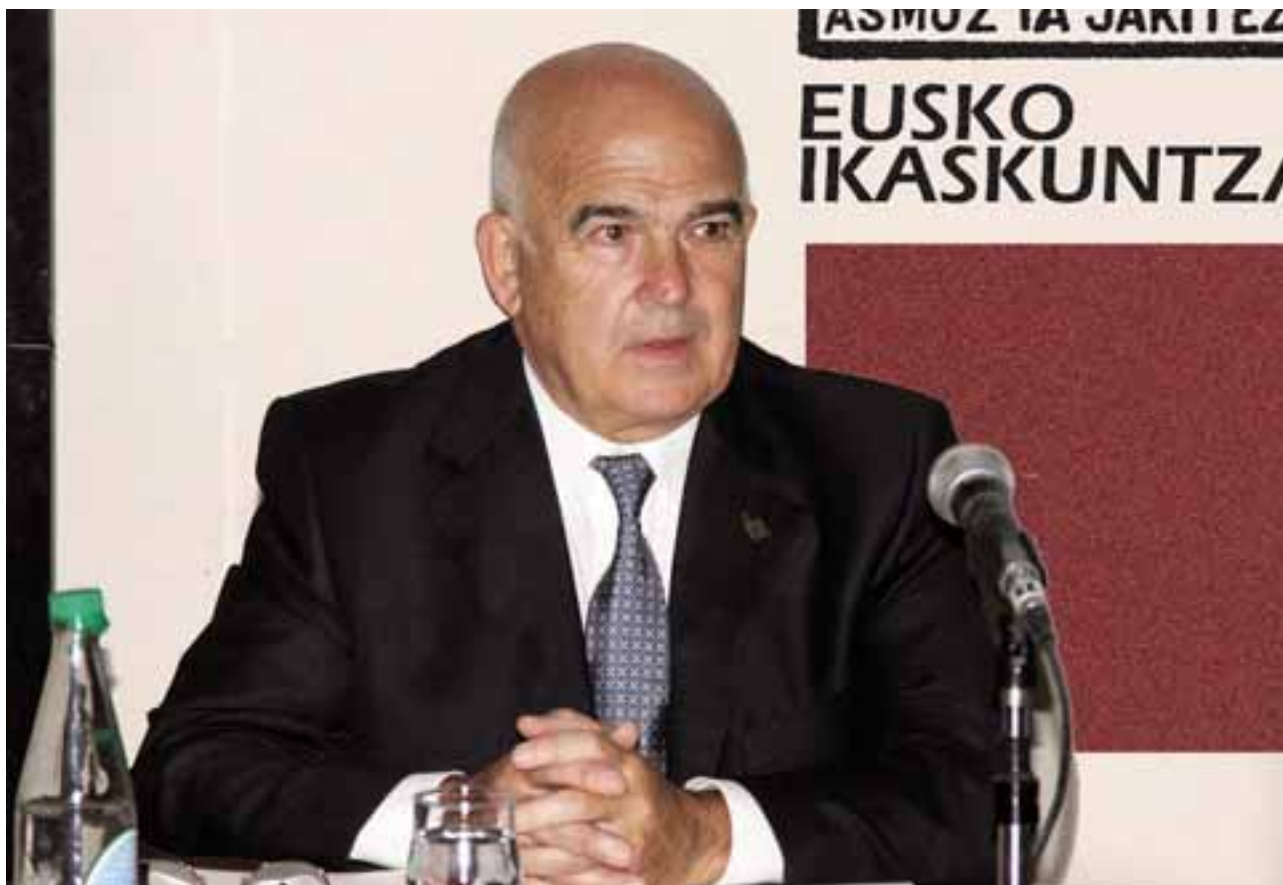


JAVIER RETEGI

President of the Basque Studies Society, Eusko Ikaskuntza



«There are a lot of possibilities for sharing projects among Basques around the world»

Eusko Ikaskuntza erakundeak proiektu berri bati ekin dio. EuskoSare izenaz ezagutzera eman da eta euskal komunitate globalarentzat komunikazio eta lankidetzaren sare baten euskarri izan nahi du. “Mundu osoan zehar bizi garen euskaldunok kezka ber-berak dauzkagu, komunitate globala garelako esan dezakegu eta komunitate hori osatzen duten pertsonen arteko harremanak estutzera dator webgune hau” azaldu digu Javier Retegik, Eusko Ikaskuntzako presidentea.

Javier Retegi has been president of Eusko Ikaskuntza, the Basque Studies Society, for three years now, but his career has always been linked to the world of business and Basque politics. He

served as Basque Minister for Industry, Agriculture and Fisheries, and was active in policy making even before the system of autonomies was set in place. He is also former director of the Society for Industrial Promotion and Modernization (SPRI) and has held various management positions in the Basque cooperative movement, becoming the first provost of Mondragón Unibertsitatea. Retegi has been the president of Eusko Ikaskuntza – Basque Studies Society since 2002. In this time EuskoSare has become one of the society's flagship projects, created as “a network of communication and cooperation for the global Basque community.”

What are the goals behind the creation of EuskoSare?

The aim of Eusko Ikaskuntza is to be a society for Basque studies, and that means that we can't limit

ourselves to Euskal Herria, but must also include Basque studies conducted all over the world. This principle is so deeply immersed in the institution that according to the bye-laws one of the vice-presidents has to be someone from the diaspora. Until now the relationship between Eusko Ikaskuntza and the international Basque community has been channeled through specific organizations in very specific countries such as the United States and Argentina. New technology has opened up a whole new realm of possibilities for us to communicate with the Basque community abroad. We're not talking about a "headquarters-to-outpost" type relationship; what we want is to create a circular relationship between Basques around the globe. The purpose of EuskoSare is to let the world know what's going on in the Basque Country today and allow the people here in Euskadi to learn about the Basque communities beyond our borders. We also want to establish cooperation networks and interest groups among Basques, like the 90 scholars worldwide who are now carrying out research on Basque topics and who use the network to share their experiences. Networks of this type can be applied to a lot of areas. One example is folk heritage. Why not create a worldwide network where dantzaris could share music, dance notes and tour plans?

So, do you think we could safely say that Basques around the world have a lot in common?

I think the potential for project-sharing among Basque men and women around the globe is huge, and not only with regard to culture. Economics is also an area we're putting a lot of energy into.

A network of this type could also offer a number of services, such as how to obtain dual citizenship, searching for long-lost relatives, and a long list that we've already got in place, not based on our own criteria, but on the demands that have come in from Basques in the diaspora.

There there's the so-called wikis, in computer talk, whereby people collaborate on an activity by contributing information. The Basque surname project in Argentina is a good example of the system's potential. It has helped shed light on the history and family branches connected to the 12,000 Basque surnames in the country, and everyone can add their own family history to the research project. Under the leadership of Fundación Juan de Garay, the effort has led

«Eusko Ikaskuntzak
orain arte
diasporarekin izan
dituen harremanak
ekasak izan dira, eta
beti elkarte oso
konkretu batzuen
bidez. Tecnología
berriek aukerak
zabaldu dizkigu eta
aprobetxatzera goaz»

to the creation of an immense encyclopedia.

Who else is working on the EuskoSare project?

As I mentioned before, EuskoSare has four purposes: information, user community, work sharing and services. It's relatively easy to put together the network, but setting up the interest group networks and providing services is harder. There are people in nearly 80 cities around the world who volunteer their time, people who also contribute their knowledge on different subjects.

What other similar experiences did you take into account when you launched EuskoSare?

This project is 100% Basque. However, we are studying experiences from other communities, such as the Jews to see what type of relationship they maintain with the people in their diaspora, and the organizations set up by the Irish, mainly to see what types of services they offer. We're still in the early stages as far as applying technology is concerned, and we're still figuring things out ourselves.

This project wouldn't be feasible if it weren't for the widespread use of technology and the internet, would it?

Without the internet and new technologies we wouldn't have designed this project, but it's also true that even with the internet we can't reach the entire diaspora. That's why it's so important to keep using the more conventional media, such as radio, television and newspapers. We need to strengthen our relationships with regular media and round it out with the use of new technology. With its international channel, Euskal Telebista could be an important tool.

How much does Basque society know about the Basque communities living outside of Euskal Herria, and to what extent will EuskoSare contribute in this area?

At Eusko Ikaskuntza we feel that the Basque diaspora has a distorted image of Euskadi and that the same thing occurs the other way around. We really don't know what it's like in the Basque communities around the world. EuskoSare will receive regular information on Basque-related issues and news from all over the world associated with the Basque Country or Basque communities. The news won't be gathered in Euskadi, but in each of places where the events actually take place. I hope that in time efforts of this type will help us get to know each other better.