



Basque Writing 10

Basque PEN Centre, 10 years

I remember a sunny April day in 2004 and there was a book market in Donostia-San Sebastian. Until one year before that, I had been working in Germany as a correspondent. And shortly after I returned home, **they closed down the only newspaper that we Basque speakers had.** The only paper that provided us with daily news in our own language on world news, culture, books, all those things that we love, was being closed down owing to a lie that was not refuted until seven years had passed. Taking advantage of the anti-terrorist law, they took away and tortured people who work in our language, the most distinguished people in the world of culture, the most dedicated journalists. And in Spain nearly everyone kept quiet, but **in Catalonia they clearly understood the scale of the attack.** The reverberations of solidarity reached us from all corners of the world. I had recently come back from Germany, we had been going around filming the events in Berlin with the camera; the police were in no doubt that they had to keep out of the way, they could not say or do anything to the reporters. So, what is normal in a democratic country, was a total exception in our corner of the European Union. They closed down newspapers, tortured journalists, and we had to hear that it was all in the interests of our culture.

The solidarity that had spread from Catalonia to London and from there across the world brought us together in Donostia-San Sebastian during that April of 2004. And Laura Mintegi, Joxemari Iturralde, and many people involved in our literature and culture were there. **That year our representatives were warmly welcomed in Tromsø.** We joined the PEN circuit. We understood that we also had to give what we had received. We remembered Ken Saro Wiwa in Bilbao. It was difficult to combine both things: to inform from our wealthy corner of Europe about the attacks

that were routinely taking place outside Europe. Despite being aware that the **closing down of newspapers and the torturing journalists by a State was very serious indeed**, we understood that freedom of expression was subject to other attacks in the Basque Country, too. **Some journalists had bodyguards, bombs were detonated against the mass media**, including one against the Basque-language television broadcaster. And the Spanish State wanted to put certain Basque citizens behind bars for publishing a letter. And we saw Teresa Toda, a member of the board of trustees of our PEN centre, together with many other journalists and workers of the newspaper EGIN being put in prison. She spent six years in prison after working for the Basque PEN Centre. Unfortunately, she is not the only Basque journalist to be sent to prison. **Fortunately, ten years after the birth of the Basque PEN there are no longer any bombs or correspondents protected by bodyguards**, but there has been no end to the imprisoning and prosecuting of journalists. **And the Basque PEN continues in this difficult situation that seldom affects a European group.**

Yet when exposing the situation at home to the outside world, we do not end up only in the dynamic of protests. **Over the last ten years we have been reporting on our language, culture and literature from one meeting to the next.** We have taken young writers, women, reading groups, literature in exile or the history of Basque from Bogota to Tokyo and from Dakar to Reykjavik. We have been fully **engaged in support of language rights**, as when we produced together with our Catalan friends the Girona statement and posted it on the necessary forums. On DOIW (Day of the Imprisoned Writer) we reported in the Basque Country on the terrible situation of many writers across the world. We embraced the suffering of Kurdish journalists and writers, we made the Kurdish Iranian journalist **Adnan Hassanpour an honorary member**, and we did

our bit by bringing his family to the Basque Country and finally to the Basque Parliaments, so that, among other things, their voice could be heard in the campaign organised to get the death penalty hanging over him commuted. We awarded the late Harold Pinter the Basque PEN Idazluma (Quill Pen Award). The 1937 bombing of Gernika symbolises the greatest destruction of our culture because it signified the total ending of the cultural renaissance up until then, until something began to revive in a very modest way in exile 15 years later. That was the background of the first Basque PEN centre. Txomin Peillen, who was a PEN member at that time, is our honorary president now. **We took advantage of the 75th anniversary of the bombing of Gernika to gather poems from the various PEN centres worldwide**, and we were delighted by the result: we spread our literature worldwide, and brought the world's literature to the Basque Country.

That is how we have completed a decade, in a modest way, but full of hope, firstly thanks to the encouragement given by dozens of Basque writers who have supported us right from the start, and secondly, as a result of the reception we have found abroad, without forgetting that freedom of expression and persecuted writers across the world and minority languages need the PEN. As I said, we have managed to come thus far, and we will be sticking to our guns. **Thank you to all of you who have travelled with us along the way.**



*Urtzi Urrutikoetxea
President of the Basque PEN Centre*



Brief review of the last ten years

International Relations



Nadine Gordimer, Berlin 2006



Reikiavik 2013

Participating in Congresses



Bogota 2008



Wole Soyinka, Gyeongju 2012

Supporting Persecuted Writers



Assassinated journalists of the **Azadiya Welat** Kurdish newspaper, 2009.



The clamour in support of the Basque-language newspaper **Egunkaria**, 2007.

Writers in Prison International Day



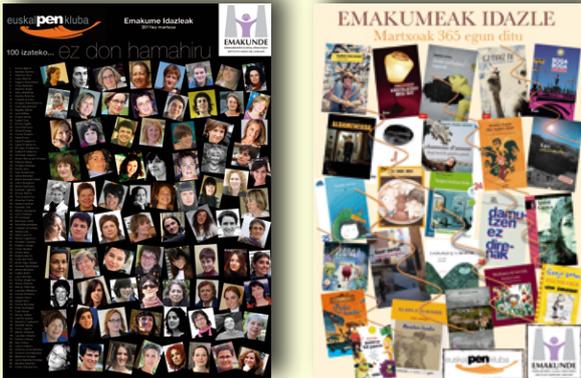
Marking the 10th anniversary of the execution of Nigerian writer **Ken Saro Wiwa**. Bilbo 2006.



Reading 'in prison' of texts written by imprisoned writers. **DOIW** (Day of the Imprisoned Writer), Donostia-San Sebastian 2012.



International Women Writers' Day



On March 8 every year the works of women writers are gathered together and put on display in bookshops.

Honorary Member



Adnan Hassanpour's sister (Leyla) and **Hiwa Butimar's** brother (Hadi) in Bilbao, 2007.

Basque Writing and other publications



Basque Writing, 2 issues per year.

PEN Quill Pen Tribute



Juan Jose Agirre, 2007.



Txomin Peillen, 2009.



Books of poems **Gernika** and 'other Gernikas'.



How others see us

Carme Arenas (President of the Catalan PEN Centre)



These ten years look like a very long period if I take into consideration all the work done by the Basque PEN; indeed, in this period, which is in fact quite a short one, this centre has been one of the most active. It is a centre that has managed to keep up continued, solid international work in support of freedom of expression within its territory as well as further afield. It is a centre that has helped to further enrich the solidarity of the PEN community, thanks to its continued work and global perspective. And the best thing of all is that we have been involved in projects and dreams together. Congratulations!

Joxemari Iturralde (writer, former deputy president of Basque PEN)



Whenever I am away from home I realise that we Basques barely exist abroad. At home it seems to us that we are the centre of the world, but abroad people have barely heard of us.

For many years the Basque PEN has been trying to make its characteristics known abroad in the defence of culture, in the defence of the rights of literature, the Basque PEN with the identity of the Basque Country disseminates its efforts in many, many countries. It is truly laudable work.

John Ralston Saul (President of PEN International)



We write and we defend writers. Linguistic diversity is essential to freedom of expression.

Why are there 900 writers in prison? Because language is important. What can be a greater loss of freedom of expression than to lose your language completely? When your language disappears, it is the ultimate removal of freedom of expression. PEN International is now committed to working in this area. And Basque PEN has done an extraordinary work defending and promoting linguistic rights, and proving that the health of a language and its literature is directly related to the freedom of expression.

Leyla Hassanpour (Adnan Hassanpour's sister)



The Basque PEN has taken very positive, humanitarian steps in the work to save the lives of journalists. I am the sister of the journalist Adnan Hassanpour who was condemned to death by the Islamic Regime of Iran, and I am deeply grateful to the Basque PEN centre. In fact, the award you gave to my brother in 2008 was an important step in saving his life. And it really put pressure on the Iranian regime to commute his death sentence.

Iñaki Egaña (historian, Basque PEN member)



It is the Basque language that makes us Basque.

The Basque Country, the dream that fulfils the utopia.

Teresa Toda (a former imprisoned journalist, and a former member of the Basque PEN's Board of Trustees)



A forceful page that is filled with words of solidarity and demands, whenever attacks on freedom of expression take place anywhere. But it is also gentle on the most ill-treated writers or journalists. It takes them into its bosom, protecting them with warmth, while spreading their clamour across the world. I say this on the 10th anniversary because I have experienced this myself.

But the Basque PEN is also a living meeting point to work with friends in support of the Basque language and its literature. Even though much has been done over these years, more will need to be done in the future. We have sufficient words and courage for that.

Itxaro Borda (writer, Basque PEN member)



The Basque PEN is necessary, firstly to enable us Basques, too, to participate officially in the dance of world writing activity, and secondly, to bring together in the Basque Country writers with different experiences who are members. It works on two levels, from outside to inside and from inside to outside.

The contacts made in the congresses are interesting, in particular they make you realise that in this world there is not just one perspective. Keep up the good work, Basque PEN, I am with you!

Martxelo Otamendi (journalist, Basque PEN member)

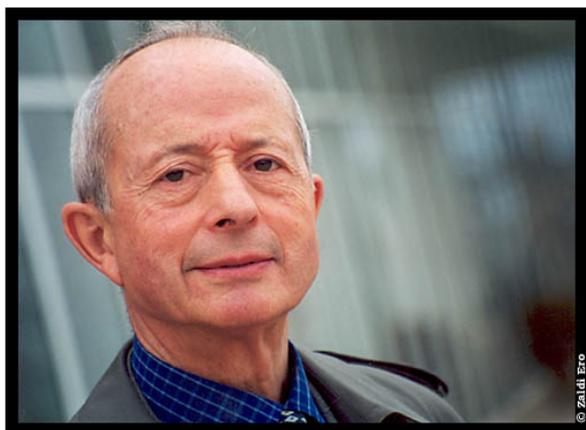


Basque PEN for me is PEN, but PEN in the Basque Country, of the Basque Country and for the whole world. In my view, it performs two major tasks. Firstly, PEN provides us Basques with news on the situation in which it is involved, it brings us what is going on in the world, it puts what is going on abroad in our hands; and it informs the world about what is going on here in connection with the PEN milieu. A dual, valuable function.

Secondly, it positions us in the world and we are greatly in need of that.



Txomin Peillen, from the beginning until today



Txomin Peillen (Paris, 1932), was one of the founders of the Basque PEN club and was a member during the three periods. In 1951, Ibiñagabeitia and Mirande were the secretaries, and the board of trustees was made up of Altube, Gavel, Lopez Mendizabal, Justo Garate, Laffitte, Orixe, Zaitegi, Fagoaga, Krutwig and Iratzeder.

The Basque PEN Assembly was approved in Edinburgh in July 1951, unanimously, as Andima Ibiñagabeitia mentioned in issue 7-8 of the magazine *Euzko Gogo*.

The Basque PEN Association was a short-lived attempt, but in 1987, when it was revived as the Basque PEN Club, Txomin Peillen was once again a member while the club continued in existence until 1989. When the Basque PEN was revived in 2004, Peillen was appointed as its honorary president.

Jon Mirande, together with Zaitegi, was the secretary of the Basque PEN Association.



Andima Ibiñagabeitia, Jokin Zaitegi and Orixe in Guatemala in the 1950s

Txomin, what is the Basque PEN?

The Basque PEN was the idea of Jokin Zaitegi, Andima Ibiñagabeitia and Jon Mirande; they saw that translations were being made into all the other languages, lesser known languages were being translated into French and the major languages, and at that point they, too, started doing translations. And that is how Andima went to the Edinburgh congress in 1951.

It was set up in 1951 but it was short-lived.

No it wasn't. When Andima returned from the congress, he went to America to produce *Euzko Gogo*. Andima was the cornerstone, and when he left, Mirande was upset. What is more, they didn't want to publish Mirande's collection of poems, and Mirande distanced himself from Basque people, from Basque literature. In the meantime, I was a young student and I was learning Basque.

Is there any point in it in 2014?

Yes, there is, to be known, or to do translations, for example. There are the major languages, and they are read, we are not read, we are not known, people don't know that we have any literature, some people say: Do people write in Basque? Does Basque literature exist?

Today, our literature has progressed a little in the world. Literature lovers know that literature in Basque exists. The cinema has contributed towards that. People realise that we have a culture that is not Spanish culture.

What is the task of the Basque PEN from now onwards?

From now our task is to make other literatures known to Basques, so that we can become familiar with foreign literature. When one is familiar with the literature, one knows about the situation of each country, what freedom is enjoyed in that country to write whatever they want. Total freedom does not exist anywhere, but sometimes there are countries with more freedom, and also countries where repression is very severe.

The Basque PEN and the PEN centres need to raise their voices at UNESCO and the UN and wherever it is necessary in support of freedom.



The renewed project

Euzko Gogoa Magazine, 1951.



The Basque PEN Assembly

Andima Ibinagabeitia

Thirty years have passed since INTERNATIONAL PEN, a famous name, began to fly across the world. From London the fame of this association began to spread all over the world, and echoing the call from there, writers began to gather together in special associations in most countries. To later join the main association in England. That way, around a strong trunk the INTERNATIONAL PEN association spread its thick branches across the continent.

What do these three letters P.E.N. stand for? The name is made up of the initials of three foreign nouns, i.e. Poet, Essayist, Novelist. It aims to bring together all the

workers who use the pen in this and in other tasks. Firstly, by bringing together writers from each nation or country, then bringing them together in a big international assembly.

The highest mission of this organisation is as follows: to make known the names and realities of all literatures across the world and the most famous writers, and put them in contact with each other.

According to its rules, literature has neither frontiers nor politics. The works created by human minds are beyond the frontiers of countries: so, making these works known cannot be subject to political issues. Yet the spreading of the most sublime fruits of the human spirit is an absolutely necessary task. In short, that is the aim of the INTERNATIONAL PEN association.

For a long time, we Basque writers have been living far removed from the assemblies of foreign writers. The news about the works created among us was restricted to the borders of the Basque Country, like the delicious walnut flesh inside its hard shell.

Fortunately, in our country, too, writers have produced important pieces of work, and illustrious men have also flourished here. But, unfortunately, they were not known beyond our valleys and fields. It was high time that the shell was broken and that our delicious flesh was displayed in foreign countries, so that people could see that it was as sweet and delicious as their own.

Getting down to work and keeping it up always brings good results. We got down to work and kept it up, and our efforts unexpectedly bore ripe fruit. Last August, as every year, the International PEN members met in Edinburgh, Scotland. Assemblies across the world sent their representatives. The chairman of the assembly explained the wishes of Basque writers, and **all the members unanimously approved our request.** Since then, the Basque PEN Assembly has turned out to be a shoot of that beautiful tree, and it soon started to grow into a sturdy branch.

We called our own assembly. We called the Basque writers spread across the world, all those who live in France and America frightened away by the terrible storm, and writers far and wide responded to our call. We received letters from most of them approving the creation of the Basque PEN Assembly and, what is more, expressing enthusiasm and encouragement.

We knocked upon doors in Zuberoa, Nafarroa Beherea and Lapurdi and doors were opened to us with the sweetest of smiles and affection. But we could not knock upon the doors of the homes of writers in Upper Navarre, Alava-Araba, Gipuzkoa and Bizkaia (*). That's where so many writers are, and no doubt the best ones. We did not dare, because we feared someone might regard our appeal as a political one. We were afraid that our appeal might not reach the hands of our dear writers. We were also afraid that something bad could befall them. We are not in fact timid, but we did not want anyone to be harmed in any way.

You Basque writers who are listening to me. **Now you know we have an association and we need your help to give that association warmth, breath and life.** Without you, we will not be able to continue down the chosen path.



We have embellished the governing board with the names of the most famous writers in the Basque Country: Altube, Gavel, Lopez Mendizabal, Justo Garate, Laffitte, Orixe, Zaitegi, Fagoaga, Iratzeder, etc. They all gladly accepted the appointments made during the assembly and not one of these illustrious writers turned down our appeal. We have two secretaries: Mirande, an experienced poet from Soule, and yours truly. We are ready if writers help us to do our work.

What is more, we would like the Basque writers of our assembly who want to come to Paris to please get in touch with us, and they will find things easier than they think.

In Paris there is a beautiful house known as the Maison Internationale des Pen. The secretary of that house has given us every facility for Basque writers. They are being offered free accommodation for five nights at least. Through the secretary, Basque writers will have the chance to meet any writer from France or anywhere else if the latter happen to be in Paris. In addition, we have been asked to organise a little party in the main hall to show foreign writers the basis and spread of old and new Basque literature.

This year, the main congress of the International PEN will be in Lausanne. For the first time, we Basques have been called to that congress. Someone will be there to transmit our voice.

That is as far as the foreigners are concerned, but what about our country? **A large field is opening up for us in our dear country to get down to work.** We have much to do: we have to help the writers, work on Basque literature, organise festivals and above all, we have to kindle the Basque flame among the writers and keep it going. We can do necessary and tremendous work. Unity brings strength, and if all the Basque writers unite, it will be for the good of the Basque language and the Basque Country. Our main task is this: to show the Basque torch always alight and burning brightly at home and abroad.

Thank you.

Andima Ibiñagabeitia (1951)

* Zuberoa (Soule), Nafarroa Beherea (Lower Navarre) and Lapurdi (Labourd) are under French Administration, and Upper Navarre, Alava-Araba, Gipuzkoa and Bizkaia are under Spanish Administration, and at that time under the Franco dictatorship.



2004



2005



2008



2013

The Board of Trustees was set up in 2004 and has been renewed over the last ten years.



And from now on, what?

Ten years have passed since International Book Day on 23 April, 2004, since the meeting was held to revive the Basque PEN. We have seen over the previous pages what the Basque PEN has done over the last ten years and during the previous periods of its existence. Now is **the moment to look ahead**. And from now on, what?

“We are committed to our work and that is spurring us on to commit ourselves to the two cornerstones of our work: free expression and language”

Two aims have spurred on the Basque PEN. Firstly, **to make the culture created in Basque known abroad**. Secondly, **to staunchly defend freedom of expression**, at home and abroad. Both of these aims remain in force today, because Basque culture is still virtually non-existent abroad, as Joxemari Iturralde pointed out above, and besides, because the authorities have not ceased to restrict expression here and across the world.

These two aims have led us to work on three of PEN International’s committees: the **WIPC** (Writers in Prison Committee), the **WfPC** (Writers for Peace Committee), and the **TaLRC** (Translation and Linguistic Rights Committee). The task of the first committee is to work in support of writers/journalists who have been threatened or who have been prosecuted. The second committee is a preventive one; the aim is to prevent conflict, in other words, to avoid situations of persecution. The aim of the third committee is to overcome the barriers that minority languages come up against.

“Being writers turns us into defenders of the word”

The two above-mentioned aims prompt us 25,000 writers in the PEN to take action. **We are committed to our work** and that is spurring us on to commit ourselves to the two cornerstones of our work: **free expression and language**. Above ideologies, barriers and prohibitions, insofar as we are writers we have to defend what is our own, what makes us what we are: our language and freedom of expression, because being writers turns us into defenders of the word.

“The Basque PEN gives us the chance to express solidarity”

PEN is involved in all these things, and that is why we are working to staunchly maintain these two cornerstones.

Apart from defending what is ours, the Basque PEN gives us the chance to express solidarity. So that language and the word may be free here and across the world. So that each person can speak or write in his/her own language; so that each person can express

his/her own ideas.

From the Basque PEN we appeal to all those whose tool is the word: writers, journalists, translators, publishers, extempore Basque verse-makers, songwriters and comic book artists. We call on them to join the thousands upon thousands of authors worldwide and become supporters of language and freedom of expression.



Laura Mintegi

Former president of the Basque PEN Centre

“We appeal to all those whose tool is the word”

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