



On the Day of the Diaspora

A response to the article written by Pedro José Chacón

As members of the Basque diaspora, and heirs to a brotherhood founded in 1612 by “members of the Basque nation” in Lima, we are writing this letter because we feel offended by the claims made regarding the **Basque community abroad** in a newspaper published in Spain.

On September 14, *El Español* published an op-ed piece titled “El día de la Diáspora vasca (The Day of the Basque Diaspora)” penned by **Pedro José Chacón Delgado** who is, as the article itself states, “professor of history of political thought at the University of the Basque Country”. We wish to respond to this article, and we ask that it be look at carefully by the University of the Basque Country, as the article makes claims that, from our point of view, are incompatible with the profile of a public employee.

We are offended and hurt by this article, because we feel that we are part of the Basque Community. That does not require Basque citizenship, but rather feeling oneself a part of it, which Mr. Chacón seems unable to understand, as he seems to even deny the existence of the Basque people itself.

We do not know by what mechanism this person achieved his place as a professor, but we are sure that the contents of this article are not worthy of a professor of history of political thought, nor acceptable from a worker in the public administration.

According to the author, the event was held in Ispaster, a town of 700 inhabitants that has seen 1,000 of its residents forced to emigrate, demonstrating “the values and the perception of reality nationalism has the Basque population held under”.

The **Day of the Basque Diaspora**, which was just held for the second time, is not celebrated at the behest of the Basque Government, as he claims, but rather at the request of the Basque Community Abroad as organized in the Euskoetxeak network. More specifically, this celebration is one of the conclusions of the 6th World Congress on Basque Collectivities held in Vitoria in 2015.

The law that allows for these Congresses, held every four years since 1995, to take place is Law 8/1994 of May 27, on the relationships with collectivities and Basque centers located outside the Autonomous Community of the Basque Country, approved with 40 votes in favor and 3 against in the Basque Parliament.

To claim that this event is a sign of the “values and the perception of reality nationalism has the Basque population held under” is wildly incorrect, as is shown by the poor argument development following this claim in the article.

He claims that towns of less than 1,000 people in the Basque Country are controlled by either the Basque Nationalist Party (PNV) or the *izquierda abertzale*, or Basque left. It would seem that as a historian, he’s gotten stuck in “absolutism”, and has failed to understand that city councils are constituted as voted for by the citizens of those towns. We understand that not everyone is going to like those results. But to claim that a town’s government is controlled by a political party is simply unacceptable coming for a person of this theoretical education. Reading his gives the impression that he would like to be the one to choose the makeup of the bodies of the Basque Government, but that would not be at all democratic.

As a public employee, publishing this type of claims, signing them with his title at the University, is borderline unacceptable. And we believe that he has entered into territory that would merit, at the very least, censure from the Institution he belongs to and has involved in this article.

From this point on, the author sets out to mix up everything in order to twist reality into something unrecognizable. According to him, at the Day of the Diaspora “no mention was made of the ETA attacks that



occurred in Ispaster.” This is true; nor was any mention made of the fallen in the Carlist Wars, or the Francoist insurrection. The Basque Government maintains a clear policy on recognizing and paying homage to the victims of violence, meaning that they don’t have to be remembered in every act the Government attends.

The ETA is a terrible and untoward stain on the history of our country. Its noxious presence has been the cause of untold pain that must be dealt with and repaired. But as a terrorist group is has disappeared, and the desire of some for its shadow to be ever present seems to be more a sickly nostalgic tic rather than a reasonable position.

He also seems to forget, how odd, that at this event were representatives of many political parties, and not all of them were (Basque, of course) nationalist, which seems to be so uncomfortable to him, because, while reading him, it becomes quite clear that he is a Spaniard who is proud to be exclusively Spanish, something he has a right to.

Then he tries to confuse the matter more regarding what the diaspora is; strange given how easy it is to turn to the dictionary to understand what we’re talking about. Webster’s defines it as follows:

1. capitalized, Judaism
 - a. the Jews living outside Palestine or modern Israel members of the Diaspora
 - b. the settling of scattered colonies of Jews outside ancient Palestine after the Babylonian exile
 - c. the area outside ancient Palestine settled by Jews
2.
 - a. people settled far from their ancestral homelands *members of the African diaspora*
 - b. the place where these people live
 - c. the movement, migration, or scattering of a people away from an established or ancestral homeland *the black diaspora to northern cities*

As it is quite obvious we’re not speaking about the Jewish community, but rather Basques, we’ll just stick with the second definition. In fact, to eliminate any doubt, we can turn to the European Union’s definition:

Individuals and members of networks, associations and communities, who have left their country of origin, but maintain links with their homelands.

And since he seems unwilling to leave no stone unturned as regards the word of Spanish nationalism regarding the feeling of belonging of the Basque community, he goes into the story of surnames to claim that those who have “eight Basque surnames” (people whose great-grandparents all had Basque surnames) are those who make up the Basque Community in the world, as well as taking top spots in the Basque institutions that are under the “control” (to use his shameful idea) of (Basque) nationalism. But of course, he then immediately recalls that the last two directors of the Basque Community Abroad have “non-Basque surnames”, or, as he puts it, “linked to Spanish emigration”; that is, he himself proves that his earlier argument was wrong.

And it is in this point where the author claims that these two directors “**are dedicated to handling nationalist grants to the diaspora**”, which becomes the second inadmissible claim for a public employee, at least for one who signs as such. The grants handled by those directors are the ones laid out in the law cited above that they must follow. They are items that come from the public coffers and are approved by the Basque Parliament, and are distributed by those directors based on criteria of transparency and openness. These grants have been handled by directors who were named by lehendakaris of the PNV as well as of the Spanish Socialist Workers’ Party (PSOE).

This claim is objectively a lie, and an offense to those public employees who participate in this process, and a claim that demands, at the very least, a public rectification. Again, though, it would seem more appropriate for the university authorities to demand the author not only rectify, but also to maintain a minimum of intellectual honor when making claims while using his public title, as otherwise his lies sully the reputation of the whole University.



As it is clear that Mr. Chacón knows little, or nothing, about the Basque diaspora, and seems to know even less about this history of our country, we would like for him to know that for many years, centuries, the weight of traditional Basque surnames was the majority among emigrants, and that's how the Americas, especially the Americas, filled up with Basque surnames that, by the way, fill the history books across the Atlantic, taking leading roles in the independence of those nations.

And in the great emigration that began in 1937 caused by the victory of the insurgents who represented the most wretched aspects of Spanish nationalism, the surnames that went abroad had a higher percentage of names he considers "not Basque", taken, with pride, by Basques who defended Democracy and *Euzkadi* with a dignity that would be difficult to emulate, even for those who only had to defend Democracy.

They were the children of the emigrants who, at the end of the 19th century, moved *en masse* to the Basque industrial areas in Biscay and Gipuzkoa. Those surnames also make up part of the Basque diaspora, with full honors, as with any person who came to the Basque Country wanted to integrate into the life in this land.

And that is something Mr. Chacón and all reactionary Spanish nationalists do not understand. They can't fathom a concept of belonging to a reality that they themselves don't feel. He, they, are occupying nationalists: they believe that "everything they control turns into what they want it to be". As if! As the last of that kind, the Francoists, used to say, "That's what we won the war for." It's an attitude that is widely present in other facets of the political reality of the Kingdom of Spain, as is the case with the issue of "Historical memory", where those in the "Mr. Chacón club" are unabashed in their "joining letters together" up to the point of saying things like, "now they want to win the war they lost 80 years ago".

That's why he doesn't understand Basque nationalism, and why for most of Basque society, anyone who wants to join into the life of this country is Basque. And everyone who lives here is a Basque citizen. No exceptions. The idea of the "weight of the surnames" is quite passé; the fact that the two directors Mr. Chacón himself made an example of earlier have "Spanish-origin" surnames proves that.

He denies the existence of a cultural community made up of what are now "seven territories". That's what he calls the "fantasy of the greater Basque Country". We can't help but imagining him like a child, covering his eyes hoping reality will disappear.

The truth is that the term "fantasy" could even be applied to defining the main goal of the Day of the Diaspora: to bring together all the Basques that had to leave their homeland and the descendants of the Basques who live in their homelands, and vice versa. That goal is a fantasy, but in the beautiful sense of the philosophy of Aristotle, "the end or goal of an activity that completes and perfects it". Connecting with each other, the descendants of those Basques who reached the shores of the New World in the 17th century, or those young people who've left in the past decade to find work, and connecting with the land we come from, is a beautiful and important goal.

And the Basque by no means invented this. The Irish, the Portuguese, the Germans, the Italians, the Polish, the Galicians, the Andalusians; all the national communities of the world look to keep that connection thriving.

He complains that there is a Day of the Basque Diaspora and not one for Spanish emigration. That is a lie; there are many. Every cultural community has theirs: Andalusians, Galicians, Castilians, etc. They have them and in all of them, if invited, representatives of Basque institutions attend.

But there's another matter that Mr. Chacón seems to forget. All these migrants who moved to the Basque Country have their rights and obligations, as do all citizens who live here. This is better and more important than any "Day of the Diaspora"; while, for example, the descendants of the Basques exiled in 1937 have to jump through bureaucratic hoops to be able to come back as Basque citizens to the homeland of their forebears.

Integration is a powerful reality in the Basque Country. It's true, "half the current population has no Basque surnames among the first two (i.e., neither parent was Basque), while 30% have either one or the other, and only 20% have both". But it's also true that, election after election, the majority of votes, regardless of the voters'



surnames, go to Basque nationalist forces; that is, to those whose only goal and reason for being are the interest of those citizens. Meanwhile, those opposing forces that represent the “reactionary Spanish nationalism” that Mr. Chacón defends with such vigor, and manipulation, is disappearing from the political reality of the Basque Autonomous Community.

Mr. Chacón’s arguments are so poor, so empty, that he has to “play the Arana card” to close his “reflections”. He recalls the words of Sabino Arana regarding the massive influx of Spanish immigrants...120 years ago:

"Entre el cúmulo de terribles desgracias que afligen hoy a nuestra amada Patria, ninguna tan terrible y aflictiva, juzgada en sí misma cada una de ellas, como el roce de sus hijos con los hijos de la nación española"
"Among the total of terrible misfortunes that assail our beloved Homeland, none is so terrible and distressing, when each of them is judged on its own, as is the contact between its children and the children of the Spanish nation" (Sabino Arana, Efectos de la invasión (Effects of the Invasion), 1897).

We doubt the opinion of the inhabitants of the peninsula would be very different regarding the arrival of the French after Napoleon’s invasion, or, going closer to one of the key moments of historical discourse in Spanish nationalism, regarding the arrival of the Muslim conquerors in the year 711.

That initial position of rejection has changed, and today in the institutions of the Kingdom of Spain, on the one hand, they enthusiastically defend the heritage of French Jacobinism (starting with the imposed 1812 Constitution), and on the other, showing the world great pride in the cultural, and genetic, heritage of the Muslim conquerors on broad swaths of the peninsula.

It’s the same thing in the Basque Country. The arrival of the first waves of emigrants, which coincided with the theft of Basque freedoms at the hands of the newly born “Spanish nation”, was received coldly. The change was too radical and too quick to not expect there to be any conflicts.

But all that is in the past. Today, no one asks anyone to reject their history, or culture, or roots (except, on many occasions, the Basques themselves). The contributions of all those who arrived, and arrive, to our country, enrich Basque society.

If, on the Day of the Diaspora, the idea of a Basque politician needs to be remembered, it should be **Lehendakari Aguirre’s** message to the Basques of the New World Diaspora, and, by extension, to the whole world. It was transmitted in 1942 and was engraved in fire on the hearts of many Basques throughout the world, from Shanghai to Patagonia, from Australia to Canada. It’s an idea that reflects a way of being that Mr. Chacón seems to not understand, but which for many Basques from Araba, Biscay, Gipuzkoa, Labourd, Navarre, and Soule, has been their guide and enthusiastically applied since the moment they had to abandon their Homeland and go abroad in order to rebuild their lives:

“Basques, in their adopted lands, must, among all citizens, be the best”

“The Basque Centers of the world are the representation of our Country”

Limako Arantzazu Euzko Etxea

Emila Olga Bazán Olano

President

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