

Basque PEN in three leaps

Literature knows no frontiers

Authors
Laura Mintegi
Urtzi Urrutikoetxea





PEN EUSKAL BILKURA

Ibinagabeitia 'tar' Andima 'k

Ogeitamar urte bai, INTERNATIONAL PEN, izen omentsua, mundua zear egan asi zitzaigunetik Londres'tik bilkura orren otsandia ludia zear zabaldu eta edatzen asi zan, eta andiko deiari iarraituz erri geienetan idazleak bilkura berezietan elkartzen ziran, Inghland'eko elkargo nagusiarri geroago itsasteko. Era ortara, INTERNATIONAL PEN'elkargoak, bere adar lodiak legorra zear edatu zitun, enbor sendo baten inguru.

Zer ditugu ordea, P. E. N. iru letratxo oriek? Izen ori iru erdel-izenen aurreneko letratxoz borobildua duzute, ots, Poet, Essayist, Novelist, euskeraz, olerkari, idazle, eleberrigille edo nobelari. Lan oietan eta bestetsuetan lumaz ari diren langille oro bildu nai ditu. Lenik enderri edo erri hakoitzeko idazleak elkartuz, urrenik erri-arteke bilkura aundi baten bazkidetuz.

Eralguntza onen egiteko garaiena auxe duzute: lur zabaleko literatura guzien eta idazle ospatsuenen izen ta izanak ezagutarazi, eta elkarrékiko artuemanean ezarri.

Bere araudian dienez, elerti edo literaturak ez du mugarik, ezta ere politikarik. Gizonek gogo-antzez sortu lanak, erri-mugen gainetik daude: beaz idazlan aiek ezagutarazteak politikarik ezin dezake egari. Giza-gogoaren zitu garaienak barreatzea ordea, bear-bearrezko egitekoa duzute. Orra,

labur, INTERNATIONAL PEN bilkuraren yo-muga.

Euskal idazleak, aspaldi ontan, atzerriko idazle batzarretatik aldenduta bizi ginan. Gure artean sortu idazlanen berri. Euzkadi'ko mugartean kokatu oi zan, oskol zailaren barnean eltzaur-mami guria bezelatsu.

Zorionez, gurean ere idazleek lan aipagarririk erron dute, baita gizon azkarrik ere erne izan da. Zoritxarrez, ordea, aien ezagupidea etzan gure ibar eta landetan kanpora egaldatu. Garaia genun, noizbait ere, eskola apurtu eta geure mami-guria arrotz-errietan erakusteko, beurena bein goxo ta guria zala ikus zezaten.

Ekiñak eta ariak, beti ere ondoren ona. Ekin genion eta ari ginan, eta gure aleginek uste gabeko igali mardula bildu zuten. Iragana dagonillean, urtero oi dute nez, International Pen'go bazkideak, Edia burgo'n, Ezkozian, elkartu ziran. Ludi guziko bilkurek ordezkariak biali zituten. Biltzar artan, euskal idazleen naikaria batzar buruak azaldu zuen, eta batzarkide guziek, ao-batez, gure eskabidea onartu zuten. Geroztik, Pen Euskal-Bilkura, zugaitz eger orren kimu gertatu zan, eta laister abar sendoa izateko bidean egokitu.

Gure arteko batzarra deitu genun. Lur zabalean sakabanatutako eusko-idazleek Prantzia ta Amerika barna erauntsi gogo-

Basque PEN in three leaps

The history of Basque PEN in three leaps

Three years after the creation of *Euskaltzaindia* (Royal Academy of the Basque Language) in 1921, PEN International was born in London, originally under the plain name of PEN (from the acronym *Poets, Essayists, Novelists*). The organisation grew quickly in a short period of time, resulting in 25 PEN Centres across Europe within four years, and chapters existing in Latin America and China by 1931. Today, there are about 150 centres scattered throughout more than 100 countries, and including some 25,000 writers.

The Basques undertook the creation of their PEN Centre in 1950. As Manuel de Irujo explained to Luis Villalonga on a letter, the initiative arose in Argentina. The writers that gathered around the *Argentine Institute of Basque Studies* and the publishing house *Ekin* brought forth the idea of creating the group, and it was them who comprised the first list of PEN members. Some of them would go on to compose the first board of directors (Manuel de Irujo, Jokin Zaitegi, Justo Garate, Ixaka Lopez Mendizabal, and Isidoro Fagoaga), but there were a few other writers and journalists who signed up as well, among them, the brothers Bernardo, Mariano, and Jose Estornes Lasa, Andres de Irujo, Jose Antonio Agirre, and Jesus Galindez.

Soon, though, certain other writers would also join the project. Firstly, writers from the provinces of Lapurdi, Zuberoa, and Nafarroa Behere (provinces of the Northern Basque Country belonging to France) joined in. Manuel de Irujo asked Manuel de Intxausti for help in providing him with the names of more writers, and Irujo sent the list of names that Intxausti had given

him to Manuel de la Sota: Pierre Lhande, Louis Dassance, Etienne Salaberri, Piarres Lartzabal, Jean Diharce «Iratzeder», and Jean Jauregiberri were the best known. The writers who lived in Argentina considered important that the headquarters of the Basque PEN Chapter be in the Basque Country, so they placed the new association in Manuel de la Sota's home, in the Etcheperdia address of Biarritz.

They did not extend an invitation to writers from the Southern Basque Country. Andima Ibiñagabeitia explained the reasons for this in an article that was published in the journal *Euzko Gogoia* in 1951:

We knocked on doors in Zuberoa, Nafarroa Behere, and Lapurdi, and the doors would open with the sweetest smiles and affection. We couldn't, however, knock doors among the writers located in Nafarroa, Araba, Gipuzkoa, and Bizkaia. We have so many writers there, and they are the best, no doubt. We were afraid, that someone might take our cries as political. We were scared that our calls would not reach the hands of our beloved writers. We feared, also, that something bad would happen to the writers themselves. We are not fearful, at least not in character, but we didn't want to bring harm to anybody.

PEN's trajectory was short, inevitably. The members of the board of directors were in Paris, Lapurdi, and Guatemala, and they had no money, nor an internal structure. PEN's run came to an end shortly. In 1987 they took up the initiative again, and once more, its lifetime was brief.

In 2004, however, a group of writers picked up the PEN project with a firm hand, and began by reinforcing the internal structure, having learned a lesson from the previous two lifetimes. 17 years have gone by since 2004 and Basque PEN is still going strong. Who would have told Manuel de Irujo, that 71 years after he had founded the Basque PEN Chapter in 1950, it would still be alive and kicking, under the guidance of a writer born in Lizarra, like him.

Laura Mintegi Lakarra
President of Basque PEN

The aim of the Basque PEN Chapter and **international recognition** (1950)

In the article published on the journal *Euzko Gogoa*, Ibiñagabeitia announced the aim of the Basque PEN Chapter.

Basque writers, as of lately, have stayed away from the writers' meetings. The news of the works created among us have been usually confined to the borders of the Basque Country, much like the soft walnut meat inside its hard shell.

Fortunately, our writers have also produced some noteworthy works, and we have had some intelligent men among us. Unfortunately, though, their acknowledgement has not flown past our fields and valleys. It was about time, after all, that we should break the shell and we should display our soft walnut meat abroad, so they could see that it is as soft and tasty as theirs. (Euzko Gogoa, 1951, 2nd year, issues 7-8).

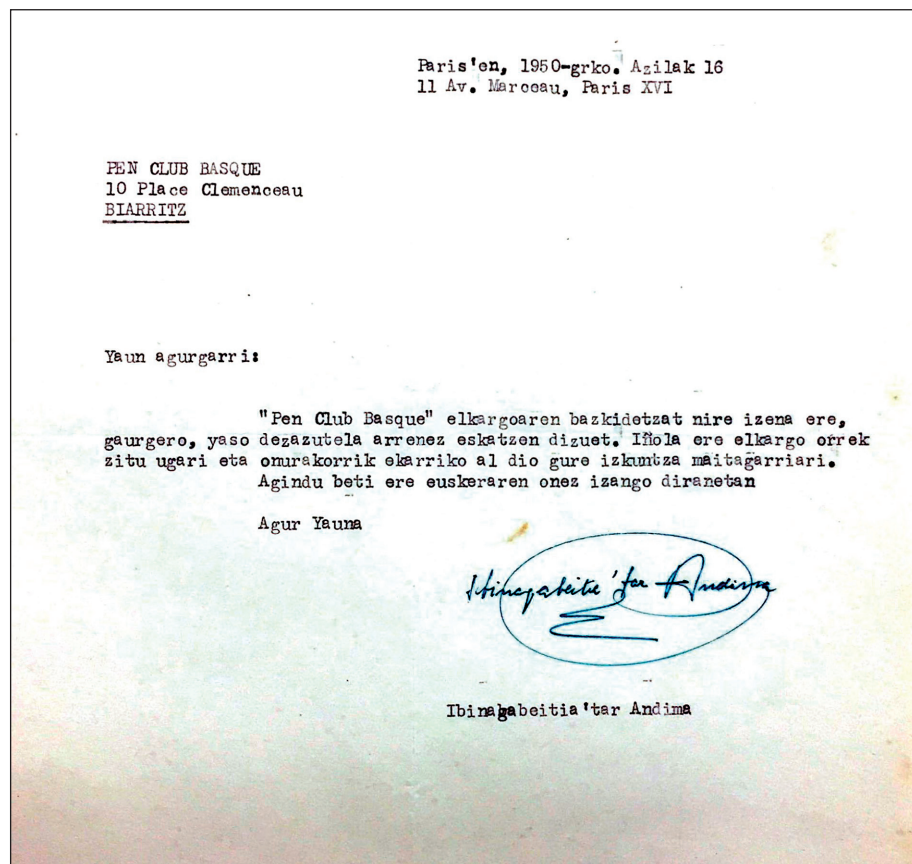
Once their aim was clear, they got in touch with the board of PEN International, and from the very beginning they obtained a lot of help from Catalan PEN. The Catalan PEN Club had been created in 1923, the third in the world, and the delegate from Catalonia, Batista i Roca, facilitated relations with the headquarters in London.

Angel de Gondra, delegate of the Basque Government in London, sent the documents to Hermon Ould, secretary of PEN International. Luis Villalonga had taken care of preparing the documents in Biarritz, following Manuel de Irujo's orders from Paris: the statutes, a list of the writers, the project (underlining the importance of the language), and the membership application form.

The 22nd PEN Congress took place in Edinburgh, from the 22nd to the 28th of August 1950, and, as Ibiñagabeitia mentioned in the article, «In that gathering, the Chair explained the thoughts and wishes of the Basque writers, and all the members accepted unanimously. Since then, the Basque PEN Chapter became a sprout of that beautiful tree». The Basque PEN Chapter was accepted without a vote and by means of applause.

Spain did not have a PEN Club, and neither did Portugal. The previous year, that is, in 1949, Jorge Semprun's proposal was taken into consideration in the Congress of Italy, and it was agreed that the writers who were exiled from Spain would create a PEN Centre. Thus, the Scots invited two well-known writers to Edinburgh, one Catalan and the other Spanish. The Spanish was Jacinto Benavente. Previously, Salvador de Madariaga and the Catalan Carles Pi i Sunyer were asked about the invitation, and both replied (each on his own), that they welcomed the invitation of the Catalan writer, but not of Benavente, «for his known cretinism». Nevertheless, the Scots invited both writers to the Congress, and, as a protest, neither the Catalan writer nor the emigrated Spanish writers showed up in Edinburgh.

→ Letter sent by Andima Ibiñagabeitia in 16 November 1950 in order to become a Basque PEN member.



The first members' meeting, in Paris (1951)

A few months after being accepted in Edinburgh, a meeting was called in Paris on the 24th of March of 1951, «On 11 Av. Marceau, Paris 16th, at five o'clock in the afternoon», to be precise, in the headquarters of «Groupe Parlementaire Basque, Délégation d'Euzkadi» (Basque Parliamentary Group, Basque Country Delegation). Many writers expressed their inability to attend, as they lived far away, so the decisions on how to compose the board of directors and Secretary were made by those who did attend.

Andima Ibiñagabeitia asked Sebero Altube to be the head, and Altube, who was about to turn 72, replied the following from Pau, in a letter retrieved thanks to Pako Sodupe:

My dear friend: I received your letter of the 2nd of this month. You asked me if I accepted to be a member of the board of directors of "Basque PEN Chapter's" Main Committee. Yes indeed, but that membership may result in the need for myself to move here and there from time to time, and if so, I would have some trouble meeting that condition, for this weak health of mine does not allow me to travel back and forth.

So there you have my answer: if this incapacity of mine is not a hindrance, I

gladly accept the designation, otherwise I must leave it. At any rate, thank you very much to all the persons who have honoured me with this proposal.

Regards, I remain at your disposal

Garaiko prentsan eta barneko dokumentazioan jasota gelditu zenez, idazle hauekin osatu zen PEN Euskal Bilkuraren lehenengo zuzendaritza taldea: Sebero Altube, Jean

Elizalde, Henri Gavel, Justo Garate, Nicolas Ormaetxea «Orixe», Piarres Lafitte, Ixaka Lopez Mendizabal, Jokin Zaitegi, Michel Etcheverri, Xabier Iratzeder, Isidoro Fagoaga, Manuel Irujo, Xabier Landaburu eta Manuel de la Sota. Eta idazkari bi izendatu zituzten, Andima Ibiñagabeitia eta Jon Mirande.

↓ Letter written by Sebero Altube to Andima Ibiñagabeitia from Pau, on 5 April 1951.

Pau'dik, 1951'eko Apirilak 5 74

Ibiñagabeitia'ri Andima jauna - Paris

Une adiskide on: Artu beti ilonim 2'ko sure karta.

"Pen Euskal Bilkura"ren Komite Nagusiko burukide izatea ontrat artzen betan betan irarustatu. Bai bein; baina burukideta orok balakarke noiz-noizera ara ido ona norbera joan bear izatea, eta ola balite, gaitz nute kondizio ori betetea, me osasun makaltu orok espaitit wten joan-itoritatu ibiltzea.

Or dena ba nure irantema: baldin me ezintza ori eragozpen espada, ontrat artzen bet izentate ori, bertala utzi egin bear.

Dana-bala mila urte eskentea oieraz ooratue nauten lagun orori.

Azur eta agintu

Altube

Struggling to keep up with the challenge (1954)

The next Congress, the 23rd, took place in Lausanne, from the 22nd to the 28th of June 1951, and by then the Basque writers had difficulties to send somebody as a delegate. They made the request to Manu de la Sota.

«Dear friend: although I anticipate your refusal, it seems essential to me to make a proposal (...). As for the financing of your trip, I will be very frank. We do not have even one franc, but I foresee that we will be able to face the expenses, if not ante, at least post partum».

There is no record of having sent any delegates to Switzerland.

In 1952 David Carver, the new international secretary, sent a couple of letters to the secretaries to ask them what kind of activities the Basque PEN Chapter had carried out in the last

year, as they had no news of Basque writers, and he was preparing a report for the upcoming 24th Congress which would take place in Nice. There was no Basque delegate in the Congress of Nice.

No Basque delegate attended the 25th Congress either, which happened in Dublin and Belfast between the 8th and 13th of June 1953. Nor the one organised in Amsterdam in 1954.

In 1954 Andima Ibiñagabeitia went to Guatemala to help Jokin Zaitegi in publishing the journal *Euzko Gogoia*, and since that time, any traces of the Basque PEN Chapter were lost.



↑ On the left, Andima Ibiñagabeitia, in the centre, Jokin Zaitegi, and on the right, Nikolas Ormaetxea «Orixe», in the Santa Monica residence of Guatemala, in 1954; in Velez de Mendizabal, J.M. (1981). *Jokin Zaitegi*. Izarra.

The second lifetime of Basque PEN (1987)

In 1987 PEN was born again in the Basque Country, this time, with the name Basque PEN Club. Famous writers made up the group: Jean Louis Davant, Jose Luis Alvarez Enparantza «Txillardegia», Bitoriano Gandiaga, Jose Azurmendi, Txomin Peillen, Joseba Sarrionandia, Eñaut Etxamendi, Laura Mintegi, Joxe Agustin Arrieta, Martin Ugalde, Edorta Jimenez, Koldo Izagirre, Patxi Zabaleta, Juan Mari Lekuona, Mikel Antza, Patri Urkizu, Manex Goienetxe, Xabier Mendiguren, Pablo Sastre, Xarles Bidegain, Josu Landa, Xabier Montoia, and Josemari Velez de Mendizabal.

That group was active in the Basque Country and internationally for two years. Pablo Sastre represented the Basque group in the 1987 PEN Congress in Puerto Rico and in 1988 in Seoul (Korea); and Laura Mintegi took part in the meeting called by the English PEN in Cambridge in 1988 and in the 53rd Congress in Maastricht in 1989.

Even though it had no activity for some years, the PEN group still received invitations to participate in international meetings. Thus, Jon Kortazar was in the Congress of Barcelona (1992), in the 60th Congress organised by Galician PEN in Santiago de Compostela (1993), and in the PEN Congress of Prague (1994).

↓ Basque PEN's board of directors on 18 September 2007. From left to right and from top to bottom, Asel Luzarraga, Urtzi Urrutikoetxea, Paul Bilbao, Teresa Toda, Laura Mintegi, Paddy Rekalde, Lutxo Egia, and Joseba Tobar-Arbulu. Asier Serrano is missing.



The third lifetime of Basque PEN (2004)

Carme Arenas and Carles Torner from Catalan PEN tried to encourage Basque writers to create a PEN Centre again. Catalan PEN organised a wide campaign internationally in February 2003 to denounce the closure of the newspaper *Euskaldunon Egunkaria*, and they could not understand how there was not a Basque PEN group.

Martxelo Otamendi from *Egunkaria*, the writers Maite Gonzalez Esnal and Laura Mintegi, and Ana Urkiza and Tere Irastortza from Euskal Idazleen Elkartea (*Basque Writers' Association*) met up with the Catalans in Bilbao in February 2004, on the first anniversary of the closure. The delegates of the EIE did not see a way to create a new organisation, but some writers took up the challenge, and on 30 April 2004, 60 writers decided to create Basque PEN for the third time, in a meeting held in Donostia.

Txomin Peillen was appointed honorary president, and Laura Mintegi was named president. Another seven writers formed the board of directors: Joxemari Iturralde, Eider Rodriguez, Lutxo Egia, Fito Rodriguez, Paddy Rekalde, Asier Serrano, and Teresa Toda. From 2004 to 2021, several writers have been part of the board of directors; among them, Paul Bilbao, Juanjo Ispizua, Hasier Rekondo, Joseba Tobar-Arbulu, Gari Berasaluze, Itxaro Borda, Maialen Sobrino, Xabi Paya, and, especially, Urtzi Urrutikoetxea. He has been the president of PEN from 2012 to 2021, until Laura Mintegi was appointed president again.

The group was formed in April, and in May Catalan PEN invited the president to Barcelona, since the Writers in Prison Committee was meeting there, and it was a good opportunity to organise the rebirth of the Basque PEN chapter with the delegates of PEN International.

Therefore, in September 2004, Mintegi and Iturralde, the president and vice-president, respectively, went to the 70th Congress in Tromsø (Norway) seeking the approval from PEN International. Just like in 1950, the Basque PEN Centre was approved unanimously, without holding a vote and by means of applause.

From 2004 to today, the delegates from Basque PEN have attended every single congress, and have also taken part in most of the meetings of the four PEN Committees; especially, in the Writers in Prison Committee and the Committee for Translation and Linguistic Rights, but likewise in the Writers for Peace Committee and PEN's Women's Committee.

➤ Demonstration held in Donostia on 22 February 2003 to denounce the closure of *Euskaldunon Egunkaria*, two days after the newspaper was closed down.



International resolutions in favour of *Euskaldunon Egunkaria* (2004)

Along with Catalan PEN, Basque PEN has put forward three resolutions in favour of *Egunkaria* in PEN International Congresses. The first one was in 2004, in the same Congress where the Basque PEN group was accepted into the PEN Community, in Tromsø. The resolution demanded an investigation from the Spanish Government to look into the closure of *Egunkaria*. The resolution was adopted unanimously.

Two other resolutions also received the approval of all PEN Centres. In the 71st Congress that took place in Bled in 2005, PEN International requested the Spanish Judiciary to abandon or expedite the legal proceedings against *Egin* and *Egunkaria*. It should be noted that *Egin* had been closed down in 1998 and that the trial began seven years later, in 2005. *Egunkaria*, on the other hand, was closed down in 2003, and its trial occurred in February 2010, again seven years after the closure.

In the resolution introduced at the 76th Congress held in Tokyo, Basque PEN demanded the Spanish Government to free Martxelo Otamendi, Iñaki Uria, Joan Mari Torrealdai, Txema Auzmendi, and Xabier Oleaga, and to investigate the tortures that most of them had to endure. The members of the PEN Congress adopted the resolution, and PEN International sent the petition to the Spanish Government.

Year after year, in the defence of persecuted writers and journalists (2004-2021)

One of the most important tasks of PEN Centres is to defend writers and journalists who are subject to persecution for expressing themselves freely, and Basque PEN has also played this role for years.

In 2006, for instance, historian and PEN member Iñaki Egaña was arrested at the New York airport upon landing, and sent back to Madrid a few hours later. Basque PEN and American PEN sent a letter of complaint to the State Secretary of the USA Condoleezza Rice, and the resolution in favour of Egaña was approved by all Centres in the 72nd PEN Congress of Berlin.

Throughout 2007, some Basque musicians were censored and attacked; such as Fermin Muguruza, Soziedad Alkoholika, Su Ta Gar, and Asier Serrano. Basque PEN collaborated with the project *Film on Freedom of Expression*, in order to spread the testimonies of the persecuted musicians through audio-visual media.

The same year, they expressed their support to Josetxo Rodriguez and Javier Ripa, comedians from the newspaper *Deia*, for the censorship they endured.

In 2008, Basque PEN denounced publicly and internationally the attacks that ETA had carried out against the newspaper *El*

Remembering the murder of Nigerian Ken Saro-Wiwa (2005)

In the initial years of this third stage, besides participating in international meetings and reunions, Basque PEN organised several initiatives in the Basque Country. It echoed worldwide campaigns more than once, and in the most severe cases, it published related articles on the press. It covered the crimes that Russia had committed in Chechnya when the journalist Anna Politovskaia was murdered in Moscow, or the killing of the Armenian journalist Hrant Dink (Istanbul, 2007).

One such occasion on which the local initiatives coincided with an international campaign was the 10th anniversary of the execution of Ogoni writer and activist Ken Saro-Wiwa from Nigeria. On the International Day of the Imprisoned Writer which is typically celebrated in November, Basque PEN organised a special event in the *Plaza Barria* (New Square) of Bilbao. In collaboration with the president of the *Nigerian Progressive Union* Leo Ogunleye, the community of Nigerians living on the capital of Bizkaia paid tribute to Saro-Wiwa, by reading along his poems accompanied by music, both in English and in Basque.

Ken Saro-Wiwa was the leader of the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People; he denounced the environmental destruction taking place in Ogoniland, in the Niger Delta, due to the activity of Royal Dutch, Shell, and other international oil producers. He was arrested in 1994, and sentenced to death after an unfair trial with no legal guarantees whatsoever. A year later, he was hanged on the 10th of November of 1995 in the prison of Port Harcourt, along with eight other Ogoni leaders.



↑ On the 10th anniversary of Saro Wiwa's killing, homage by Basque PEN and the members of the *Nigerian Progressive Union*, in Bilbao, on the 27th of November of 2005.

Correo and the media outlet EITB. Likewise, it met with journalist Gorka Landaburu to learn about the reality of threatened reporters who had to be escorted by bodyguards. Landaburu received a letter bomb at his home, and was gravely injured.

In the years 2013 and 2014, certain digital outlets were subject to censorship, such as *Apurtu*, *Herrira*, and *Topatu*, and Basque PEN publicly denounced all those violations. In 2013, by the same token, it denounced the refusal to grant a licence to *Euskalerria Irratia*, a radio station broadcasting entirely in Basque.

In 2009, the case of PEN member Asel Luzarraga was appalling. While living in the Mapuche village of Wall Mapu, the Chilean police arrested and imprisoned him, accusing him of having planted four bombs, despite the fact that Luzarraga was out of the country at the given dates. The platform *Asel aske* (free Asel) carried out large mobilizations in the Basque Country to denounce the case, and Basque PEN made diplomatic efforts in Chile in order to get him out of the Temuco prison. On top of that, the complaint took on an international scale through PEN International. Luzarraga spent 42 days in prison, and seven months under house arrest. Although the prosecutor's initial request was for a 15-year prison sentence, he was ultimately condemned to 220 days. Since he had already served 251 days under arrest, he was able to leave Chile in 2010.

The companionship of Kurdish writers and journalists (2008)

The Basque PEN Centre stabilized and made its way firmly as the years went by. Having realized the importance of the solidarity received regarding the *Egin* and *Egunkaria* cases, Basque PEN deliberated that it should actively work on defending the rights of international persecuted journalists, and immediately took on the case of Kurdish journalists Adnan Hassanpour and Hiwa Butimar. Thus, in 2007, both of them were named *honorary members* of Basque PEN. That year, the regime of Iran had sentenced both journalists to death, and their relatives were asking for help, trying to internationalise the case, in order to avoid punishment.

Leyla Hassanpour, Adnan's sister, and Hadi Butimar, Hiwa's brother, gave their testimony before the Human Rights Commission of the Basque Parliament, on the 16th of June of 2008. The Parliament of Navarre also welcomed the siblings of the two journalists on 23 June 2008, and all parties signed a resolution to show solidarity with the two Kurdish journalists. Basque PEN awarded both journalists with the *Fountain Pen* award, and the press covered the case of the Kurds extensively, through interviews and by reporting on the conferences and round-tables that had taken place.

The international pressure bore fruit. In September 2008, the Supreme Court dropped the death penalty, and ordered another trial. In 2009 Adnan Hassanpour was sentenced to 15 years in prison. He was freed on September 2016, after almost ten years of imprisonment.

→ Leyla Hassanpour, Adnan Hassanpour's sister, and Hadi Butimar, Hiwa Butimar's brother, explained the situation of the two Kurdish journalists in the Basque Parliament on 17 June 2005.

Basque Writing magazine, a window to the world (2008)



↑ The *Basque Writing* magazine is published in English as of 2008, to be distributed internationally. Pictured, the second issue of 2020, dedicated to Joan Mari Torrealdai.



Since the first issue came out in 2008, the *Basque Writing* magazine published by Basque PEN has come a long way.

Its main goal is to introduce, in English, literary and cultural projects that are created and elaborated in Basque. Basque culture, in spite of its smallness, does have something to offer to the whole wide world, and that despite being an old culture, it can offer a dynamic, lively, and modern image in the world.

Since the first monograph dedicated to children's and youth literature, many more have been published, such as the proliferation of readers' clubs, the history of Basque, literature produced in exile, the lively dynamics of *bertsolaritza* (Basque sung poetry), the importance of translation, the *Korrika* phenomenon (exhibition race held bi-annually in the Basque Country to raise funds for the Basque-language teaching organization AEK), poetry-based events, the transformative power of comic books, the influence of *Ikastolas* (type of primary and secondary school teaching primarily in Basque), writing in a small language, the 75th anniversary of the bombing of Gernika, literature and political conflict, and in the year 2020, the state of affairs caused by the pandemic.

All the monographs have sparked some interest, both home and abroad. Whether they were PEN members or not, the magazine has included articles by the most important voices in Basque literature; among others, Mariasun Landa, Iban Zaldúa, Itxaro Borda, Oier Guillan, Harkaitz Cano, Bernardo Atxaga, Karme Jaio, Kirmen Uribe, Eider Rodriguez, or Lorea Agirre.

PEN Fountain Pens: in honour of Txomin Peillen (2009)

Starting in 2005 and for six years, Basque PEN organised a special mention called the *PEN Fountain Pen*, one year in honour of a person who had stood out in Basque culture, and the following year with an international perspective. The first to receive a *PEN Fountain Pen* was Joan Mari Torrealdai, on 23 April, for the work he had done in favour of Basque culture and on censorship in the Franco era.

In 2006, the *PEN Fountain Pen* was given to British writer and Nobel Prize winner for Literature Harold Pinter, at his home in London. On that occasion, the goal was to highlight the work that Pinter had done for marginalised literatures; especially, the work done in favour of the Kurdish language in the play *Mountain Language*.

In April 2007 the *Fountain Pen* was awarded to Juan Jose Agirre, for his work on the Benedictine archives of Lazkao in 1973, which is an essential reference for any research on Basque history and nation-building in the 20th century.

In 2008 the *Fountain Pen* was offered to Adnan Hassanpour and Hiwa Butimar. Their relatives, sister Leyla Hassanpour and brother Hadi Butimar, collected the *Fountain Pens* in the literary and musical event that was held in the Kafe Antzokia venue of Bilbao.

In 2009, Txomin Peillen, one of the first founders of Basque PEN and honorary president of the current Centre, was honoured once again. He received a *PEN Fountain Pen* for his strong stance in favour of freedom of expression, and for having been a PEN member on all three occasions on which Basque PEN was founded or re-founded (in 1951, 1987, and 2004).

The last *Fountain Pen* was granted in 2010, to the editor of the *Azadiya Welat* newspaper, Eser Uyansiz, and to Teresa Toda, deputy editor of the *Egin* newspaper. In the case of both newspapers, freedom of expression was seriously violated, and the journalists suffered the direct consequences of the persecution. Teresa Toda had been in the prison of Cordoba for three years at the time, and *Egin* journalist Martin Garitano collected the award on her behalf.



Basque women writers to the forefront (2011)

In March 2011, a new initiative was launched to promote the visibility of literature written by Basque women, in collaboration with *Emakunde* (the Basque institute for Women), and with the aid of publishers and the distributor *Elkar*. On the eve of 8 March, Basque PEN releases a poster with the covers of all books written by Basque women in the last 12 months, and it displays the poster on the windows of all bookshops in the seven Basque territories, for at least two weeks.

Year by year, the design and even the content of the poster has changed. In some years, a space has been given to children's and young people's literature; in others, in contrast, to women translating into Basque. In addition to the poster distributed to bookshops, the digital version is also available to anyone who wants it, due to the growing number of bookshops, organisations, schools and town halls that ask for the poster.

As mentioned above, Basque PEN has participated in the meetings of the International Women Writers' Committee, Itxaro Borda being the delegate on behalf of Basque PEN. From 2021 onwards, Leire Bilbao and Arrate Egaña also compose Basque PEN's Women Writers' Committee along with Itxaro Borda.

↑ Honorary President Txomin Peillen received the PEN Fountain Pen on 12 June 2005. Peillen is the only member who has been present in PEN's all three lifetimes.

→ Since 2011, Basque PEN collects the works published by Basque women writers on a Basque PEN poster, to be distributed to bookshops, in collaboration with *Emakunde* (the Basque institute for women). Pictured, the 2021 poster.



In collaboration with the Sami writers (2012)

All these years, Basque PEN has been in touch with several Centres, as well as other countries, languages, and associations. Some of the most special among them were probably the Sami writers. They were in the Basque Country for the first time in 2012, through journalist Stein Torger Svala. Some 30 writers had come to Bilbao to get first-hand news about the Basque culture and language. They visited *Euskaltzaindia* (Royal Academy of the Basque Language), the *Basque House*, the Book Fair of Durango, and the Martin Ugalde Culture Park. They danced and sang in the *Kafe Antzokia* venue of Bilbao, got to know Gernika and Urdaibai led by PEN member Edorta Jimenez, visited the *Hugo-Enea* writers' house in Pasaia, and in Donostia, on behalf of the city council, they received an invitation for the 2016 European Capital of Culture.

Said and done, they came back four years later, in 2016, this time taking Donostia as the focal point. They met with the Etxepare Institute, and the organisations Bertsozale Elkarte (association of Basque singing poets) and Bagera (pro-Basque language organisation). They also had a meeting with Garabide (organisation to revitalise marginalised languages), and cultivated a long-lasting relationship between the two Centres, under the guidance of Basque PEN.



↑ Sami writers visited the Basque Country in 2012 and 2016, in order to learn more about Basque culture and literature. Pictured, Sami writers in Donostia in 2016.

The event of the International Day of the Imprisoned Writer (2012)

In November 2012, during the days marking the International Day of the Imprisoned Writer worldwide, Basque PEN held a highly acclaimed event on the Boulevard of Donostia, in collaboration with the association Ataramiñe. They built a prison cell in the middle of the street, and several writers and journalists read aloud a few texts written by writers who had been imprisoned; among them Fermin Munarriz, Laura Mintegi, Gorka Landaburu, Karlos Zurutuza, Mixel Sarasketa, Iñaki Egaña, Fito Rodriguez, Martxelo Otamendi, and Juan Karlos Izagirre.



↑ Eider Rodriguez read Mikel Iburguren's poems aloud in the context of the International Day of the Imprisoned Writer, in the prison cell that was built on the Boulevard of Donostia, on 15 November 2012.

→ Itxaro Borda and the members of PEN's Women Writers' Committee in Reykjavík (Iceland), on 10 September 2013.

The language policies of the Government of Navarre in Iceland (2013)

Eight years after the third re-founding of Basque PEN, in 2012, Laura Mintegi stepped down as president, and was appointed treasurer; Urtzi Urrutikoetxea took the presidency, for nine years.



The PEN members had brought two resolutions to the Congress of Iceland. One of them denounced the language policy that the Government of Navarre had adopted against Basque: it refused to grant a licence to the radio *Euskalerrria Irratia*, hampered the broadcasting of Basque media outlet ETB in Navarre, and there were constant obstacles to teaching in Basque.

In the other resolution, the Basque PEN Centre, together with the Occitan Centre, demanded the French State to accept the Letter in favour of Marginalised Languages that the European Council had drafted in 1992, and to show respect for the languages within its territory. It was the first resolution to be made with Occitan PEN, and the first, also, on the French State.





Welcoming diversity and Basque as a bridge (2016)

PEN knows exile all too well, having defended writers who have had to leave their homes for a hundred years. Basque PEN was even founded abroad for the first time. In response to the phenomena caused by wars and migratory movements, the stance of Western governments has become increasingly hardened.

Consequently, it made a map of the languages spoken in the Basque Country on the International Mother Language Day of 2015 (21 February), and this map has been used many times ever since, to depict the linguistic diversity within the Basque Country and to claim that Basque must be a guiding, common thread to this diversity.

In 2016, the International Mother Language Day coincided with the European Capital of Culture in Donostia. Basque PEN prepared a series of conferences named «*Ongi Etorri*» (Welcome) for the whole weekend. Rhodi Melle, journalist in the Rojava region of Syria, was in Donostia, and so was the Kabyle writer who had fled Algeria, Kaissa Ould Braham. Itziar Idiazabal and Txema Abarrategi from the association *Garabide* gave a speech each, and PEN members Itxaro Borda, Lutxo Egia, and Asier Serrano gave a recital with music. To finish off the event, Petra Elser and the organisation *Banaiz Bagara* made the audience sing along, and demonstrated in a festive atmosphere that diversity is a treasure and that Basque is indeed a bridge between languages.

↑ Poster that Basque PEN put out on the International Mother Language Day, on 21 February 2015, in collaboration with the Basque Parliament. Designed by Esteban Montorio.

The Protocol to Ensure Linguistic Rights in Donostia (2016)

Among all the events organised as part of the European Capital of Culture in 2016, one of the most noteworthy was the *Protocol to Ensure Linguistic Rights*. It must be borne in mind that 2016 marked the 20th anniversary since the *Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights* was signed in Barcelona. The goal was to set some practical steps to ensure the linguistic rights that were adopted in Barcelona in 1996. Paul Bilbao, head of *Euskalgintzaren Kontseilua* and PEN member, and Basque delegate of the Committee for Translation and Linguistic Rights of PEN International for many years and several organisations worked in unison: ELEN (European Language Equality Network), Linguapax, ECMI (European Centre for Minority Issues), CIEMEN, UNPO, *Euskalgintzaren Kontseilua*, and PEN International.

Euskalgintzaren Kontseilua received hundreds of contributions; the Scientific Committee did some filtering and gave it an academic perspective, and in the end a document including 185 measures was agreed upon. On the 17th of December 2016, before the organisations representing the whole European civil society, Joan Mari Torrealdai read out the important manifesto *Bagara Nor* (*We Are Worthy*).

Teresa Toda's testimony in the Meeting of Persecuted Writers (2015)

TPEN Member and deputy editor of *Egin* Teresa Toda was released from prison in November 2013. The editor Jabier Salutregi remained almost another two years in prison, as well as the members of the board of directors of *Egin* (Patxo and Isidro Murga, Manu Intxauspe, Pablo Gorostiaga, Jesus Mari Zalakain, Jose Luis Elkoro, Karlos Trenor, and Joxean Etxeberria).

Basque PEN brought forth the denouncement of the injustice in the *Egin* case to the Writers in Prison Committee that had met in Amsterdam. Teresa Toda, recently released from the Cordoba prison, thoroughly explained what had happened to the journalists and board of directors of *Egin*, and the testimony astonished all the audience. She was even proposed to be a candidate to lead the Commission, but due to some visa-related problems she was unable to participate in that year's Congress in Quebec, and the legal problems to travel prevented her from presenting her candidacy in person.

Basque PEN gave its all to promote the *Protocol to Ensure Linguistic Rights* internationally. Hand in hand with *Euskalgintzaren Kontseilua*, Paul Bilbao took the document all over Europe, and it also reached outside Europe through PEN members. Urtzi Urrutikoetxea and Laura Mintegi presented the relevant project in front of dozens of African writers in Johannesburg, and underlined the need for input from other continents, realities, and cultures. The following year, they did likewise in Bengaluru and Pune (India), Chiapas and Manila.

As an indirect result of such tough work, Basque PEN has been put in charge of PEN International's Committee for Translation and Linguistic Rights, having Urtzi Urrutikoetxea as its head, after being led by Macedonian PEN originally, and subsequently under the guidance of Catalan PEN for another 12 years.

↓ Paul Bilbao, general secretary of Euskalgintzaren Kontseilua, and Xabi Paya, project manager of the European Capital of Culture, unveiled the *Protocol to Ensure Linguistic Rights* in Donostia, on 17 December 2016.

↓↓ 80 years after the closure of the *Eguna* newspaper, tribute events were held. In the image, Xabier Kintana (Euskaltzaindia), Irune Zuluaga (Fundación Sabino Arana), journalists Iñaki Mendizabal, Odile Kruzeta, Urtzi Urrutikoetxea, Idurre Eskisabel and Javi Onaindia and Laura Mintegi.



The newspaper *Eguna*, revitalised after 80 years (2017)

It is important to remember those who have come before us, as it is essential to know where we come from in order to know where to go, as much as it is important to know whose workload has got us where we have got to.

The year 1937 was one of the highest points for Basque journalism. The newspaper *Eguna* was created at the height of a war. To honour the 80th anniversary of that event, they launched a wide initiative. On the one hand, in collaboration with *Euskaltzaindia* (Royal Academy of the Basque Language), the Sabino Arana Foundation, and the City Hall of Bilbao, they put up a plaque commemorating the newspaper *Eguna* on Posta Street in Bilbao, right in front of the house where the newspaper was once edited. On the same days, three round tables were organised at the *Euskaltzaindia* headquarters, and another round table in Gasteiz.

On the other hand, to emphasise that the chain has not been broken, an attempt was made to link that first all-Basque newspaper with the newspaper *Berria*. Thus, in the same period in which the newspaper *Eguna* formerly lived, the newspaper *Berria* covered, day by day, the news that were published in 1937. Lutxo Egia made a selection of those chronicles.

To commemorate the brief life of the newspaper *Eguna*, Basque PEN explained in four languages the importance of the newspaper behind the front cover of the first issue's facsimile, and sent it to the 250 *Euskal Etxe* (Basque Houses) and associations in the diaspora, with the help of the Basque Government.

Despite the pandemic's disruption, activity continues unabated (2020)

In 2020, the SARS-CoV2 virus caused a worldwide pandemic, and this had a very significant impact on Basque PEN's activity, as well as on PEN International's.

Even though the health state of affairs imposed some special conditions, the activity did not cease. In collaboration with the Quebecois PEN Centre and Laval University, a few workshops were held within the wide program that the Etxepare Institute planned to carry out in Quebec, and, despite a year's delay, it managed to still organise the initiatives.

In the endless task of memorialization, Josu Martinez's powerful film *Anti* was displayed on 21 February, International Mother Language Day, having the director himself present at the telematic round table held immediately after the screening of the film, presented by journalist and PEN member Gaizka Aranguren. This also led to the twinning with the Welsh PEN Centre, and both Centres are preparing further events.

There have also been some changes within PEN. Urtzi Urrutikoetxea took over as head of PEN International's Committee for Translation and Linguistic Rights, thus stepping down from the presidency he had held since 2012. As of 23 January 2021, Laura Mintegi is once again the head of Basque PEN, and the new members of the board of directors are Paul Bilbao, Xabi Paya, Urtzi Urrutikoetxea, Itxaro Borda, Gari Berasaluze, and Maialen Sobrino.



Presidents of the Basque PEN

Sebero Altube	1950-1951
Jean Louis Davant	1987-1989
Laura Mintegi	2004-2012
Urtzi Urrutikoetxea	2012-2021
Laura Mintegi	2021-present

Members of the Board of the Basque PEN

Laura Mintegi	2004-present
Jose Mari Iturralde	2004-2009
Eider Rodriguez	2004-2009
Paddy Rekalde	2004-2009
Fito Bornaetxea	2004-2009
Teresa Toda	2004-2021
Lutxo Egja	2004-2021
Asier Serrano	2004-2021
Urtzi Urrutikoetxea	2009-present
Paul Bilbao	2009-present
Juanjo Ispizua	2009-2013
Hasier Rekondo	2009-2021
Petra Elser	2013-2021
Xabi Paya	2021-present
Gari Berasaluze	2021-present
Itxaro Borda	2021-present
Maialen Sobrino	2021-present

On the cover: Sally Howell, *Tribute to the PEN Charter*, 1990 (detail)

The authors

Laura Mintegi Lakarra is a Basque writer and academic. She has published a short story book and five novels, some of which have been published in English, Spanish, Dutch and German. She is a lecturer at the University of the Basque Country, and Head of Department of Language and Literature. She is a Corresponding Member of Euskaltzaindia. In 2004, she re-founded Basque PEN along with other writers, and has been the president of the centre from 2004 to 2012 and again starting in 2021.

Urtzi Urrutikoetxea is a Basque writer and journalist. He has written poetry and fiction, and has a wide experience in international journalism. He has worked in contact with the minorized languages, and has been involved in many PEN projects. Urrutikoetxea served as president of Basque PEN from 2012 to 2021 and is currently chair of the Translation and Language Rights Commission at PEN International.

This book was published for the first time in 2021, in Basque and English .

© Euskal PEN eta Txalaparta
ISBN: 978-84-18252-63-1
Legal deposit: NA 1204-2021



Translation

Beñat Azkargorta

Correction

Joshua Gamble

Pictures

Sabino Arana Fundazioa eta Euskal PENen artxiboa



Layout

Monti Diseinu Grafikoa

Supported by

Etxepare Euskara Institutua
eta Bizkaiko Foru Aldundia



Bizkaia
foru aldundia
diputación foral

**etxe
pare**
EUSKALINSTITUTUA
INSTITUTO VASCO
BASQUEINSTITUTE