



# Assessment Report of the Basque Plan for Peace and Coexistence

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## *Acknowledgements*

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# Introduction

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The Basque Government has recently approved the “Plan for Peace and Coexistence” to reinforce the end of ETA’s violence and suggest ways to create conditions for sustainable peace. A group of independent scholars and practitioners living and operating in the United States was asked to provide an external assessment of the plan and feedback on the following:

1. A general assessment of the plan.
2. Assessment of methodological aspects: (1) a document open to collecting input from the social partners and the parliamentary groups before approval, and (2) a methodology based on promotion of cumulative micro-agreements.
3. An assessment of the structure of the reconciliation process with reflections and actions concerning the past, the present and the future.
4. An assessment of the relationship and comprehensiveness of 18 practical initiatives with highlights and suggestions for improvement
5. An evaluation of the plan’s final goal: an agreement around basic democratic ethics that integrates four major political traditions of this country around a basic idea of shared coexistence.

Our suggestions, comments and questions are not intended to be prescriptive, but serve as an invitation to the readers for an open conversation and joint inquiry that would crystallize both strengths and weaknesses of the document. We believe that peace is a work in progress that requires the dedication and honest involvement of many actors. The plan’s invitational character is one of its key strengths, and adds to its uniqueness and potential for success.

We intend to use a dynamical systems lens in our review. Dynamical systems theory encourages attentiveness to the interaction of various elements in a system, their adaptability and disconnects. We found it particularly useful for analyzing key assumptions and objectives of the plan. One of the key objectives proposed by the plan is to secure irreversible peace and a non-recurrence of violence. Such an outcome would position the Basque country in the company of other success stories

such as South Africa and Northern Ireland. The openness of the plan to outside input, assessment and learning is an extremely important precondition for non-recurrence of violence. Again, such orientation is generative and invitational—it suggests that everyone involved in the process possesses some capacity to lead and shape the process itself. However, it is difficult to predict how different elements in such an open system will interact and how different processes can align in such a way that produces positive outcomes.

Therefore, we suggest that the research orientation be highlighted throughout the plan as a tool that will contribute to the actualization of its long-term goals. Research and assessment should not only be seen as an external tool for evaluating final products of various initiatives, but also as an effort to understand and learn from the processes of creation and implementation of various activities and initiatives.

If we can understand and self-reflect on how certain activities came about and how they were implemented, we will be able to change, adapt and improve, thereby making the overall objective of sustainable peace more plausible. By being attentive to challenges and good practices throughout the process, the odds for success are more likely. Thus, we suggest the integration of a mechanism for monitoring the risk of recurrence of violence from the very beginning of the process.

Such a mechanism necessitates a research-oriented attitude that enables feedback in all stages of the plan's implementation. In addition, it would require evaluation of the process, as well as a self-evaluation that stems from a fundamental desire to learn, improve, adapt and self-correct.

Another important aspect of the plan is that it offers the Basque society the opportunity to write a new page of history. The plan emphasizes collaboration between various political traditions through a discursive and dialogic process, which contributes to a shift in mentality from power over to power with. *Power with* suggests awareness that is only achieved through cooperation between all members of a society working toward a common goal.

## General assessment of the plan

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- The plan is well structured and it engages the audience on both practical and theoretical levels. Its focus on project components, processes and concrete initiatives provides a comprehensive blueprint for action.
- The idea of dealing with the past, present and future responsibly and constructively is extremely important and it provides a solid framework for the implementation of the plan's key objectives.
- The placement of consensus, sharing and cooperation as driving forces behind the plan are truly commendable. The plan clearly outlines how stimulating citizens' participation in 18 initiatives will ensure inclusivity and cooperation.
- The plan's mission to contribute to the consolidation of a definitive and sustainable peace is an ideal goal. Indeed, we need to be able to imagine peace before it is realized. This is to say that, the plan frames peace as a work in progress, which requires constant dedication and engagement. It is not something that emerges out of nowhere, but it is a result of the hard work of many.

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## Assessment of methodological aspects

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- One of the key strengths of the plan is its openness to input, pluralism, sharing and cooperation from the social partners before it is implemented.
- The idea of promoting documents (i.e. the micro-agreements) that may or may not be wholly agreed upon, and then using these documents as a foundation for minimum consensus, is great. Utilizing this structure will help to bring together parties more easily by taking 'steps' towards consensus and trust, both gradually and cumulatively.
- It would be useful to outline how the proposed processes and micro-agreements will complement each other and how engagement with other actors, such as the civil society, can facilitate links between government and the people.

## Assessment of the structure of the reconciliation process with focus on the past, the present and the future

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- The past, the present and the future are omnipresent throughout the proposal and they provide a solid backdrop for the reconciliation process.
- There is a clear delineation of past, present and future focused processes.

Processes of the past require *no exclusion and no equation*, and assume responsibility for past actions. The present focuses on normalization and creating shared space for different political traditions and views. The future fosters educational and informational strategies that enable social cohesion based on human dignity and human rights.

- The plan clearly demonstrates how cases for all victims (without exceptions) need to be studied and reparations made accordingly.
- It would be useful to consider how processes under the past, present and future umbrella can be complementary. Moreover, it would be useful to explain why certain processes were placed under the umbrella of the past, the present or the future. For example, education is categorized as part of the future, but it is also deeply important to the present as well as the past.
- Pertaining to initiatives of the past, a suggestion is to create a safe space where testimonies and voices of the victims can be heard. After all, it is the victims that can produce a shift in discourse towards reconciliation. And, the whole society can learn and imagine a better future through these stories.
- Initiative 6 is very relevant for the processes of dealing with the past in that it promotes research on torture and fact finding. Our suggestion is to conduct research on cases of forgiveness and reconciliation during the conflict that can serve as models for the human capacity to defy violence.



# Assessment of the relationship and comprehensiveness of 18 practical initiatives with highlights and suggestions for improvement

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- The initiatives are fairly comprehensive, complementary, and structured. In this way, the initiatives fall in line nicely with the aims of the project and are broken into three categories: the past, present and future respectively.
- It would be useful if the transitions between initiatives were highlighted more directly (or explicitly), so that the proposal's implicit logic develops with every initiative, thus demonstrating interconnectedness.
- Certain timelines in some of the initiatives should be reconsidered. For example, commissioning, writing and delivering a comprehensive report on the human rights violations that occurred from 1960-2013 seems a bit ambitious considering how many stakeholders *should* be consulted in this process.

On specific initiatives:

- 1) The report on human rights violations is critical. That said, some additional clarification is needed to explain the handling of this process. It is stated that: "This report does not intend to investigate specific cases but instead offers an 8 approach that compiles and collects existing reliable data." Our suggestion would be to clarify how reliable data will be collected and how a possible research bias will be tackled.
- 2) The Plaza project will provide a safe location to promote citizen awareness and the opportunity to find common ground. The creation of the institute will be the force behind managing the collective memory of the people. Our suggestion is to explain in more detail how interactive components of the project will be fostered. It would also be useful to outline how feedback from the citizens will be addressed.

- 3) A memorial for victims is a great way to facilitate a ‘closing’ of the past while also educating the current and future generations.
- 4) The support, recognition and reparation for victims of terrorism are key elements to reconciling and accepting the past. Moreover, this process will allow victims and their families to move forward towards healing.
- 5) The victims not currently provided for by the present law will hopefully be covered under this initiative, which focuses on necessary legal and administrative tools.
- 6) The research on torture is an important initiative that could be used to highlight detecting torture and making it public as a way to strengthen and legitimize the democratic system and its inclusiveness.
- 7) It is important for this initiative to define *consensus* more clearly.
- 8) With the Hitzeman program, it is important to clarify how the social reinsertion program for the prisoners will be handled and how society will become aware of the commitment and responsibility for the standardization process.
- 9) This initiative is critical in that it allows the Plan for Peace and Coexistence to communicate ideas to other major European countries and serve as a model to others. Additionally, the Plan and the General Secretariat would benefit from cooperation with the EU and gain legitimacy from this interaction.
- 10) The same logic follows for cooperation with the UNHCR.
- 11) The joint contribution from three Basque Universities to focus on the core challenges of coexistence and to allow for academic and practical solutions to furthering this project is excellent. This initiative coincides greatly with the educational aspects of the proposal. There should be openness to the possibility of collaboration with civil society and additional governments or universities as well.
- 12) Police training on human rights is the most vital aspect of initiative 12. Providing human rights training for prison guards is necessary as well.

- Initiatives 13), 14) and 15), focusing on the public-social collaboration, citizen participation and coexistence arrangements with provincial governments and town councils are indeed necessary to continue working towards common ground and including citizens in the various initiatives.
- 16) The aim of creating collaborative frameworks for schools to teach human rights and conflict resolution skills is extremely important in order to engender future generations with additional skills and tools that promote community. Our suggestion is to consider parents and teachers, and their engagement in the process since they are key facilitators of meaning related to the past/history and present.
  - 17) Initiative 17 flows nicely with the previous objectives and takes formal steps in promoting coexistence among youth.
  - 18) Strengthening critical social awareness against violence through media is critical, but we need to ensure a feedback loop from the public and explore the impact of such activities.
  - 19) And lastly, ongoing management and evaluation of this Plan is vital in that it tracks the plans effectiveness and progress.

## Evaluation of the Plan's final goal

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- The plan is very comprehensive and it effectively illustrates the challenges and opportunities presented by the socio-political landscape. The initiatives that will be undertaken in order to achieve this goal include various outlets for achieving peace and coexistence such as: educational systems, prison systems, human rights training and cooperation, memorial projects and joint collaboration within provincial governments. The various aspects of this project and its multidisciplinary nature will help create the conditions for coexistence.
- In terms of integrating the “four major political traditions,” under the umbrella of coexistence, it would be useful to expound more upon these political traditions and how each interprets particular ideas and initiatives of the plan. For example, it would be good to clarify how educational (or university) initiatives specifically bring together the four major political traditions.
- The idea of coexistence suggests pluralism, collaboration and some consensus based on trust. But how can we explore the complexity of coexistence and what it means for each (unique) political tradition? This exploration should not be seen as something definitive, but as a process based on the willingness of all citizens to engage in generative and deliberative conversations around the topic of coexistence. The transparency and openness of such a process would create ownership among relevant stakeholders and would also build trust in policies and initiatives proposed by the government.

## Conclusions and steps forward

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- The openness of the plan to outside input, assessment and learning is an extremely important precondition for prevention of violence since it ensures adaptable and deliberate responses to ever-changing circumstances.
- Assessment should not only be seen as an external tool for evaluating final products of various initiatives, but also as an effort to understand, learn and selfreflect on the processes of creation and implementation of various activities and initiatives.
- Follow-up micro-research is needed to examine traction and effects of various initiatives at the community level. Such research would be key for understanding the process of dealing with the past.
- The plan's greatest strength is found in its emphasis on bringing together various political traditions through a discursive and open process. This implies a dialogue not just with parliamentary groups, but also with the Spanish government and ordinary citizens whose feedback is invaluable.
- The inclusive nature of the Basque peace process makes it truly unique and situates it in the company of other success stories, including South Africa and Northern Ireland. For the Basque society itself, the plan enables a transformation of relationships and shifts the collective mentality from power over to power with. *Power with* suggests awareness that is only achieved through cooperation between all members of a society working toward a common goal.