

# PATXI ZABALETA

CHIEF COORDINATOR OF ARALAR

Photos by Francesc Parés

*Before becoming leader of Aralar, Patxi Zabaleta was a prominent figure in Herri Batasuna (HB). He left the coalition in part because of its dependence on ETA. He currently leads an organisation that strives to attain the same objectives through peaceful means.*

*When we talk of Euskadi we keep talking about ETA, political normalisation and victims on all sides. Batasuna's leaders, such as Arnaldo Otegi have repeatedly called for unity in the actions of the abertzale (Basque nationalist) left. Do you think that this is only possible in the context of the absence of violence?*

Yes. Remember that at the start HB was not a creation of ETA, it was a lot more pluralistic and contained diverse kinds of people. When the end of the armed struggle arrives we'll be obliged to reach an understanding with the other great force in the *abertzale* left. There are several components that will be necessary in order to reach unity of action: respect for political channels, a plurality of opinions, an internal democratic structure, the taking of autonomic status as a starting point and always accepting the EU framework.

*It seems as if Batasuna is evolving towards exclusively political means? Are we coming to an end of the phase of a subordination to ETA?*

Yes, they're gradually doing so. In their latest document they speak of achieving peace unilaterally, of exclusively political means, of overcoming a situation of the banning of political parties. The Basque people call for ETA to end their armed struggle and to stop presenting themselves as the sole representatives of the Basque people.

*Do you believe that the Spanish state is in a position to offer guarantees that, in a context of the absence of violence, all policies and strategies will be possible within the state?*

We Basques have to make peace ourselves. We have to be the main protagonists in the peace proc-



ess. Having said that, peace has to come from ETA's unilateral, unconditional end to violence. Any political agreement with ETA would be a brake on and put a ceiling on our national aspirations. As we said in the Anoeta Declaration, we defend a dialogue in which all options are defended and which all political agents are included, following an end to the armed struggle. It will be necessary to negotiate an amnesty; we will have to face the question of compensation for all the victims, as happened in [Northern] Ireland, and accept the different memories.

*But in [Northern] Ireland the British government actively participated in the search for peace. In your opinion, is the situation the same with regard to the Spanish government?*

Unfortunately not. It is way behind what happened under successive British governments that

supported the process. The socialist government lacks the nerve to distance itself from the viewpoint held by the People's Party. The Spanish public is much more advanced than its political class.

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**THE BASQUE PEOPLE CALL FOR ETA TO  
END THEIR ARMED STRUGGLE AND TO  
STOP PRESENTING THEMSELVES AS THE  
SOLE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE BASQUE  
PEOPLE**

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*Let's talk about Europe. Its integration project is in crisis. Will we see a Europe emerge that is truly respectful of diversity and where the large states don't control the big issues, as we've seen with the current crisis?*



In the short term I feel that the large states will continue to exercise an important leadership, but in the mid-term things will change. The fact that European institutions didn't have any role in the current crisis is something worthy of deep reflection. Europe is facing the challenge of whether or not it should maintain its model of social policies or follow the American model. Moving towards a European space of social and economic liberties is irreversible.

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**THE RIGHT TO SELF-DETERMINATION SHOULD BE THE BASIS OF THE NATIONAL AGREEMENT, TOGETHER WITH THE DEFENCE OF THE UNIQUE CULTURAL CHARACTERISTICS THAT DEFINE US AS A NATION**

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*You said that, 'ETA has to declare a unilateral, unconditional ceasefire'. Do you see this as possible in an organisation with more than fifty years of history and that in spite of its obvious weakness continues to mobilise new members?*

ETA has to realise that its role in the political vanguard is no longer acceptable to the public. There will have to be a negotiated dialogue following a unilateral end to the armed struggle, but in a democratic system it's the political and social actors who have to lead the political struggle.

*In Catalonia there's a growing agreement that everything that had to be resolved with the 'Transition' is becoming unravelling. What do people in Euskal Herria [the Basque Country] think?*

We all agree that the transition was not ideal and that it hid and failed to resolve certain problems. In some ways, nothing really changed. Nowadays there's a political restructuring taking place in Euskadi which will lead to a strengthening of the two major *abertzale* options. On both the left and the right. We have to face the challenge of being connected and engaging in dialogue, even if this is critical. At the same time, we have to

be able to do the same with Spanish forces. This is the political normalisation of this country. Our challenge is to do this in a way that is compatible with our presence in Europe. Nowadays, identities are multiple, and this gives us a lot of room for manoeuvre.

*The different abertzale formations don't appear to raise their voices like they did and, for different reasons, they appear to be somewhat disorientated. In your opinion, is Basque nationalism in crisis?*

This may well be true for the PNV. Following thirty years in power they are now in opposition, but nevertheless continue to retain important power structures in Euskadi. They have an internal debate as to whether to move towards the right to self-determination or to maintain a dynamic of calling for change within the state. The defence of the right to self-determination should be the basis of a national agreement, together with the defence of the unique cultural characteristics that define us as a nation. Forces on the *abertzale* left are clear on this and the PNV will sooner or later have to make a decision about it. Our goal will be to drag the PNV towards a position on sovereignty and do so on the basis of shared policies and strategies.

*In Catalonia, referenda on independence are taking place throughout the country with a good response from voters so far. What do people in Euskal Herria think of this phenomenon?*

We see it as positive and as an instrument of promoting the participation that will act as a clear precedent. I understand that it's being done well. When the time's right we could use it in Euskal Herria.