

EUROREG
Case study report

Regions, minorities and European integration:
A case study on the Basque nation in Spain

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1. Introduction¹

Basque identity is very ancient and explicitly nationalist since 1898 or so. From this point of view, European integration transformed the context of the conflict, not created its political opportunity structure.

Reflecting general data, interviewed actors affirm a very strong Basque identity. A majority of them channel this through nationalist ideas and political expression, but even those who do not, feel strongly (basically) Basque and think Basque people should decide on her own affairs. This is seen as something compatible with other identities

¹ Observation: the authors want to clarify the use of the following terms: 'autonomic' (and sometimes 'autonomous') for referring to the political communities created by the Spanish Constitution of 1978, and which has no proper term in English because it has been a recent political invention; 'independentist' expressing one main feature of some persons or parties seeking independence for the Basque nation (and that is different of the term 'independence', which express a yet independent State). This term of 'independentist' was explicitly demanded for appearing in the English version of this work by some of the interviewed for referring to them. As we have not found a better word in correct English, we have attended this claim. Another apparently incorrect word is 'plurinational', expressing the fact of some States having several different nations inside them.

(European and Spanish/French) in a lot of cases. What can be said about this is that civil society seems to be more sophisticated than actual political channels or agenda.

Every actor thinks Europe has been a very positive tool for consolidating the democracy in Spain, but almost all express their reserves about its role on the Basque conflict. In this way, it can be said that European structural funds are not important for the political agenda (in part because the Basque Country GDP rises above the EU-25 average and it has no access to the main part of these funds). However, all the interviewed actors dream with a much better accommodation of Basque nation into the European Union (and perhaps into a [con]-federal plurinational Spain).

Here, the possibilities offered by European integration with its opening of the borders due to the internal market and the Cross-Border Cooperation (CBC) programmes are very promising for the visualization of the Basque homeland. Now, many Basques think, is possible to go throughout the entire country without borders and this makes a difference for reinforcing social, cultural and political ties. This explains the interest of Basque institutions – governed by a nationalist majority – for this kind of cooperation, even creating their own fund for cooperation (inspired in the European ones).

Other interesting project related to the CBC is the recent idea of launching a so-called Euro-region formed by the Basque Country Autonomous Community and the regions of Aquitaine in France and Navarre (in Spain) with the Basque identity as its core, leading this economic and political initiative. This idea tries to insert the (entire) Basque Country, showing its national territory (with the symbolic importance and physical possibility for the quotidian cross-bordering and intensified social relations), into the European economic and political spaces, with very important post-national and post-sovereign features. It is a new approach to identity and nation building, only possible in the new conditions created by the European market and the political re-launching after Maastricht. In this sense, as we will show, both in the Southern Basque Country – redefining traditional nationalist ideologies – and in the Northern provinces of France with new and challenging development strategies for the development of the region the European integration process has been a key factor explaining the new approaches, concepts and strategies of the Basque nationalist forces.

These changes have a good opportunity for being developed in Spain, where the Socialist party governing since 2004 March has opened a new political opportunity structure with much more dialogue and political will than previous conservative Popular Party did. ETA has reacted to this change declaring a permanent cease of fire. What is more interesting, everybody think now that there is a great opportunity for solving the Basque conflict, and almost everybody is relatively optimistic. But, as true as this is, a lot of these actors think this is probably the last opportunity for Spain to solve democratically this conflict and go on with the Basque Country inside the Spanish State (here the 39% of independent supporters are a very real and menacing indicator).

European integration support in the Basque Country

Basque population has always been very supportive of the European integration process. In November 2003 about three out of four Basques (74%) thought membership to the European Union was positive, and only 5% saw it as something negative. This European feeling is much higher than European (48%) or Spanish (62%) average.

Relating to the own Basque Country's affairs, a majority of Basques (52%) thought integration is good for their country. However, this figures obtained by the Basque Observatory of the European integration were not coherent with Basque results in the last referendum on the European constitutional treaty. Only 38'4% voted (65'3 yes;

34'6 not). ¿What could explain this apparently strange electoral behaviour? The reason was twofold: the social model, too much nearer to neoliberalism than to the traditional social model; and, even more important, the misrecognition of national and regional entities, and their accommodation, in the European political structure designed by the treaty.

This issue of the nations without States and regions' accommodation in the constitutional treaty was explained basically because of Aznar's role and veto on these issues. Lamassoure's proposals about the associated status of political regions, which was very well received by nationalist forces across Europe (and in the Basque Country too), was radically vetoed by the Spanish head of government. This inability of EU to recognise and accommodate the Basque Country, understood as an aggression to the own identity and political power (self-government), explained the Basque indifference and opposition to the treaty. This pattern of behaviour is very similar to what Basques did with the Spanish Constitution in 1978: assuring not to stop the democratic advance, but showing their important opposition to the chart and its lack of legitimacy.

A general feeling, basically inside nationalist majority, is that European Union seems to be only a matter of States, and everybody knows these (Spain and France) are precisely who they are fighting against. In this sense, there is a somewhat loss of confidence in opportunities of the solution of the conflict European integration opened in 1986. Much of them think Europe is losing its opportunity for be legitimate in the (for a long time) very pro-European Basque society.

In this report we show some key historical data for the correct understanding of current conflict over political accommodation of Basque nation in the Spanish (and French) States, and some provisional findings about the possibilities offered by the European integration process. In this way we explore with more detail the framework offered by Cross Border Cooperation (CBC). For pursuing this objective we have worked with bibliography and done a great part of the interviews (while remaining some of them due to agenda problems or illness of key actors, non-easily substituted with other one).

2. Background of the case²

2.1. Characterization of the Spanish State

Rokkan and Urwin, after a systematic comparative work, constructed a theoretical framework with four categories for explaining the main features of the diverse European states. First, they identified the *unitary state*, characterized by overwhelming and unambiguous dominance of the centre. This economic and political centre, with its administrative structures and institutions, controls the entire territory. Second, we have the *union state*, which approximates the centralization and administrative standardization of the unitary State, but with the strong difference of tolerating a degree of ethnic-cultural membership and preserving some degree of pre-existing regional autonomy. *Mechanical federalism*, with its symmetrical accommodation imposed by the

² In reference to this point (Background of the case) it will be observed that there are only few bibliographical notes. To the extent that this is mainly a synthesis of the State of the Art report, we submit to that work and its bibliography for a wider and more detailed historical analysis.

centre, and *organic federalism*, stressing the voluntary association of several territories while retaining their specific institutional structures, complete Rokkan and Urwin's framework.

Spain is, following the categorization of Rokkan and Urwin, a Union State. This implies that the Spanish political system can be seen as a tension between the unitary and decentralist tendencies. Contrary to a common academic practice showing Spain as a (quasi-) federal State, it still has a number of important corrective mechanisms privileging the powers of the centre. Only one example will suffice for supporting this point: the central government has the right to stop every political or legal act coming from the Autonomous Communities –even those under exclusive autonomic powers– while awaiting final decision from the Constitutional Court (which may very well be delayed for months or years). In other words, the Spanish constitutional and political design starts with the presumption that the power (in capitals) still remains in central hands, in spite of formal decentralization (though it is true that is enormous in many aspects).

That is, Spain shows simultaneously features of several categories: some formal elements and main political culture still are very unitary/centralist; main formal and emergent political culture elements are linked to union; and some residual, but very important, confederative elements (basically the constitutional distinction between nationalities and regions, the constitutional respect to the historical *Fueros* [ancient Basque and Navarrese Law] and the quasi-confederative economic and fiscal system of these territories).

This third confederative component needs to be developed a little more. Firstly, it is important to note that the clear institutional and constitutional points we have just showed were introduced into the Spanish Constitution only after a bitter political struggle. It was not an obvious development of the State model (coming from a very strongly unitary one), but a hard conquer of the other nations, mainly Basque and Catalan. They were not graceful concessions, but an essential need, an absolute political minimum of the new democracy for having an opportunity to start. Said this, the distinction between formal/institutional and political culture domains is a key for the correct understanding of the Spanish political system. Backed with the legitimacy of the so-called 'transition consensus', one of the main political myths of the nascent democracy, the successive Spanish governments tried to erode the main decentralist factors. When it was impossible they used the interpretation of the law in a very restrictive way (only slightly stopped by some important decisions of the constitutional court), and most important of all, the centre has always tried to blur any qualitative differentiation between autonomous communities. This was one of the cornerstones of the entire model: the clear distinction between three nations –Catalonia, Basque Country/Navarre³ and Galizia– and the rest of the State's regions –some of them being really 'invented' by the central State in the pursuing of its interests⁴.

³ The division of the Basque Country into two communities was an important matter of debate. Finally it was decided, not without strong opposition of the Basque nationalist forces, to create two different Communities and to establish a clear constitutional disposition about the special bonds uniting both communities, even contemplating the possibility of reunification among them. It is important to remark that the Navarrese society was the only community who could not vote neither about splitting from the Basque Country nor about the political Statute of Autonomy, called *Amejoramiento del Fuero* (improvement of the old *Fuero*), so it was an elite-led initiative without any social debate or explicit support. As the territorial integrity of the Basque Country and Navarre is one of the main demands of

During the transition period (1973-81)⁵ it was a commonplace the clear differentiation between these three historical nations and the rest of the State, unified under the Spanish national identity. Fearing the political implications of a clear recognition of the national character of these three societies, the discussion process –strongly ruled by the Fascist regime’s elites– resulted in a mixed solution. The Constitution recognized the division between regions and some nationalities. During the debate was obvious that this denomination affected to these three nations, only avoiding the term ‘nation’ because it might legitimate a secessionist process. So it was clear that nationalities meant nations without state, and that they were substantially different from other possible regional communities. But the constitutional text did not say which were these nationalities, and this ambiguity was used for permitting other regions to self-define as such. After this first move, the centre tried to blur too the immanent political nature of nationality, invoking the equality principle among *communities*, always forgetting the constitutional title of *nationalities*.

Starting with the very name and political category, the Spanish governments continued this homogenization process with an abusive interpretation of the centre powers, limiting to the maximum autonomic ones. In this way, after the frustrated coup d’état the two main Spanish parties of the moment (centre-conservative and socialist) used the coup for legitimate an agreement for the closing of the model, in the sense of limiting the expansive potential of devolution process. The most important output of this State pact was the promulgation in 1982 of one constitutional-rank law (known by its capital letters: LOAPA (*Ley Organica de Armonizacion del Proceso Autonómico*), pursuing the homogenization of the autonomic process]. The Basque government first, and several Basque and Catalan institutions after, appealed to the Constitutional Court, arguing it was an unconstitutional law because it strongly limited autonomic powers and established the dilution of nationalities’ political status. The court failed in favour of the claimants in 1983, but only declaring inactive some articles, remaining active most of the law.

This direct confrontation between centre and nationalities was only one domain of the struggle. The centre, which tolerated the powers self-attributed by own communities through their Statutes of autonomy, conceded a lot of competences to non-national communities for the mentioned equalization. Then, the two main parties started to say Spain was becoming one of the most decentralized political systems in the world, what

nationalist forces, it is obvious that this move was very heavily politically charged and done with the approval (tacit or active) of the Spanish government, the main guarantee of the Autonomous Communities creation.

⁴ In this way, Madrid was created as a political community of its own, when never existed as such, but other attempts for creating a community were directly prohibited by the centre (in spite of the clear constitutional invitation to every region to politically self-generate if wanted).

⁵ We consider the transition period to democracy extending from 1973 to 1981. The reason for this is that the date of 1977/1978 (discussion of the constitutional text and final ratification by referendum) does not explain the context. The transition really started when ETA killed admiral Carrero Blanco in December 1973. This military was designed by Franco as his successor, being a good representative of the hard wing of the regime. But with his assassination everybody was conscious that things will change, and the democratic ideas marked the political agenda. In the other end, the attempt of some army’s sectors for imposing a military government in 1981 (February 23th), assaulting the Parliament, was over in only some hours, showing that democracy was strong enough for going on by itself. This episode can be considered as the final stage of the so-called ‘ruido de sables’ [swords’ noise], understood as the army’s tutelage of the transition.

was true only in part. Behind several powers and their parallel amounts of money *conceded* from the centre to autonomies, was not real power in many cases. This argument is twofold. Firstly, the State permitted the managing of many powers derived from, and limited to, the legal framework established by central government, with little margin for autonomous politics. Secondly, most of the great amounts of money transferred to communities did not permit any political decision, because they were assigned to the officials' payments. Summing up these two strategies, it can be observed that the centre still has the last say over main strategic issues and core political powers, and privileged access to resources (via taxes).

Furthermore, this situation is supported by a still strong centralist and unitary political culture –very extended into the Spanish political elite and into society too after forty long years of dictatorship– that widely legitimates this kind of politics. It is true that the ongoing political bargaining has changed this in some way, but the tension between a formal quasi-federal structure (strategically limited by serious corrective mechanisms) and predominant unitary/centralist political culture still remains as the central feature of Spanish political system. Perhaps it can be said that previously unitary/centralist culture has increasingly become less centralistic, but the unitary vision of the State still is a powerful metaphor, both into the political elite as well as into wider Spanish society. Centralism has increasingly limited its force after twenty five years of autonomic development, but even today whatever may affect or challenge unity (in very broad terms, not only linked to the risk of secession; we are thinking on different academic approaches to history or geography, on the use of every official languages by central institutions, etc) still legitimate fierce central counterattacks and exacerbate old and deep imperial-rooted ideas on unity and a strong Spanish nationalist imaginary.

On the other hand, in a very interesting dialectical movement, the autonomic communities (leaving away the three nations) created by 1978's constitution began to operate in an increasingly autonomous way, forming new territorial interests, redefining several areas' ones, and promoting their articulation through the new arenas and political elites. It is true that these regional arenas were basically a first step in political careers towards the central, Madrid-rooted, one. But the new political diversity fostered new actors, interests and resources, increasing the complexity of Spanish politics and policies.

Linked to the expansive nations-led powers' devolution trend, another interesting consequence of the mentioned counter-trend towards uniformity among all the communities –nationalities and regions–, was that the 'ordinary' regions reached an important political status (which was not previously demanded, but gracefully conceded by the centre), and this fact fostered an 'emulation process', followed by a number of regions. This was a result of the new regional elites' use of the principle of equality invoked by the centre. What's more, some of these regions 'activated' social and historical 'latent' factors becoming 'real' political entities –less than nations but much more than mere political inventions. Some clear examples of this are Andalusia, Valencia, Aragon or the Canary Islands. The social activation of their respective past as kingdoms, principalities or colonies, and the strong promotion of these identities, has been a very successful tool for obtaining new powers. Proving the importance of this mechanism have emerged, and sometimes with great electoral success, several regional/nationalist parties (Partido Andalucista, Chunta Aragonesista, Coalicion Canaria, etc.) or regional brands of Spanish-wide parties with strong regional

consciousness and demands (for example, both Socialist and Popular parties in Valencia).

These regions started a feedback process with regional interests, seemed to be better articulated and defended through the regional identity, and this identity backed new regional demands. It has become a structural factor the emulation of nationalities' higher powers. Developing the equalization principle (fostered by the centre just after the transition for the sake of [Spanish] 'national unity' through political leveling out), these regions usually wait –saying it explicitly sometimes– for the final results of nations' negotiation with the central State for demanding their benefits (both new powers and more money). Recently, with the discussion over Basque proposal for a new political status into the Spanish State or Catalan debate about their new Statute of autonomy, leaders from Canary Islands, Andalusia or Valencia explicitly said that their regions should obtain whatever these nations might get from the centre. One of them said with absolute clarity, they will wait until the Catalan debate were finally ended for the starting of their own Statute discussion; and even more strikingly, other regional parliament wanted to introduce a clause into their Statute for the automatic adding to it of any power Basques or Catalans could get in the future. This 'emulation factor' fits with new institutional theory findings over the autonomous functioning of institutions created by a political power, which may very well go far away from any previous intended design. The main output of this emulation effect is the introduction of one expansive or centrifugal factor in the Spanish political system.

Both main parties (socialist and conservative) have tried several times to reach an agreement among them for avoiding this competitive and mutual-reinforcing trend towards (quantitative) decentralization, but with only limited success. They have been much successful in according and implementing a common strategy for stopping, or at least limiting, the far much challenging nationalist (qualitative/recognition) demands.

There is a strong incentive between the two main parties turning in the central government and these regional interests for supporting a common strategy which widens the number and weight of the powers devolved, while limiting the symbolic and recognition issues which might lead to pro-confederative re-accommodation. For the developing of this informal arrangement, State-wide parties act as the political interface between regional and central leaders and interests. The main difference among the three main State-wide parties is the primacy of one or another type of the Rokkan/Urwin model. Conservative party is more unitary in its structure, expressing inside its preferred State model. Socialist party has –mainly, but not always, because the discourse has oscillated with time– a more union ideal, reflecting its internal tensions between more unitary (partly due to genuine Spanish national feelings and partly due to interest in strong central redistributive powers towards less developed regions) and devolution-seekers factions (basically situated in the three nations' territories and the regions with strong identities). Finally, the ex-communist/new left party expresses in its discourse its own internal tensions and structure too. Formally composing a federation (almost a confederative organization, as happens with the Basque branch, which is a sovereign organization freely associated to the coalition), demands a federal State. This is the compromise between three positions: a very unitary discourse (from the old communist structure) with was the official one until few years ago, but now losing weight because the poor electoral success of their supporters; a federal discourse coming from new left sectors more opened to formalize the real social structure of Spain; and a more

confederative discourse, sensitive to national realities and demands, trying to recognize the plurinationality of the State while defending a federal arrangement based on the freely expressed will of every nation (supported mainly by the Basque and Catalan organizations).

Outside this Spanish-wide party-system, appear several nationalist parties who challenge the idea of one Spanish 'national' political system or unitary Spanish 'nation'. These actors are widely socially-backed in two national societies: Basque Country and Catalonia, where existing both Basque and Catalan national party-systems with their own agenda, political calendar (with own electoral rhythms) and cleavages (national Basque or Catalan vs. Spanish, superposed to the traditional left vs. right axis). This obvious social reality strongly demands its full recognition and claims the Spanish State and also society to finally accept the implications of the genuine national plurality which constitutes it.

If both Spanish parties and society fear the consequences of such recognition (and foremost the risk of secession), and constantly delay the moment of a serious approach to this diversity, nationalist parties see with increasing mistrust the virulent nationalist reactions coming from the centre, and radical sectors increase to speak more openly about the need of separate from such a State unable of accept its own complexity –with its corollary of cultural richness, diverse national consciousnesses and political maturity of their parts. There exists a genuine Spanish fear to the freedom of Basque and Catalan nations. Behind all the discourses, the analyst can find a great lack of self-confidence in Spanish nationalist capability to suggest an attractive common political project for all the nations inside the State. It can be said that from the losing of last colonies abroad (1898) on, Spanish national proud was eroded and its 'national' project (a sudden reformulation of the old imperial and trans-oceanic one) was mainly articulated first on the imposition of one or another elite to the entire country, and after on the join fight of these two social sectors (conservatism and communism/socialism) against other alternative national projects.

All these data show how Spanish polity is a result of a deep and long-standing tension over the unity-diversity issue. This explains the lack of coherence of the system, its trend towards asymmetry, as well as the delicate and fragile equilibrium of every arrangement, which is always, by definition, instable; what fits perfectly with the great dynamism of Spanish political system (dynamism being the other side of instability).

One provisional finding of this analysis is the structural core of the Basque (and other nations') accommodation inside the Spanish (and French) States. It has to do a lot with the very definition of the nation, the demos and the kind of polity (State) able for a fair enough solution to this problem. Other central issue related to this, is that this kind of conflicts may be understood too as a deep democratic challenge. It has been acknowledged that [non violent, democratic] nationalism is basically a great challenge to and developer of liberal doctrine and political practice (Tierney 2004).

For developing this argument, we will begin with the tension between State centralism and its counterpart of national peripheries demanding their formal and political recognition, which is easily explained if one looks to the following historical facts.

2.2. Historical background: the concrete facts of a long conflict

In the Basque case it is impossible to understand its historical roots without attending to the complex facts occurring from the 19th century onwards. As we will see after, the trends initiated in the first third of the 19th century, absolutely marked the ongoing march of Spain throughout the 20th century until her late transition to democracy.⁶

Spain initiated the march for becoming a modern State very early, in the late 15th century. Administration effectiveness and rationalization first, and Absolutism after promoted the common historical trend towards centralization. Sometimes through wars against foreign kingdoms, then being conquered and incorporated (as Navarre was in 1512), other times through victory over dynastic adversaries within succession civil wars, the centre increased and centralized the State powers. This stage was almost over with the New Plant Decrees of 1715, abolishing the old powers of Aragon, Catalonia and Valencia, and only remaining the Basque-Navarrese *Fueros* (due to these territories' support to the winning dynastic branch).

Tensions with Basque and Navarre powers started from two different sides. On the one hand, the Absolutist State began to fight these little feudal remains for the sake of kingdom's unity. Once forgotten the allies' help for getting the throne, appeared the functional needs of the system. On the other hand, liberal forces challenged both the Absolutism and the so-considered old regime's features, such as the church influence over politics or the Basque *Fueros*. This caused several contradictions and problems of coherence inside the own Basque Country, because liberal strongholds as Bilbao supported the *Fueros* against their liberal counterparts in the rest of Spain, and traditional forces had to oppose centralist attacks to Basque powers too.

The very first time that Basque powers were frontally attacked was with the promulgation of the elite-led liberal and democratic constitution of 1812 (approved in Cadiz), which directly abolished them because they were considered as unacceptable 'privileges' and non-compatible with the modern market liberals wanted to build. There was a very instable political context for some years and the return of the King restored the powers, but the warning was clear.

After a long period (1833-1878) marked by civil war among very different political cultures and principles (being the challenger to the centralized State one strong and complex social force called Carlism –supporting the throne-seeker Carlos as the new king for Spain), the centre finally won in the battlefield and imposed its political vision of one modern and centralized State, abolishing the old political powers of Basques (*Fueros*).

What is more important for our theme is: a) the great social discontent emerged due to the obvious unfairness of the centre abolition of old Basque powers⁷, called 'Fuerist unanimity' [*unanimidad foral*], and its close connection with the incredibly fast

⁶ As a clear example of the political uses of History, it is worthy to observe the so different interpretations of the same historical facts coming from the Spanish radical nationalist right and the Basque radical extreme left:

<http://groups.msn.com/euskalherriafreedomaskatu/historia.msnw>

<http://www.papelesdeermua.com/html/modules.php?op=modload&name=News&file=article&sid=186&mode=thread&order=0&thold=0>

⁷ Punishing in this way both defeated Carlist rebels as well as 'winners' liberals in Bilbao, for putting an example.

emergence of nationalism, articulating a modern mass nationalist movement in only twenty years (Hobsbawm 1995:117); and b) the great differences, behind tactic/short-term convergence, between traditional and reactionary Carlism and the fully contemporary emergent nationalism. In spite of some links and common points, Carlism and nationalism present deeply differences, because “they were not only diverging on loyalty to distinct nations, but even to different kind of nations” (Flynn 2000:99).⁸

The period of the Spanish Restoration (because of the restoration of the king after a short Republic in Spain) coming from 1874 to 1923 was quite stable. This political regime was called *turnismo*, a Spanish term expressing the change (turn over) of each of the two main parties: conservatism and liberalism. These two parties arranged an informal pact for turning themselves into power, excluding republicans (democratic and radical sectors) and carlists (traditionalists). The system could be sustained because of the *caciquismo*, an informal net of local bosses who assured the manipulation of elections and the winning of the pre-assigned party.

Due to several factors, the Restoration system was replaced by another dictatorship (1923-1931). Among them, the bad situation of the war in the overseas colonies, the growing importance of nationalisms (mainly Basque and Catalan), the rising republican and workers’ movements, and finally, the influence of the nascent Fascism in Italy.

If the end of the first Republic was not stopped by any potent social faction, now was created a more powerful social and political coalition against the dictatorship. This wide consensus incorporated from some sectors inside conservatism to republicans, liberals, nationalists, worker unions, etc., eroding the regime and facilitating the resignation of Primo de Rivera in 1930.

In 1931, April 14th, the Second Spanish Republic was opened up with the electoral victory by socialist, nationalist and progressive forces (in spite of the clear manipulation made by conservative sectors in a lot of municipalities). These elections, with the very first participation of women, were about municipalities’ governments, but were defined as a referendum over the Monarchy/Republic issue. The success of republican parties forced the king Alfonso XIII to go to exile and the Second Republic started.

Soon after, the first truly democratic parliamentary elections –without local bosses (*caciques*) manipulating elections– were won by republic-seekers parties (republican, socialist, liberal, and supported by Basque, Catalan and Galizian nationalisms, among others). The new Parliament began some social and reformist legislation, with the fierce opposition of Church, army and conservative forces. Finally, a democratic Constitution was approved defining Spain as an *integral* State, unitary in form but with recognition and respect to the autonomy of regions and municipalities.

In 1936 was approved a Statute for the autonomy of Catalonia and was started the debate over the one for the Basque Country. But the coup coming from the most conservative and centralist sectors, and the following civil war stopped this decentralization process. It is an historical continuity that every time the Spanish State was beginning to recognize national diversity a rightist coup or civil war ended this

⁸ Flynn stated too that Basque nationalism, pursuing full independence, was not oriented to the nation state form –in the Jacobin way usually identified as a nationalist common feature–, but it was much marked by a confederative approach.

move and reestablished central control of the situation, showing a pendulum-driven tension.

The end of the civil war and the victory of Franco on the battlefield started a dictatorship for 40 years (1939 to 1978). The main result was a strong centralist and nationalist State, fighting every cultural and linguistic fact related to the other cultures and nations inside Spanish territory.

The Spanish civil war has been interpreted as the first battle of the immediate following World War against Fascism, so the international context is very important for the correct understanding of these facts. One of the main internal consequences of the international landscape was the sudden and unexpected change explained by the world power politics towards Spain after the World War. If Spain was among the potential losers of the conflict, because her Fascist government, with the subsequent Cold War the Western powers reduced their hostility and finally supported the Francoist regime due to its fierce anticommunism. The increasing support of the USA towards Fascist Spain was seen by the republicans as treason to democratic values.

Coming back to the Basque Country, the most important political output of this change was that the Basque republican government in exile, led by the Nationalist Party and its charismatic president Aguirre, left the USA territory and established in France. The main strand of Basque nationalism made a turn towards Europe, emphasizing again Europeanism as the prime political goal of the party in the strategic level. Aguirre offered a powerful political vision of a Europe configured over the 'real Europe', a Europe of peoples, not more formed (only) by States. He saw in the thirties that the great historical trend after the first War did not promote a future of States, in the sense of the liberal nation-States coming from the nineteenth century, but a new polity which will go far beyond this kind of political buildings, real 'jails for peoples'. This nationalism strongly supported every advance in the road to European federation, from Briand's proposal (1923) to European Communities treaties (1951/57), passing through the so-called Congress of Europe (The Hague, 1948 May), where Aguirre and Basque nationalist leaders were present against Franco's efforts for impeding it. A clear example of this support to European idea was the celebration of the Motherland's Day in 1933 with the slogan of 'Euskadi, Europa' ('*Basque Country, Europe*').

We can see that this little government in exile was developing ideas and strategies hand to hand with the main European political trends of the time. Basque nationalist leaders participated actively in several European forums, with special importance in the NEI (*Nouvelles Equipes Internationales* – New International Teams), a very influential pro-European demo-christian organization. Meanwhile, Spanish political elites remained attached to the classical nation-State ideal and completely self-centered (autarchy), without attending to any change coming from outside.

In the 1960s another relevant fact was the creation in Basque mainland of an armed nationalist branch called Euskadi Ta Askatasuna [ETA –Basque Country And Freedom]. With little activity during the first years and almost in an amateur way of doing politics, in the 1970s became a strong clandestine organization able to kill many main military and political personalities of the Spanish State, with the very shocking assassination of admiral Carrero Blanco, named by Franco as his successor. From then on, ETA has killed near one thousand people, including military, politicians, journalist and several civilians due to bombings. It is worth noting that ETA has spoken with

every Spanish government about the Basque claims for its self-determination, with the peak of political importance in the conversations in Argel in 1988. Now it seems that there exist more possibilities of ETA, in the short term, declares a cease of fire for initiating a Basque peace process.

2.3. Current institutional framework as an expression of the territorial-national tension

1977/78 – **Transition to democracy:** Constitution and decentralization of the State (State of the Autonomies). It was a compromise among centralist forces (conservatives, communists) and autonomy supporters (centre-right sectors, Socialists, moderate nationalists), leaving aside the Basque and Catalan secession promoters, who opposed to this model (for not recognizing the Catalan, Basque and Galizian nations and their right to decide whether to stand inside Spanish State or not)⁹. Socialist, who defended a federal State during the Francoist regime, when were closes to power changed their position and promoted the autonomic model; in the same way, moderate nationalists demanded a confederation model, but finally they understood that conservative forces wont accept this. For the sake of assuring democracy they renounced temporally to their goals and, not voting the Constitution, assured its passing, implicitly accepting the autonomic State. Following Rokkan typology, we can see this equilibrium as a tension between the unitary State and organic federal. Due to the correlation of forces at the end of Francoism (it must be remembered that the dictatorship began the road to democracy for controlling the transition), both mechanical/organic federal solutions were abandoned and a mix of unitary and union State was built.

This final model, called autonomic because of the creation of 17 autonomic communities, was a union State with some important corrective mechanisms assuring central control on decisive issues (what can be expressed as a union model with a unitary political culture and several instruments derived from it, affecting to the election of the members of central institutions, mainly the Constitutional Court –with jurisdiction on competence struggles–, or the underdeveloped territorial chamber of the Parliament, the Senate, which everybody acknowledge that is of no worth for its first goal: the integration, coordination and discussion of territorial issues).

Inside this model, Basque Country and Navarre (after great discussion finally separated into two different communities, and in the Navarre case without popular ratification of this decision), represent the most confederative elements of the system. Both self-assumed the constitutional category of nationality and formed first-wave autonomic communities, with the maximum political powers the centre agreed to concede. Furthermore, the constitution recognized their very special link among them and stated a disposition about their eventual regrouping. Finally, constitution had to recognize too the pre-constitutional historical-rooted *Fueros* of these two communities, fostering their revision for suiting them to current Spanish political framework. One of the most important developments of this issue was the continuity of old fiscal arrangement

⁹ There were several political organizations which used violence during the transition in these nations, and in the Canary Islands too. In the same way, several extreme rightist groups operated assassinating nationalist and communist militants, without forgetting the so-called swords' noise [*ruido de sables*], in reference to the worried more conservative sectors inside the Army, who menaced with a coup against democracy if going too much away from centralism or to the left positions.

between Basque-Navarrese territories and the central State, which means that own Basques define taxes and get the money, giving after to the State a previously agreed amount. This is a very strong confederative element which goes far beyond political or economic equilibrium, linking –institutionally as well as symbolically– current institutional framework with ancient *Foral* [Fueros-ruled] past.

These special and near-confederative constitutional dispositions are surrounded by more general institutional/autonomic elements. As every other community, Basque one has its own parliament with strong powers (far much assured by its fiscal powers), and a president leading a strong executive. One important feature of nationalities (differentiating them from ‘normal’ communities) is that they have the capacity for convoking their autonomic elections. This important element of the political initiative implies nationalities to have their own political (sub)system and agenda.

The Basque political system is formed by seven parties. Four of them are Basque nationalists, two Spanish nationalists, and a little party –recognizing Basque nation, but promoting a federalist solution– standing in-between, trying to build some bridges for crossing national lines. Traditional and common left-right axis is absolutely secondary in Basque politics, although its affinities sometimes obviously permit alliances or explain struggles.

In the following tables we can see which is the current electoral support in the Basque Parliament (table 1), how is the correlation of forces along national lines (table 2), and the evolution of electoral results during last three elections (from 1998 on), where can be seen the almost static trend in national support in spite of several changes in the number and denomination of parties (with the minimum but interesting exception of the little increasing of federalist/non-nationalist supporters). Finally, a table will show a general overview of Spanish politics with the seats compounding the Parliament.

Table 1

**Electoral support of Basque parties (Last Basque elections - 2005)
Current Basque Parliament (75 seats)**

Party	Seats	% Votes	Votes
PNV / EA	29	38,6	463,873
PSE-EE	18	22,6	272,429
PP	15	17,3	208,795
IL	9	12,5	150,188
EB	3	5,4	64,931
Aralar	1	2,3	28,001

Participation: 65%

PNV (Partido Nacionalista Vasco) - Basque Nationalist Party

PSE-EE – Socialist Party of the Basque Country

PP - Popular Party

IL - Independentist Left (It has presented several names during last years: EHAK, EH, Batasuna)

EA (Eusko Alkartasuna) – Basque Solidarity
 EB (Ezker Batua) – United Left
 Aralar – democratic Independentist Left

Table 2

Basque National conflict

Basque Nationalists	Federalists	Spanish Nationalists*
PNV / EA** (29)	United Left (3)	Socialist Party (18)
Independentist Left*** (9)		Popular Party (15)
Aralar **** (1)		
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Total:	39	33

Explicit Basque nationalist: 39 seats

Recognizing Basque nation: 42 seats

Explicit negating Basque nation: 15 / 33 seats*****

* Both of them are Basque branches of Spanish-wide parties, with the Socialist one with important autonomy for taking its own decisions, and conservative Popular Party being more hierarchically submitted to mandates coming from the centre.

** EA was created as a split of the Basque Nationalist Party, and is more oriented to social-democracy and independence than PNV.

*** This party is currently non-legal, but another party very close to it has got its votes. The main feature of this party is that is the only one not condemning violence.

**** A split of the Independentist Left, basically due to ideological/tactical differences about the issue of Navarre and violence.

***** The Socialist Party has had an oscillating discourse about this issue. Just before the transition it recognized Basque, Catalan and Galizian nations, and even defended the self-determination for them. During mandates of Socialist president Gonzalez it played an ambiguous role accepting the condition of nationality, while during two mandates of president Aznar negating any concession about symbolic issues. Now again, with president Zapatero's government, Socialist party has suggested important symbolic gestures if nationalism accepts the State framework. It is interesting to note that Basque Socialist Party still names its main institution [Basque] National Assembly, a name coming from years when Socialists accepted the national reality of the Basque Country. In this way, some documents of this Party agreed in accepting the term 'nation' if it guarantees a definite accommodation inside Spain.

Table 3

Basque electoral evolution

Party \ Elections' year	2005	2001	1998
PNV / EA	29	33	21 + 6
PSE-EE	18	13	14
PP	15	19	16 + 2

IL	9	7	14
EB	3	3	2
Aralar	1	-	-

Table 4

A comparative of 2004 and 2000 Elections to Spanish Parliament

Parties	Votes 2004	Seats 2004	Votes 2000	Seats 2000	Difference
PP	9.630.512	148	10.321.178	183	-690.666
PSOE	10.909.687	164	7.918.752	125	+2.990.935
IU-IC-EUiA	1.269.532	5	1.382.333	9	-112.801
CIU	829.046	10	970.421	15	-141.375
PNV	417.154	7	353.953	7	+63.201
CC	221.034	3	248.261	4	-27.227
BNG	205.613	2	306.268	3	-100.655
ERC	649.999	8	194.715	1	+455.284
EA	80.613	1	100.742	1	-20.129
CHA	93.865	1	75.356	1	+18.509
Na-Bai	60.645	1			

It is interesting to see how, except the two main parties (Socialist PSOE and conservative PP) and the leftist Spanish-wide coalition of IU, the rest are nationalist or strongly regionalist parties (Basques: PNV, EA and the great coalition in Navarre Na-Bai; Catalan: ERC and CIU; Galizian: BNG; Aragon: CHA; and Canary Islands: CC). Taking into account that IU accepts the plurinationality of the State, and CHA and CC have an ambiguous discourse over this issue, we have 34 seats defending the plurinationality of the State.

Other interesting fact in table 4 is the appearance of Na-Bai, a coalition of every nationalist force in Navarre (except the most radical Independentist Left) which has reached Spanish Parliament getting more than 60.000 votes. This is a very important move because is the first time (almost) all Basque nationalism has presented reunited in one election, and in the opinion of several analysts, its success can foster future agreements among nationalists.

In the case of Navarre (table 5), the Basque nationalism is currently supported by the 20% of population approximately, with leading force (UPN) being strongly anti-Basque nationalism and very conservative (even reactionary for some issues about moral and religion values). In any case, most navarrese people are deeply committed towards their

Community –being it Basque or Navarre– and feel a strong own identity, being Spanish national identity only a complement of navarrese main one. So, even anti-Basque governing party demands high powers and strong political and fiscal positions inside Spanish State.

Table 5

**Electoral results (2003)
Community of Navarre**

Party	Seats	%
UPN	23	41,4
PSN-PSOE	11	21,1
IU/EBN	4	8,8
Aralar	4	7,7
CDN	4	7,6
PNV/EA	4	7,4

UPN – Union of Navarrese People

PSN-PSOE – Navarrese Socialist Party - Spanish Socialist Party

IU/EBN – United Left /Ezker Batua (written in Spanish and Basque languages)

Aralar –Independentist Left (the split of it who has almost supplanted traditional one)

CDN – Convergence of Navarrese Democrats

PNV/EA – Coalition of Basque nationalist Party and Basque Solidarity

3. European integration and the domestic-regional context of change

As was previously said (here and in the state of the art report) and will be develop with more detail after, the impact of the European integration process may be summarized in two main points. Firstly, it can be said that economic funds and also the recently human rights conditioning policies have had a little impact on the empowerment of the Basque minority and in the conflict over the political accommodation of the Basque nation. Secondly, where European integration has really affected the Basque Country is in its capacity to assure a political stability and minimum guarantee of democracy and civil rights –what was certainly important for the successful transition to democracy–, and facilitating a political environment very dynamic which fosters changes in nationalist discourses and strategies.

The transition from Franco’s dictatorship to democracy in Spain was marked by the tense accommodation between demands for democracy and the real power of established elites (political, economic and military). For every democrat, European Communities were seen as a real guarantee of rights, democracy and economic welfare (this last point supported too by the military regime, which tried unsuccessfully to entry several years before the transition). If the goal of integration was expressed by main democratic forces (with the exception of some radical leftist groups), this was especially

important for Basque nationalist parties. A nationalist high ranked informant assured that only after the Spanish main parties (centre-right governing party –UCD– and socialist –PSOE) guaranteed the objective of integration as soon as possible, Basque nationalism accepted it as a democratic minimum for the pursuing of their political goals in the future. In consequence, the approved Constitution, without fully recognizing the Basque nation, was neither explicitly supported nor absolutely refused. The main Basque nationalist force did not vote it, trying to visualize their annoyance, without menacing the ratification referendum (and therefore assuring its approbation). The most radical nationalist faction, supported ETA's diagnostic of strong limitations of the nascent democracy and voted no to Constitution. Both positions (strongly questioning the democratic transition) expressed the deep doubts of main Basque sectors. So the Constitution obtained more positive votes than negative, but with a huge abstention, being it a remarkable fact if compared with results in the rest of the State and what eroded heavily the legitimacy of this political cornerstone.

This politically conscious and reasoned abstention marked the Basque reception of the Spanish Constitution, and questions the very fundamentals of Spanish democracy. In this way, any purely legal argument used by the Spanish parties for opposing to nationalist demands is immediately contested arguing that it is the very framework which is being questioned and challenged. This brute legitimacy argument has been recently developed by nationalist parties, which now talk on the need of a 'second transition'. They argue that the so-called 'transition' was only the first wave of democratization of the Spanish State, affecting individual rights and formal democracy, needing now to launch the second wave, related to collective rights, mainly the full recognition of the national, cultural and linguistic plurality of the State.

This challenge is not only a Spanish affair, but a very contemporary issue, a real key-problem of current Europe. Thus, this challenge inserts itself into the main one of articulating a truly European democracy with the participation of all its institutional levels (multilevel polity) and cultural diversity (historical territory-rooted one and the increasingly coming from overseas).

European integration has strongly forced and favoured the changes in the political discourse of national minorities, including the Basque one, as we will see in the section related to the political parties. In this way, the nations without State assume, at least their main sectors, that classical State and sovereignty is no more real. Derived from this point of view, they try foremost to rethink the political relations among national communities and want to contribute to the building of a new, more complex and respectful, multilevel polity. Due to its little size inside the State, they have learned the need for think and act in a different way, more innovative. They, at least their elites, have learned too the need to assume their nations' own diversity, and therefore are trying to redefine the very ideas of nation, identity and even power, proposing new ways for respect and assure own powers, as well as new mechanisms for coordinate themselves and with the centre.

This doesn't invalidate the continuity of traditional nationalist State-seeker doctrine in some still powerful groups.

There is no doubt, as several of our interviewed stand, that European integration has had a great influence on these changes. This is why is true that European Union both lesser

secession costs as well as foster new patterns of collaboration among actors of each level and between institutional levels.

4. Changing opportunities and constraints for minorities

One important point for the EUROREG project is to evaluate the impact the European integration process has on the Basque Country and its national conflict. For this reason we will take into account five main dimensions.

1) Stability landscape and political context

One of the main outputs of European integration has been the stability, not only related to the political context, but to the political culture too. Even the political language has changed, and the way for doing politics has started to change too, with more attention to new actors and demands which now do not menace the political order. In this way, Europe, without any doubt, in the Spanish case has assured the continuity of democracy, what during the 80s was a central issue. After only twenty years since entering, Spanish society does not question the democratic institutions any more. This is, today, almost common sense, but it was the central political objective during the Spanish accession to European Communities.

2) Political ideologies

The European integration has permitted, as we will see in the next section, the development of new ideas, concepts and strategies –some of them directly and others indirectly: in this sense, probably the most clear example is the notion of ‘shared sovereignty’ coined by the PNV (see the interview with President of the party, Mr. Imaz), or the very good disposition from the independentist left to think innovative policies for a accommodation of the Basque Country.

On the other side, Europe has had some problematic issues for the Basque Country too. For example, the use of European integration process as a State-led one impedes new States to emerge and nationalisms to claim access to state-monopolized institutions. Furthermore, some leaders of main Spanish parties have stressed the loss of importance of nationalisms in this context, redefining their national feelings as patriotic and remaining the brand of ‘nationalist’ only to claims or feelings coming from nations without State. A dialectical response to this ideological trick has been the stress of some nationalist leaders about the importance of having a State of their own. This shows how European integration promotes ambiguous and often contradictory ideological responses and strategic moves.

3) Resources

It is true that European funding of many projects in the Basque Country has had a visible impact on several communication infrastructures and many public works, but this has had not a direct impact on Basque politics in general, and in particular related to the national development and building of this minority. Advantages of the internal market, what is very important for a dynamic economy heavily oriented to exportation.

In any case, as was pointed out by a leading nationalist figure, during the savage Basque industrial restructuring (during the 80s), with many thousands of workers fired, and one of the highest levels of unemployment in Europe, the Basque Country was a net contributor to European budget. In other words, given the money the Basques give to Spain (6,24 % of Spanish budget), and the Basque part of the money Spain gives to European Union, comparing this amount with the money coming back from Brussels to the Basque Country, this nation has received less than the amount previously sent. This means that the Basque Country has been, even during the worst times of unemployment and industrial crisis, a net contributor to the EU. This disequilibrium can only be explained taking into account the mediation between European funds and receptors done by the Spanish State. It is a strong hypothesis that this government had political considerations, related to the conflict over Basque political accommodation, in the decision taking process.

4) Institutional development

The integration has created conditions and incentives for some presence in international forums (regions' political nets, European parliament and parliamentarian political groups, Committee of the Regions, office in Brussels, etc.), some direct access to Commission officers, etc. This has been used by regional institutions for inserting themselves into European political nets that offer important opportunities for access to information and common action.

Nevertheless, the State centre has used integration process for the eroding of the powers of the Basque Country. In spite of internal constitutional political arrangements, central government used (and still do) diplomatic representation and monopoly over Foreign Relations for replacing Basque institutions in negotiations about issues under its exclusive powers. What's more, this subtle move implies not only to empty Basque (and the rest of national and regional) communities powers, with the correspondent restructuring of Spanish political equilibrium, but also an increasingly trend towards the lack of democratic control over the discussion and implementation of these policies, because what were parliamentarian competences, now become governmental ones, without the minimum control of democratic chambers. Here it can be observed another example of the centralist political culture we told about before, and which strongly correct the important (formally) process of devolution in Spain.

5) Cross Border Cooperation

The blurring of frontiers, leaded by the four freedoms of the internal market, and the Cross-Border Cooperation framework, as we will see with more detailed later, permit now to intensify social and economic bonds among Basque territories of both sides of Spanish-French border, and opens up the real possibility for political and administrative collaboration. This makes possible to visualize more and more the overall, complete, national territory.

5. Local actors' responses and perceptions

The European integration has had, and still has, a strong impact on Basque Country society. It has affected Basque main social and political pillars in complex and

contradictory ways. This is widely perceived by every kind of actor, being it social, economic, cultural or political. Thus, it can be said that Basques agree about the importance of European integration, what they see as a basically non-reversible trend.

From this common point of departure, different actors have different views about the implications this general, historical, process has for their lives. It depends on the ideology each actor has, the domain it mainly belongs to (political, economic, cultural), and the reference/primary national feeling.

All these factors cross their outputs and configure a very complex social landscape, with many contradictory consequences. One of the most usual is the mix of a general favourable idea about European integration with a relative high sense of concrete (short-term) negative impact on their lives.

The principal negative dimensions are related to: a) national identity, with 'Europe' being accused of frustrating high expectation of national recognition and political accommodation; and b) economic consequences basically linked to clear perception of high loss of acquisitive power due to price readjustment after euro-money launching.

The positive, and highly ideological, points are still backed by a diffuse idea seeing Europe as a realm of political stability, economic welfare and democratic guarantees. This conviction is so strong that still primes over several short-term quotidian-life outcomes, contrary to what usually occurs with domestic politics.

Before showing these concrete responses and perceptions, it is necessary to say something about the clear-cut division between political domain and the socio-economic and cultural. It can be identified a very autonomous political sphere basically expressing the national conflict, and a social sphere deeply linked to, but not dependent from it. Thus, as one of the main objectives of this research is to analyse European impact on the Basque national conflict and its implications, we will first attend to the political parties' visions and responses.

5.1. Responses and perceptions of the Basque political class

In this point, we will show how each one of the six Basque political parties approach the mentioned changes, with their respective opportunity and risks. We will expose their official main perceptions and responses. In this task we will mix answers of the interviews and official documents. Sometimes, personal opinions of the leaders will be added to the arguments, due to their value for the trend-analysis. Finally, some reflections will try to fix main common points of agreement and tension.

Basque Nationalist Party [Eusko Alderdi Jeltzalea/Partido Nacionalista Vasco]

We interviewed Josu Jon Imaz, president of this party, who is a self-declared and convinced pro-European. He was, after obtaining his PhD in Chemistry, a Euro-MP in Strasbourg, and there he learnt the political culture and costumes of European institutions. Then, the Basque Nationalist Party carried him back for being part of the Basque government. He was vice-president of the executive and when his name sounded for be even a candidate to president he was, quite surprisingly, elected for being the president of the party. He won in a hard competition with another candidate,

Mr. Egibar –openly supported by the previous and very charismatic president, Mr. Arzalluz, who led the party for more than twenty years–, decanting in this way the party towards a more sophisticated nationalist doctrine.

Asked about the general attitude of his party towards Europe, Imaz answered that for the Basque Nationalist Party, Europe is a guarantee of seriousness in macroeconomic and monetary policies, what means stability, something essential for a productive economy. European integration has a great importance too for the economic taking off of the Basque Country (with the internal market and a very competitive environment as the basis).

Cross Border Cooperation. The cross border ties with the Aquitaine region are underdeveloped. This explains the importance of the funds oriented to foster the creation of social relations and nets between two sides of the border. One of the most strategic projects is the aeronautic sector cooperation, with the promotion of the triangle Bourdeaux-Toulouse-Basque Country.

An interesting point was to know that during years 1995/1996 there were some conversations for launching a European program for supporting any Basque peace process in a similar way to Irish PEACE program, developing one point of the so-called Ajuria Enea agreement, but unsuccessfully. However, both Mr. Imaz and the Basque Nationalist Party believe European Union and its institutions will play a decisive role when a peace process may be articulated.

Mr. Imaz sees strong links among European and Spanish State ensemble, related to the similarity of some of their problems with the accommodation of national plurality. In this way, stresses the central point of “the deep transformation of one political structure into another through a voluntary agreement”. His party identifies two essential elements: “decision and pact”, what may be developed as the right to decide oneself (Basque Country) and the need of pact with the other (State), without the imposition of any of them. Mr Imaz used the metaphor of one chest with two keys. No one can open it without the agreement of the other owner of the second key. In this way, to be sovereign becomes to be owner of one key, not the fully owner of the chest. In more analytical terms we can say that this party offers a new idea of sovereignty, one very closely linked to the idea of ‘access’ to the power. To be sovereign is no more to ‘have’ or ‘posses’ absolute power, but to ‘have access’ to the forum where real power is decided and exercised.

This is a Basque approach to the still emergent, truly European, concept of “sharing sovereignty”. This coexistence of many political subjects, all recognized as such, self-committed to constantly debate and pact altogether for developing a common project, is what Basque Nationalist Party imports from the best federalist European tradition. In reality what this party is suggesting is a new way for the self-determination of the European peoples, more civilized and sophisticated than most previous cases.

In spite of many critics, both outside and inside the party, this concept has been linked to the official political discourse of the party since –at least– the year 1999. We can remark as an example these statements for a better understanding of this concept (in the way promoted by the Basque Nationalist Party):

- The Basque president Ibarretxe stated in the general politics debate at the Basque Parliament (September 1999): “Citizens and peoples are never serving to juridical frameworks. Constitutions create neither countries nor nationalities. They do not create them, in spite of anybody’s opinion. Unity does not impose. Today what is really imposing is the free adhesion. Let’s accept, then, plurinationality. It does not exist ‘One, Great and Free’ [Spain], but different peoples, different nations who have to live in equality and **sharing sovereignty.**”
- Electoral program of the Basque Nationalist Party (Elections to Spanish Parliament, 2000): “... Although with diverse changes and vicissitudes, we can resume the stage of living together going from the incorporation of Basque territories into the Castilian Kingdom to the beginning of the past century, affirming that Alava, Gipuzkoa, Navarre and Bizkaia, lived for centuries a live of **shared sovereignty** through their free adhesion based in personal unions, scrupulously renovated with each one of Castile kings and after with each one of Spains’ [in plural] kings.”
- Declaration of the Intergroup of nations without State in the European Parliament¹⁰ (Santiago de Compostela, 2001): “The Intergroup defends one principle of **shared sovereignty** coherent with the process of building a political Europe and demands to member States their explicit recognition of this principle both in relation to the transferred powers to the European Union and in relation to the political and legislative powers of current nations and political entities with a high level of self-government.”
- The politic paper, establishing the strategic line of the Basque Nationalist Party in 2004, stated: “3.4.3. Objective: definition of a national strategy. The Basque President’s [BNP’s elected candidate] proposal, basically aims to open a political process whose main objective is oriented to build a new project for living together both the Basque Autonomous Community and the Spanish State, on the one hand, and on the other among own Basque territories; a project based on free association and **shared sovereignty.**”
- Mr. Imaz stated in the solemn act celebrating the 110th anniversary of the foundation of the Basque Nationalist Party (2005 July, 31th): “In front of the dependence/independence, in front of a 19th century Nation-State idea, we clearly support a nation opened to the world in the 21th century, an interdependent Europe, a shared sovereignty with Spain, France and Europe. Not submitted to anybody, without imposing anything. That is what we are talking about when we demand the right to decide united to the commitment to negotiate. That is what we are talking about when we support institutions being guarantee for national and social building. That is what we are talking about too when we claim the pact with the State.
A nation grouping all the Basques, from Iparralde and Hegoalde.¹¹ Against the forced territorial unity, we defend an attractive national project for being a democratic reference in the Basque Autonomous Community, Navarre and Iparralde.”

¹⁰ This Intergroup was formed in the moment of signing up the declaration, among others, by the euro-MP of the following parties: Basque Nationalist Party (for the Basque Country), Convergence and Union as well as Republican Left (for Catalonia), and Galizian Nationalist Bloc (for Galizia).

¹¹ In Basque, the northern and southern sides of the Basque Country, respectively being in France and Spain.

Finally, when directly questioned about the links of his concept of shared sovereignty with European integration, Mr. Imaz answered with a clear ‘Yes’.¹² He was asked about his own election and the competition with the other candidate. And not negating it, implicitly affirmed that his pure election for leading the party was a clear pro-European and pro-shared sovereignty principle sign. It can be said that this development of self-determination principle, is one of the most democratic and post-sovereign proposals currently operating in Europe. We have dedicated a wide space to this ideology, but we understand that it is an important issue, because this party is the main one (both in the Basque Country and inside the Basque nationalism) and it has been very influential in the debates about the future and accommodation of the Basque Country.

Basque Socialist Party/Basque Left [Partido Socialista de Euskadi/Euskadiko Ezkerra]

We have interviewed Gemma Zabaleta, Basque MP of the Socialist Party and a very known and active member of the more Basque-oriented sector in her party. Mrs. Zabaleta has been very attacked even inside her party by more Spanish nationalists sector, the main one during the years of the national pact with governing Popular Party of Mr. Aznar. She receives us in the Socialist Party offices inside the Parliament, leaving the door opened. This can be interpreted as a sign in two directions. It said to us that what she speaks is not only her opinion, but her party’s too; symmetrically, she said to her colleagues –after presenting us to her party’s chief in parliament and telling what was the interview about– that she had nothing to hidden.

Mrs. Zabaleta is really a woman with personal ideas and this was showed constantly during the interview. She strongly remarked that the political agenda is obsolete, being not more suited to reality. In this way, concepts as State, nation, solidarity, etc, do not fit more to actual reality.

Committed to European values, she sees European integration as where are the keys for the solution to Basque conflict, only a little one compared to current huge challenges. “European process is very positive for the resolution of conflicts because it gives to them their real dimension, and let us to watch them in relative and comparative terms.” For these reasons, she thinks the real political debate is not between the Basque or Spanish nations, or between left and right, but “between the Old and the New”.

About the so-called Basque-Aquitaine Euro-region, she thinks it can be a useful (third) way to solve the hard issue of Basque territoriality demanded by nationalists. It might be a political and administrative entity, compounded by diverse political institutions pursuing common interests. One suggestive idea is to assume that every Euro-region must not be articulated in the same way. There is a wide margin for suiting them to each local reality. In this possibility of cooperate, and in such a way to foster a good accommodation of national Basque reality, Zabaleta sees a strong obstacle in French State centralism. In this way, innovation is a tool for changing and solving these kinds of problems.

¹² So, confirming the advanced hypothesis suggested in Filibi 2004, and stressed again in the previous state of the art report.

She speaks of a twofold politics: official and (hidden) real [*oficial vs oficiosa*]. Following this distinction, she remarks the need to find mediators between both of them, for passing from the hidden-real to the official domain. In this task it is necessary to socially reinforcing the peace process. Citizens must be actively involved, they should commit themselves with it, and make proposals. In this way, she emphasizes the role women should play. Mrs. Zabaleta talked about a document women from all the parties were redacting about the need to reach peace.

Popular Party of the Basque Country [Partido Popular del Pais Vasco]

We interviewed Mr. Carmelo Barrio, general secretary of this party. For this organization, Europe is a political structure of States and citizens, being the regions mere intermediate and instrumental elements. They accept and think positive these to do their best in this framework, but with loyalty. The Popular Party thinks that is being slowly created a potent political structure, with special emphasis in two dimensions: a socially strong framework and a space of peace and freedom.

Barrio asks to himself whether the CBC it is only a declarative and politicians' artifact, without reaching social reality. In its connection with Basque nationalism, he suggests that European integration is accelerating rhythms and political stages and provoking nationalist parties to adapt themselves to this emergent political reality. In this way, the new discourses of nationalism would be a readjust more than a genuine change.

About the Basque hard process of closing of main industries, Barrio sees as a very positive aspect the European funds, believing that they were really very well managed by Basque authorities. He is also critic in the way nationalism capitalized this, negating the role Europe or Spanish government have played.

Finally, he strongly stress the need to de-dramatize identity, but mainly in relation to Basque identity, because he thinks that European identity will not redefine nor blur (perhaps re-adapting) state identities.

Unity [Batasuna] (Independentist Left)

We interviewed Elena Beloki, a high-ranked member of Batasuna. This organization was declared non-legal because the Spanish central audience of Justice, which investigates all the cases related with terrorism, declared Batasuna was a mere branch of ETA. Developing this point, Mrs. Beloki was accused of being part of ETA and currently can not abandon Spanish borders without authorization of the judge. As she collaborated with Batasuna European MP, Mr. Gorostiaga, she knows very well European institutional framework. She is actually doing a Doctoral research about the special constitutional and political accommodation of the Aaland Islands. That why this woman speaks fluently in several languages and manage analytical concepts coming from International Law and Political Science. When she was asked about how she politically self-defines, stated: "I belong to the Basque Independentist Left". This explains why we have used this term to refer to a political group who has used several names and political brands in recent years for escaping to non-legalization and presenting to ballots.

Mrs. Beloki wanted to begin with a general statement: “There exists a general trend to think about the self-determination right in the United Nations system.” She argues that “States begin to modulate some formulas to accommodate, without change the territory of the State, these self-determination demands”. The Independentist Left understands this as a cornerstone of European integration. Some concentrated economic groups are very interested in building huge markets economic spaces. That is why “Europe has come as a given. Nobody has asked us about this.” But in spite of this lack of legitimacy, Beloki thinks that “this process is irresistible”. Of course we [the Independentist Left] have a strong critic position about this, because we are leftist, she says. But she does not develop this point, and concentrates in our proposed agenda.

Europe fosters political accommodation of regional and [non State] national diversity. In her opinion, “the United Kingdom reformulates the State in the framework of the European integration process”. “Europe promotes devolution”. All this first exposition is for stating that, contrary to common use of media, self-determination is fully contemporary. European integration has not abolished States, but has changed them. It can be said that States have being reinforced by integration. In the blurring zone of contact of these two trends –reinforced but changed States– this group sees some opportunities for the fitting of the Basque nation.

In this way European context offers an important margin for institutional innovation, what can be very useful, mainly during transitional periods towards complete Basque national liberation. “Europe permits the creation of new actors or political power poles, as the Nordic Council is”. About sovereignty sharing she expresses her doubts. “There is no sovereignty sharing possible without prior sovereigns”, states. But she strongly believes that Cross Border Cooperation may facilitate increased collaboration among Basques and visualization of national territory during a long period towards full Basque sovereignty. “What we are demanding is the political context and rules, with which everybody can pursuit their political objectives and dreams”.

Now, with the new president Zapatero she is relatively optimistic. Asked for the reasons for this attitude, she answers with an historical argument. The Independentist Left thinks that after the Spanish transition to democracy (1978-1982), were fulfilled two out of three main political goals: 1) International legitimacy of Spanish State; 2) Social legitimacy of the model, and 3) legitimacy of the State in the Basque Country. They understand the third one is still remaining, non-fulfilled. In their words, the Spanish and French States have tried everything to insert the Basque Country into their political and national systems, but without definite success. Basque nation has been able to resist all manoeuvres –juridical, educational nation-building, non-legal as military groups, etc. “And we have resisted”, she says proudly. Every new Spanish president has tried to solve this problem and make history, but all of them have failed. They used violence too, in vane. That is why this president is trying to do another different thing. She did not end the phrase, perhaps suggesting he is speaking to them (what has been for the months before the interview a constant hypothesis of newspapers).

Asked how the Basque conflict might be solved, she stated that “the State border partition can be solved with pragmatic formulas when there is real political will in the States”. For this the CBC can be a very useful tool. She said the Independentist Left is

analysing current CBC mechanisms in Europe, mainly in France. These ways for cooperation across borders would be necessary for the yet mentioned transition period.

Basque Solidarity [Eusko Alkartasuna]

We interviewed Rafael Larreina, Secretary of organization of Eusko Alkartasuna. This party believes Euskadi-Aquitaine funds are to a great extent symbolic due to their few resources. They have not been a decisive factor, but a complementary issue. In any case, CBC may contribute to foster and reinforce Basque identity in both sides of the border. Now, for example, Iparralde [northern Basque Country in France] pay a great attention to the Basque southern part, due to both quick development southwards and increasingly feeling abandoned by Paris rooted French central institutions.

Europe has been very far from citizens, who have perceived much more the management of Basque institutions. This fits perfectly with Basque Solidarity proposal about a new Europe, a Europe of the peoples, and not the Europe designed by the constitutional treaty with still strong borders. This party supports the idea that multiply the political actors is more democratic, and stress the need to abandon the veto-culture. He is strongly convinced that artificial realities will finally be eroded by European integration and the social realities, peoples, will emerge.

The Basque Country will fit in the European political structure, but this only will occur step by step. The first one would be to have a voice and direct presence in European institutions, and the need to be recognized by European Constitution.

United Left/Environmentalists [Ezker Batua/Berdeak]

In July 2004, United Left seceded from Spanish-wide federal organization form becoming a new sovereign organization then con-federated to the general one. For his general coordinator, this was the institutional expression internally coherent with their proposal for the State structuring: the federalism of free adhesion.¹³

We interviewed Mrs. Isabel Lopez Aulestia, Basque MP and director of a new area in the government of the Basque Country about new ways for political participation of citizens. She is sub-director of the Basque Council of the European Movement, and a strong European integration supporter.

Mrs. Lopez Aulestia thinks that in spite of very good managing of some actors, such as the border towns of Hendaia, Irun and Hondarribia creating the so-called Euro-city, the funds of the CBC program are scarce and their impact very little. She thinks the CBC has been well known because the governing “Basque Nationalist Party is charmed with this idea, because it goes in the direction to the dreamed Basque homeland”. This dream is strongly shocked in the social domain, with the traditional Spanish side inferiority and French superiority, what still remains.

¹³ Electronic newspaper ‘Libertad digital’, date: 5 de julio de 2004.

She observes a CBC relations very marked by concrete interests, and nothing about altruist or idealized identities. In this way she puts the example of the old-rooted conflicts between northern (French) and southern (Spanish) fishers.

In a more general level, Europe offers a general context which facilitates more cooperation and exchanges, and this is seen by nationalists as an opportunity, creating concepts as “Europe of the peoples” with direct participation in Brussels and so forth. For her the problem is more in the social level, demanding a new socio-economic condition for the entry of new members in the European Union in the line of the Human Rights’ one or democracy.

5.2. Responses and perceptions of Basque Socio-economic actors

In the socio-economic sphere, the attitude and evaluation on European impact over Basque society depends heavily on the kind of actor. Commerce chambers and enterprises stress the importance of the progressive building of a real and border-free market, fostering exportations (what is a central issue in a strong export-oriented economy as the Basque is) and making easier the access to capitals and the inversion outside. These actors openly support European integration as a first-class factor for assuring stability, both political and derived from public budgets’ equilibrium (forced by European central bank’s policies).

Unions are other matter. They stress more the increasing de-regulative process of the market, the high rate of labour instability (with many jobs linked to very short-term contracts and a trend towards low salaries) –being extremely in Spain–, and the reducing role of redistributive State policies. Unions see European economic space more as a risk than an opportunity.

Behind this general picture, one need to focus on the concrete actor for knowing detailed opinions. For example, enterprises’ opinion over European policies will depend on the economic sector they belong to. The strictly economic opinion is sometimes mixed with political issues, basically related to the real changes integration has had over the institutions now decide over each sector. Old-rooted links between fishers’ associations and Basque administration, which has full powers on this area, see now how real decisions are taken in Brussels by Spanish minister since Spanish entry into European Communities. This is an example of concrete impacts coming from ‘Europe’. On the other hand some important and strategic Basque sectors widen their numbers selling throughout the entire European market, or gain contracts in new member States with the help of European ‘economic freedoms’.

About the influence of European integration over the Basque national conflict, or the accommodation of Basque nation, these actors are reluctant to speak. They usually stress the general framework of stability and hope a promptly solution. There is a widespread consensus over the ‘economic and social explosion’ will follow after the end of Basque conflict. Almost everybody detects a great potential of Basque people and economy, highlighting the ‘Basque miracle’ after the great depression of the 80s with all the violence and strong political struggle. Solved the first yet, with the creation of new economic sectors for replacing the disappeared big Basque industries, they ask

to themselves for the limits of Basque capacities without the other serious constraint: violence and deep political struggle.

Some socio-economic actors demand full independence of Basque economy, in coherence with their political ideas, but the main part agree only in the necessity of completing Basque political powers and financial powers with their correlate in the socio-economic domain. There exists almost a consensus on the defence of this fiscal autonomy (almost independence, because are the own Basque institutions who fix and get the taxes –excluding only some of them still controlled by the State centre), and on the need to assure self-government against the risk of central government's re-centralist risk. Strong differences appear respect to the most radical political demands, with even nationalist enterprises owners fearing State revenge if Basque Country starts a secession road. In contrast with this, nationalist unions, with a broad majority within Basque workers, are more radicals than their political counterparts. In this sense, the unions usually linked to moderate nationalist parties have agreed a common strategy during the last years and claim a full development of own powers over socio-economic issues. It is a bit surprising that workers unions consider full socio-economic self-government to be so clear benefits. Here, again, unions are still divided over national lines, but this perhaps has begun to change with some recent contacts between the Basque nationalist majority and Spanish-wide Basque branches for negotiate a common strategy.

Cultural domain. Basque society is enriched with the mix and cross-fertilizing links among three cultures: Basque, Spanish and French. So, 'Basque' culture must be understood in a threefold complex way: culture expressed through Basque language, Spanish and French; all of them interacting in a very deeply-divided and tense context, but this sometimes permit both political criticism and innovation, perhaps in a greater degree than in other more stable societies. One example of this affects to the central issues (for Art and social sciences) of truth, power and life. The Basque society can observe in the quotidian life the manipulation of media (everyday each new is approached by so different point of views depending on the media one watches, that caution forms part of Basque common sense), the imposition of Basque- or Spanish-led majorities in all institutions (from State-centre to local ones, passing through Basque/Navarre regional level), and finally with the constant presence of death with more than one thousand killed by both sides (with the main part coming from ETA since the beginning of democracy).

On more close-to-ground terms, the Basque-language culture stands the great challenge of competing with culture produced with/through two worldwide-spread languages: Spanish and French. This obviously makes very difficult the creation of a solid cultural framework: from the investment in spectacles or media products, to the fixing of an audience who always knows Spanish or French, but scarcely Basque even after 25 years of strong public support to Basque language expansion policies. This explains the Spanish or French (here without any support of authorities to the development of Basque) predominance in the public sphere, and the reactive radical defence of nationalists of Euskera [Basque] in the political and institutional domains (what poison the relations among Basque- and Spanish/French-users and fosters political use of language).

In this sense, Basques see their language as a little boat inside a World and European great sea-storm, with huge waves which risk its future. Both social and economic

general trends menace more than support this language in spite of strong commitment of regional institutions and society. On the other hand, Europe has recently given a happy surprise, with the process opened by president Zapatero in favour of increasing recognition by European institutions of all Spanish official languages. This, what has been a long-demanded and deeply hearted nationalist demand, opens up a new scale to the functioning and living of Europe's most ancient language, as Basques proudly say whenever they can.

5.3. Institutional approach

One high-ranked Basque official assured that "Cross-Border Funds have not been linked to any Basque nation-building process". What's more, not only with INTERREG Funds, but with the own Basque government's ones, the official position is to avoid this, because the counter-part is not *Iparralde* [northern Basque Country, in France], but the French State or Aquitaine (Varela). Cross-Border Cooperation is basically a very pragmatic issue, not so linked with ideology, but with concrete cooperation areas and projects. It is both clear that these policies have an obvious strategic dimension, and that it is not the same incentive for cooperating with French Basque Country or Navarre, in comparison with any other (Spanish) region bordering southern Basque Country.

As a result of all these issues, the arising conclusion is that the Basque government has learnt an important lesson after some years of explicitly national construction. The close ties with so strongly historically linked territories were not transformed into concrete facts because the French-side counter-parts have always been very reluctant to this kind of discourse (because their own strong French nationalism). Now it seems that Basque institutions have begun to develop a more subtle and sophisticated approach to its northern neighbors. The short-term and explicitly national objectives have become long-term, strategic and more technical (de-nationalized) ones. In this change the European process has been important, giving a good and successful example of how to build a solid political entity avoiding explicit political/federal objectives, and developing tangible cooperation creating 'concrete solidarities'.

But it is not only a learning about how to build the Basque nation what emerges from the Cross-Border Cooperation. Derived from this strategic level, it is also starting a new approach to the relations with their neighbors –Basque-navarrese mainly, but Spanish and French regions too. There is a debate inside the Basque government about how to insert the Basque land into new polities and other outcomes of European and globalization processes. In this way, new concepts are emerging as 'Cooperation of proximity' (Muñoa) or 'Euro-region', expressing the need to build new economic, politic and social spaces for a good defense of own interests and actualization of self-government and identity. More technical officers and pragmatic politicians inside governing nationalism are beginning to think which can be these essential new spaces, and how might be built. At the present, two ideas seem to be more suited to these needs: the main one is the Euro-region, a wide ensemble formed with the Basque Country and Aquitaine (not only the Basque territories, but the entire region, much bigger), with plans for being expanded to reluctant Navarre and perhaps other adjacent regions, leaded by the core urban territory Bilbao-Donostia-Eurocity (Irun-Hondarribia-Hendaye)-Bordeaux. It is clear that the economic wealth and power of southern Basque Country would lead the ensemble, but it is worthy to note the difference with previous

strategic plans. This appears to be a much de-nationalized and post-sovereign project, articulating a new, asymmetric and Cross-Border, polity designed to compete with and insert into new international and European realities.

INTERREG program has had three stages in its development. In its beginning, it was a tool for solving the problem of the regions directly affected with the border blurring. After this first stage, a second one was centered on the Cross-Border Cooperation between affected regions on both sides of member States' borders. Finally the funds orientated to the cooperation were widened for finance interregional cooperation in a broader sense, not only limited to physically connected regions, but any regions from different countries wanting to develop join projects. This evolution has been thought and implemented by Brussels' bureaucracy (Varela).

About Euro-region, our informant thinks that behind it there are both a tool mechanism for find and build new identities in a zone with identities' problems, and a tool for regional development. In these senses, this project can be very useful (Varela).

In this way, an identified problem is the lack of a join ordination of territory. Without this common ground, there is no possibility for a real Cross-Border Cooperation, because this would unite not from an affective or political point of view, but from the purely physical. Another essential need is the development of a common (Cross-Border) public transport service (Lafont).

The major of Hondarribi is fostering the CBC project for eliminating any physical barrier among the three towns (Hondarribia, Irun and Hendaia), creating a common urban space with open and easy access. The objective is to articulate and physically connect what is really a single conurbation.

There is another need about the European Structural Funds: the implementation of an instrument for the measuring of the concrete and real impact of the projects funded by these programs (Iraola, Eizagirre).

5.4. Spaces for cooperation and insertion in global trends

Two of our informants think the optimum size for Basque insertion in the European and global economic and political spaces might be the Pyrenees, with a long axis going from the Basque Country to Catalonia (Varela and Lafont), one of them suggesting a confederation of the peoples living in both sides of this mountain range (Lafont).

In 1990 there was an important fact in Iparralde: the reunification of all Basques territories under one public law institution: the chamber of commerce of Baiona. It is the only institution grouping all Basques, and this permits the Cross-Border Cooperation on national basis with southern counterparts.

Some of our informants stressed the heavy bureaucratic proceedings and the delays for receiving the payments of INTERREG funds. Some of them expressed their reserves about the evaluation process for adjudicating the funds, which some considered somehow confusing. Finally, two other problems with Cross-Border Cooperation funds (now both, INTERREG and Basque Aquitaine-Euskadi Fund): first, they finance only half of the budget and this is a problem for small associations, with scarce access to

other resources; and second, it is a requisite that at least two organizations –one of each side of the border– must accord a project, and this invalidate some organizations that are Cross-Border in themselves, such as several cultural and linguistic organizations are, having offices in both sides of the border (their solution is to act as legally separate entities, but this cause other administrative and organization problems).

Leaving apart the idiomatic question, there is a perceived difference about the working habits and costumes, what is a problematic issue for truly cooperation. May seem stupid but some actors have had problems even for arranging an appointment, due to differences with meals' hours, what leaves very little 'operative and common' time (Eusko Ikaskuntza, Irun major).

5.5. From ideology to trust

The major of a town close to the border (Hondarribia), and one of the main supporters of Cross-Border Cooperation (CBC), stated that “social exchanges are increasing thank to CBC, but ways of life (which are very different in each side) don't change from one day to another. In this way, reality is more stubborn than words and discourses.” This respondent compared the little-scaled political and social construction of their three towns with European Constitution, with the same problems, but with the advantage of being only few actors for taking decisions”. This major thinks that for a real and useful cooperation should be clearly identified the common interest issues, leaving apart the more problematic due to interests' or ideological aspects. In this sense, it is impossible to cooperate on fisheries due to very different working techniques and strongly opposed interests, but it is perfectly possible to cooperate in touristic campaigns for example, because of strong complementarities among the towns. In this sense, each town has its own features, being Hondarribia and Hendaia more tourism-oriented and Irun more commercial and industrial.

They stress two fundamental values: the political visualization of the conurbation, and the real possibility for developing common projects. For reaching these objectives the three towns have agreed to show in their respective schools the reality of the both sides of the Bidasoa, the common river joining them, and to take decisions by unanimity. In any case, the majors acknowledge that political will goes far much forward than social reality (Hondarribia). For promoting the cooperation they have created an agency for the developing of the area: the Bidasoa-Activa [Active-Bidasoa] agency.

One important aspect is to deal with strongly opposed ideological positions (The major of Irun and Hendaia being respectively Spanish and French Socialist and the major of Hondarribia moderate Basque nationalist). This explains that Basque nationalists have reduced the ideological level of their proposals, for facilitating both Spanish and French nationalists to support the common projects. Everybody is reluctant towards adversaries, but no project has been vetoed on ideological basis yet, due to a general consensus over the strategic perceived need to cooperate among all of them. Only in this way they have an opportunity for destroying barriers and borders created and maintained for centuries, being the diverse nationalist positions the greatest risk for long-term cooperation. This political will and even personal faith in the cooperation is perfectly expressed by Hondarribian major, when says: “what is good for Hendaia and Irun is good for me”.

The major of Irun sees the changes caused by European integration in similar terms. The first, very hard, impact of the abolition of frontiers with unemployment (23% in 1993) and crisis (economic and of identity too), it is now a promising opportunity. The three towns of Hendaia, Irun and Hondarribia saw that “the union was a value in itself for solving this crisis”. Without State borders, they (the three towns) have passed of be the external of something (their States) to be the centre of a new reality: the urban corridor coming from Baiona to Donostia. It is not surprising that, due to this “privileged geographical position”, now the major can say that “Europe is a huge opportunity”. What the abolition of borders is really doing is to foster the relation always has existed trough the border. In this way, Cross border cooperation is widely supported in these towns and the political will is backed with another important fact: the three have complementary economies, and this gives lots of possibilities for cooperation.

About the practical issues behind cooperation, it is true that CBC strongly depends on the personal values and ideas of the majors, but there have been several majors and all of them have gone on with this cooperation. One important advantage is that in the local level many ideological differences blur, and real and concrete problems arise. The major of Irun thinks that the real ‘actor’ is the urban continuum along the river Bidasoa, but highlights the risk of eroding traditional identities without good motives for it. Perhaps a new identity may emerge in the future, but it is clear that traditional (local) ones will stand as primary. This major sees several important obstacles for the CBC: the language issue, with a common one (Basque) being spoken only by a minority on both sides of the border; the very different timetables ruling quotidian life in each side, and making hard even to appoint a reunion; the different values and customs articulating lives in the north and south of the river.

In any case, he strongly supports the CBC and only fears its delay or stopping. This is why he thinks this process should be reinforced and politically and socially backed. In this way he demands stable channels of communication and collaboration in the regional (both Basque and Aquitaine) level.

5.6. Statistical invisibility

Some socio-economic actors identify a great problem for an accurate and diagnosis and action: the lack of relevant statistical data about the northern Basque Country (in France). This point, repeated both in interviews and informal conversations, impelled us to find more about this issue. Furthermore, during the past EUROREG meeting in Athens (October 2005), several teams talked about the same problem. That is why we contacted Gaindegia, a Socio-Economic Observatory for the Basque Country, and interviewed its director in spite of not be directly financed by any European nor Basque fund for the Cross-Border Cooperation.

The lack of statistical information (des-aggregated from French State’s total figures) about French Basque Country is a great obstacle for knowing the reality of this territory and for an overall diagnosis of the complete Basque Country, what is a main claim of nationalist groups.

For pursuing this statistical ideology-driven objective of “make the Basque Country to appear”, Gaindegia was created in 2000. They have chosen as the minimum unit the local one, stating that the entire Euskal Herria [complete Basque Country] has 685 municipalities. They have been strongly influenced by European statistical standard for make possible comparisons after they can extract the figures for the Basque Country (Isasi).

6. Relationship between ethnic-national identity and territory

Basque Country, socially and politically, existed before European integration and even European funds have affected very little in her conflict. However, and in line with Keating and Bray’s paper, integration process has been very influential widening up the political context in which Basque actors act. In the symbolic level, eroding the frontiers divided Basques between them, European Cross-Border Cooperation offers great opportunities for visualize Basque homeland. But this must be done with care. Spanish and French States have the last word on this issue. This is the reason which explains the Fund for cooperation with Aquitaine created by Basque government. Without renouncing to the advantages offered by INTERREG, Basque government has tried to strengthen her ties with Iparralde (the Basque Country under French rule).

Relation with European institutions and programmes has been a complex learning process. One of the outputs may be the design of a new project going beyond traditional (only-) ethnic lines, and which seems to optimize the political opportunity structure opened up by integration.

This fits very well with the hypothesis launched in our project. What’s more, following the title: “Changing interests and identities in European border regions: EU policies, ethnic minorities and socio-political transformation in member states and accession countries”. Here, another interesting insight –although, as mentioned earlier, should be supported with more evidence– has been that identity patterns have not changed a lot in society, but certain elites have begun to design some projects going beyond traditional more-ethnic or more-closed identities, opening to the creation of new economic and social spaces, cross-bordering, which will probably be of political importance in the near future. This is more an intuition than a strong scientific outcome, but many actors showed during the interviews some ties and ideas very closed one to each other (in spite of using different words), what is probably expressing a (more or less conscious) general agreement about some important keys for supporting a new political project for the Basque Country. These keys are clearly beyond ‘classical’ nationalism and are extraordinarily opened and flexible. And usually the nearer to practical issues they are, the more pragmatic and post-national they are. In this way is hardly surprising that local politicians, enterprises or Basque government officials are much less guided by abstract ideas about ‘nation’ or ‘nation-building’ than Basque-level politicians. These more close-to-the-terrain elites are creating a new discourse and ideas about their community that are building new opportunities for rethinking the Basque society and the relation with the institutions and societies around her.

In these changes the European integration has made a difference, conceptually and physically, redefining the Borders and the political power, and providing a more promising political context. The opened windows to relations with other peoples made by the common market are being very helpful too for exchanging ideas and new modes of governance. Here the enterprises (with the Basque Country having even her small

enterprises highly internationalized) and the officials and politicians having a European experience (post-graduate or political –for example in the European Parliament) are key actors in the developing of these new and challenging ideas about the present and future of the Basque Country.

7. Concluding remarks

1) The impact of the European integration process may be summarized in two main points. Firstly, it can be said that economic funds and also the recently human rights conditioning policies have had a little impact on the empowerment of the Basque minority and in the conflict over the political accommodation of the Basque nation. Secondly, where European integration has really affected the Basque Country is in its capacity to assure a political stability and minimum guarantee of democracy and civil rights –what was certainly important for the successful transition to democracy–, and facilitating a political environment very dynamic which fosters changes in nationalist discourses and strategies.

2) There exist great differences among the parties in relation to the way they approach to the issue of the Basque development. For nationalists, self-government and the fostering of their own identity is an essential tool for developing their country, while Spanish parties stress more the belonging to a wider State as a guarantee of development and identity.

Below this picture of tension, there are two elements of cohesion that act as social glue. First, the Basque Country is a relatively well-developed one, with a generous amount of wealth, and it is easier to manage this kind of country that other with serious problems of development. For years there existed a transversal government managing the country (Basque Nationalist Party and Socialist Party). These two parties managed a broad social consensus over the model of development.

Second, it has never existed in the Basque Country any clear discrimination implemented on national divisions. This has helped to minimize the social impact of the political conflict.

In any case, self-government demands are huge in the Basque Country, as was showed both in the previous state of the art report, with only 24 per cent of the population supporting the current State of the autonomous communities model, and 32% demanding the independence and other 38% claiming for a truly federal State which clearly acknowledges the Basque nation. That is, 70% of the Basque population demands much more level of self government and national recognition than the currently existent.¹⁴

3) It can be said that cross border ties are neither very strong nor important in quantitative terms. Their importance comes from the symbolic and ideological domains for the nationalist forces, who see how this is the only legal and pragmatic way for the visualization of the entire Basque national territory. In any case, the Basque nationalism has learnt some lessons after a first stage of very explicitly ideological and nationalist approach to CBC, and is increasingly developing a more pragmatic, medium-term oriented and related to ground approach. This permits to avoid main reluctant positions in French counterparts and implement more concrete projects which, improving real

¹⁴ Figures extracted from the last Euskobarometro (November 2005), an opinion survey made twice per year. The figures of the precedent survey (May 2005) were: independence (37%), federal option (34%), and autonomic model (26%). Font: www.ehu.es/cpvweb/pags_directas/euskobarometroFR.html

conditions and welfare, will surely foster more solidarity and even a deeper Basque common feeling.

In spite of several institutional channels for this kind of cooperation (both European INTERREG and the own funds promoted by the Basque government) the sense of common solidarity is still low, and mainly concentrated on the physical border, with only more clear national component on the inner area of the range, where the Basque language is more extended.

Finally, more research is needed about the Euro-region project.

4) People in the Basque Country feel mainly Basques, with complex relations among three national identities in conflict: Basque, Spanish and French, variable in each territory (feeling mainly Basque in the Basque Autonomous Community with appreciable compatibility with Spanish identity in a wide sector; mainly Navarrese in Navarre, again compatible with Spanish one but with a minority but geographically concentrated Basque national identity in the north; and wide feeling of Basque identity, but under prime French identity in the northern part of the Basque Country).

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Annex

List of interviews

No - Interviewed	Post	Sex
1 – Rafael Hueso	Basque Gov, Foreign Affairs, CBC Basque Fund	M
2 – Jose Antonio Varela	Basque Gov, Foreign Affairs CBC Struct Funds	M
3 – Jose Maria Muñoa	Basque Gov, Foreign Affairs, European Affairs	M
4 – Antxon Lafont	Basque Economic & Social Committee, President	M
5 – Olatz Zumalabe	Basque Studies Society (Eusko Ikaskuntza)	F
6 – Felix Iraola	Gipuzkoan Chamber of Commerce, Director	M
7 – Agustin Eizagirre	Gipuzkoan Chamber of Commerce, Sub-Director	M
8 – Gemma Zabaleta	Basque Socialist Party, Basque MP	F
9 – Borja Jauregui	Mayor of Hondarribi (Basque Nationalist Party)	M
10 – Jose Antonio Santano	Mayor of Irun (Socialist Party)	M
11 - Carmelo Barrio	Popular Party of the Basque Country, Gen Secr	M
12 - Rafael Larreina	Basque Solidarity Party, Secretary of Org	M
13 - Josu Jon Imaz	Basque Nationalist Party, President	M
14 - Xabier Isasi	Basque Socio-Economic Observatory, President	M
15 - Isabel Lopez Aulestia	Basque Left Party/Environmentalists, Basque MP	F
16 - Elena Beloki	Independentist Left, coordinator international area	F
17 - Igor Ahedo	University Basque Country, CBC Researcher	M
18 - Francisco Letamendia	University Basque Country, CBC Researcher	M
19 - Bernard Arretxe	Chamber of Commerce of Baiona, president	M
20 - Mixel Berhocoirigoin	Peasant Chamber of Iparralde, president	M
21 - Pantxo ---	Institute Culturel Basque, President	M
22 - Marisol Garmendia	City council of Donostia, delegate of Presidency	F
23 - Guillermo Etxenike	Development public official, manager	M
24 - Francois Maitia	Region on Aquitaine, President	M

[*] There are several interviews still remaining, waiting for appointing a definitive date (some of them postponed –due to illness–, and others, such as the president of the Basque Country or one Spanish economic high official, delayed because agenda problems). We hope to have all these completed for being included into the definitive text to be presented at Bilbao meeting.