new in the history of the PNV. The years following the end of the Second World War had been marked by the reasonable (if perhaps excessive) optimism of Basque nationalists, who hoped the resulting Europe would be not only democratic, but nation-based instead of state-based. Between 1945 and 1950 the PNV's leaders had played an active role in important European organizations thanks to the links they had had with senior figures in the Christian Democrat parties from the days of the Second Spanish Republic. These organizations included the *Nouvelles Equipes Internationales* (NEI), the leading Christian Democrat association in Europe at that time, and the Union of European Federalists (UEF).[27]

However, 1975 Europe was no longer the Europe that had been dreamt of in 1945, a federal union of nations that was able to reconcile the diversity of its constituent elements. The Europe that Basque nationalists now faced was based on strong states, whose foundational role precluded the independent participation of sub-entities like the European peoples, and Western democracies had inclined towards Franco on several occasions.

Despite all the difficulties, the PNV acknowledged that the moral support of the European organizations of which they had been a part 'había contribuido en grado notable a sostener ante el mundo la justicia de la causa vasca' [had contributed notably to making the world see the justice of the Basque cause].[28] For this reason, the strategy remained markedly pro-European. References to Europe in the text produced by the Pamplona Assembly highlighted two principal ideas: the alleged crisis of nation-states and the party's support for a 'Europe of the peoples', both of which shaped the PNV's pro-European discourse during the years of the transition to democracy. Regarding the crisis of nation-states, the text stated:

> Los Estados europeos, anclados aún en sus estructuras de Estado-Nación, no disponen ya, sin embargo, de la capacidad de decisión soberana de la que hasta hace poco disfrutaron. La aparición de las grandes potencias y la política de bloques les han arrebatado el protagonismo político e internacional que ejercieron hasta la II Guerra

27 For the pro-European policy of the PNV see Arrieta (2007).

28 [No author] (1961). 'Europa', *Alderdi*, 3 (August), 172–3.

> Mundial. Se anuncian elecciones generales para un Parlamento europeo, porque el nuevo marco económico europeo exige ineludiblemente un nuevo marco político. Si Gran Bretaña, Francia o Alemania ya no pueden sostener su autoestatalidad en la plenitud de soberanía como hasta ahora, es lógico que el pueblo vasco no debe caer en la tentación de pretender darse a sí mismo una estructura estatal caduca y superada.
>
> [European states, still clinging to their Nation-State structures, do not have at their disposal the power of decision they enjoyed until not long ago. The rising of the great powers and their bloc politics have deprived them of the central international and political role they had until the Second World War. General elections are announced for a European Parliament because the new European economic environment demands a new political framework. If the United Kingdom, France, and Germany can no longer remain fully sovereign states as they have until now, it is only logical that the Basque people should not fall into the temptation of longing for the same obsolete and outdated state structure.][29]

From this alleged crisis of nation-states, Basque nationalists deduced (as their leader José Antonio Aguirre had done many years before) that fighting to provide the Basque Country with the state structures defined thus far was unrealistic. The only reasonable alternative was a supranational European organization which was not opposed to the independence of stateless nations and was willing to recognize political autonomy within member states. The Europe envisioned by the PNV was united in all senses: politically, culturally, socially and financially. It should be

> una Europa en la que cada pueblo pueda desarrollarse plenamente a partir de su propio ser y peculiaridad, laborando codo a codo con los demás en la construcción de una Europa nueva, libre, progresiva, democrática y con vocación mundial […]. El Partido Nacionalista Vasco reitera su vocación europea […]. Esa Europa, en cuya creación y desarrollo debe influir y participar también el Pueblo Vasco, la concibe el PNV: como una Europa de pueblos libres, con una base común de civilización y de cultura, libre en su ser político y diferencial y unidos bajo un techo estructural común político y económico, susceptible de cubrir un desarrollo comunitario, y no exclusivamente como una Unión de los Estados actuales, superados como estructura política y dominados por intereses económicos internacionales.
>
> [a Europe in which all peoples may fully develop in their own specificity, working alongside other peoples in constructing a new, free, progressive, democratic and

29 EAJ-PNV (1977).

> world-oriented Europe […]. The Basque Nationalist Party reaffirms its European calling […]. This Europe, that the Basque people must also contribute to building and developing, is envisioned by the PNV as a Europe of free peoples, with a common base of civilization and culture, free to express themselves in their politics and in their differences, united under a common political and financial structure capable of fostering the development of communities. It should not be exclusively a reunion of the currently existing states, which are obsolete as political structures and ruled by international financial interests.][30]

Without a doubt, the description most frequently used in the PNV's European proposal was a 'Europe of the peoples'. This notion implied a federal Europe which would be willing to protect small and stateless nations. It would be founded on the right of all peoples to express their will and on acknowledging the artificiality of existing states, which the PNV believed were limited and ill-adapted to the needs of the real Europe. Therefore, it was necessary to create wider political units which allowed for the expansion of markets and the financial advancement of peoples. In the words of the *jeltzale* Gerardo Bujanda, the PNV aspired to realizing 'una Europa de los Pueblos en cuya geografía política el pueblo vasco pueda desarrollar plenamente su personalidad' [a Europe of the peoples in whose political geography the Basque people may fully develop their character], a Europe that was 'suma de culturas de todos los que han de integrarla – incluida, claro está, la de Euzkadi [*sic*] – formando un todo armonioso en que Pueblos y hombres puedan cultivar su personalidad en libertad' [the sum of the cultures of all members, including, of course, that of *Euskadi*, forming a harmonious whole in which peoples and men can freely cultivate their personalities].[31] Although the phrase 'Europe of the peoples' had only occasionally been used before, it became common at the end of the 1950s, when Francisco Javier Landaburu (chief representative of the Basque government in pro-European organizations) employed it in his book *La causa del pueblo vasco* [The cause of the Basque people], and especially in the 1960s, with the emergence of European regionalism.

30 EAJ-PNV (1977).

31 Urrun (1963). 'Euzkadi-Europa', *Alderdi*, 16–17 (April–May), 204–5. Second quotation from Urrun (1968). 'La Unión Europea', *Alderdi*, 8, 244–5.

However, such PNV discourse, woven as it was around the concept of a 'Europe of the peoples' was not aligned with the party's practices. After the 1948 Hague Congress, faced with the choice of accepting the real Europe or being sidelined, they decided to participate actively in the Europe of states as a lesser evil and as a stepping stone towards a nation-based Europe. During the Spanish transition to democracy, once again, the party was halfway between theory and practice, between the desire to become a free *Euskadi* in a federal Europe of nations and acceptance of the predominant regionalist approach, which allowed the Basque Country to take part in the European project only as a region, and not as a nation.

In the years prior to Franco's death, as nationalists anticipated a transition to democracy in the foreseeable future, they started co-operating with Spain-wide democratic forces as a way of ensuring their participation in European institutions.[32] In the 1960s this approach enabled the PNV to take part in state-wide organizations such as the CFEME (the Spanish Federal Council of the European Movement, which they had contributed to establishing in 1949), the Christian Democratic Team of the Spanish State and, during the early years of the transition process, the Democratic Convergence Platform. The strategy of moderate co-operation with Spanish forces clearly eased their participation in those years. Meanwhile, in their French exile, the PNV kept alive their bonds with institutions like the European Christian Democrat International (previously NEI, *Nouvelles Equipes Internationales*), in which they were part of the Spanish Christian Democrat Team.

From the Transition to Democracy to the Present Day

In the years before Franco's death the exiled PNV had been preparing to position themselves in the new democratic Spain which it was anticipated

32 In previous years, the PNV's potential co-operation with Spanish forces had been the origin of many disagreements among the various factions of the party.

would soon come into being. They intended to participate in the transition process and in the articulation of the new democratic State in order to achieve the highest possible levels of self-government for the Basque Country. And the truth is that the party 'had a remarkable influence', as noted by Alfredo Crespo (2012: 285).

As in previous periods, the PNV adopted a pragmatic approach, but without ever relinquishing their aspiration to independence. They structured their discourse around the claim for the 'historical rights' of the Basques, which was sufficiently ambiguous to accommodate both the secessionist and the more pragmatic positions (Elias and Mees 2017: 136). Their long-term goal was independence, but it was supplemented by a more moderate discourse that interpreted Basque autonomy as the first step towards their ultimate aspiration. The Basque Country was articulated within the Spanish State through its status as an Autonomous Region. This duality also existed in Europe; while the PNV's discourse advocated a Europe of the Peoples in which the Basque Country would be a nation, in practice it accepted the Europe of the States of which it was a part, together with other Spanish political parties.

Over the following years, the PNV was a key actor in the establishment of a fully autonomous structure in the Basque Country. Mees noted that the party was 'el máximo protagonista de la nueva Euskadi democrática' [the major player in the new democratic *Euskadi*] (2013: 324). Following on from the PNV's 'pendular' tradition, their political strategy has continued to oscillate between the aspiration to become independent from Spain and a more moderate realpolitik, which has sought to have a greater degree of self-government and more consensus with non-nationalist Basque parties.

A clear example of the former was the declaration made by the PNV at the end of the 1990s. On 12 September 1998, the leaders of the Basque nationalist parties gathered in the Navarrese town of Lizarra (known in Spanish as Estella) and signed the 'Lizarra Pact', in which they asserted that the Basque nation was a political subject entitled to self-determination from Spain and France. The PNV sought to create a Basque nationalist bloc, which was separate from non-nationalist parties such as the PSOE, with which they had previously formed a coalition in government.

In September 2002 the *lehendakari* Juan José Ibarretxe presented a proposal for a new political status for the Basque Autonomous Region that demanded the right to self-determination and the establishment of a new bilateral relationship between Spain and the Basque Country through 'free association'. The plan was presented before the Spanish Parliament in February 2005. It was supported only by Basque, Catalan and Galician nationalists.

The failure of the Lizarra proposal placed the PNV in an extremely difficult situation. The more moderate sector of the party criticized the pro-sovereignty strategy advocated by Ibarretxe, and the PNV gradually turned towards more pragmatic positions under the presidencies of Josu Jon Imaz (2004–7) and Iñigo Urkullu (2007–12). In the first decades of the twenty-first century the strategy of building up nationalist forces has given way to agreements between parties (both nationalist and non-nationalist). The traditional duality, between radical long-term demands for an independent state within Europe and relatively more realistic short-term demands, has been reinstated.

Taking into account the tenets discussed in this chapter, it is interesting to note that the current moderate discourse of the PNV continues to include the key concepts of 'historical rights' and 'pact':

> Como nación foral que somos, nuestros derechos históricos, amparados y respetados, pueden dar de sí tanto cuanto pueda alcanzar nuestra capacidad de lograr pactos institucionales, adoptar decisiones políticas que sean refrendadas por la ciudadanía y respetadas. El futuro del Autogobierno vasco pasa por la recuperación del espíritu de pacto, el mutuo reconocimiento y la bilateralidad.
>
> [Since our nation is based on historical rights, these rights need to be protected and respected, and their scope will depend upon our capacity to reach institutional agreements and make political decisions that are respected and supported by the people. The future of a self-governing Basque nation is dependent upon the recovery of a pact-based approach, mutual recognition and bilateralism.][33]

33 Iñigo Urkullu, *lehendakari* of the Basque government, general policy debate, the Basque Parliament, 24 September 2015 <https://www.irekia.euskadi.eus/es/events/28306-pleno-politica-general?criterio_id=1032349&track=1> accessed 10 September 2018.

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