

Basques Just Want Self-Determination

In regards to your Nov. 6 editorial "Basque Nihilism":

As a Basque government representative with duties in the area of justice, employment and social security, I feel it should be made clear that this institution has never had a compromising attitude toward ETA-perpetrated terrorism. Moreover, the struggle against violence and the commitment to human rights for all people has been the main focus of all official messages and most important actions carried out by the Basque government. For this purpose, we have convoked anti-ETA demonstrations, disseminated unequivocal communiqués condemning any human-rights violations whatsoever, created an office to support the victims of terrorism, and developed initiatives against those who kill, extort and threaten.

A campaign is currently under way aimed at promoting public support for all people living under threat for exercising their right to freedom of thought. Our commitment to the eradication of violence is unwavering. We have demanded that ETA disappear once and for all, and stand at the forefront of a Basque society that feels the same way.

In October, the three-party coalition Basque government passed a proposal for a new political status with Spain. The proposal does not suggest breaking away from Spain, but rather a framework of coexistence. We wish to establish a friendly relationship between the Basque Country and Spain based on an

open and flexible interpretation of the Constitution and protected by the laws currently in force. The proposal has been submitted to the Basque Parliament for debate by all of the leaders who represent the citizens of our region. We are dealing with a new model of relationship that in all cases would be subject to negotiation with the Spanish government and would require ratification, in the absence of violence, by the citizens of the Basque Country.

The only thing we seek is the well-being of our citizens. In our opinion, we do not at present have all of the instruments available for harmonious and socially fair development unbound by outside interests. The Basque government has demonstrated many times over its ability to responsibly perform its duties. Average growth the last five years is 3.8%—higher than the 3.2% in Spain as a whole. By 2002, the Basque Country had attained 105% of the average European income. Our unemployment rate sits at 9%, two points below the average figure for all of Spain.

The Basque government does not advocate any sort of adventure that might mean a taking a step backward. We are striving for a pluralistic, cohesive society that is an example of progress and coexistence. This, and only this, is the true goal of the Basque government.

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