

## Ibarretxe vows to let the people speak if negotiation is rejected

In the meeting at the Moncloa Palace yesterday Zapatero categorically refused to negotiate the Proposal for the New Statute

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Juan Jose Ibarretxe, the *Lehendakari* (President) of the [BAC-Basque Autonomous Community](#), went to the Moncloa Palace (the Spanish Prime Minister's official residence) yesterday with a request that "the door be opened" for negotiation on the [Proposal for a New Statute](#). That door was, however, closed by Prime Minister Zapatero. In fact, he categorically turned down Ibarretxe's request to begin "formal negotiations" between the Spanish Government and the [BAC Government](#). Ibarretxe nevertheless made it clear to Zapatero that the wishes of the [PP](#) and the [PSOE](#) could not override the will of the people in the BAC, so that if the response to what had been agreed on by a majority of the [BAC Parliament](#) was 'no', he, Ibarretxe, would let "the people speak" by means of a referendum. "While I am *Lehendakari* the will of the PP and the PSOE will not override that of the people in the BAC," he stressed.

The response of the Spanish Government was equally firm: "While Zapatero is Prime Minister, the proposal will never go ahead," said Maria Teresa Fernandez de la Vega, the Spanish Government's Vice-President and Spokesperson. "The Proposal is a mistake and will lead to a dead end". This was how Fernandez de la Vega summed up the Spanish Government's position on the Proposal for the New Statute. She pointed out, however, that there was a way of getting out of "that dead end", which was "to start from scratch, seek consensus and follow the way established by the law." If these conditions are met, the Reform of the Statute proposed by Ibarretxe would have the backing of the PSOE Government. But if not, she warned the *Lehendakari* that he would come up against the resolve of the Government and the power of democratic laws".

So, as expected, there was no agreement between the *Lehendakari* and the Spanish Prime Minister. The two listened to each other "politely", according to Fernandez de la Vega, but the result shows that there was no meeting of minds. After the meeting lasting three and a half hours Ibarretxe appeared before the press with four messages. The first was addressed to the Spanish public at large: he had gone to Madrid to speak with his arms open, with an offer to open the door "for solutions and to achieve friendly relations with Spain". Secondly, he asked that the decision endorsed by an absolute majority in the BAC Parliament be accepted and that negotiations be started. The third message was addressed to the people in the BAC: "We Basque citizens are going to decide the future of [Euskadi](#), because we have the right to do so." And the fourth message was for the media: it is vital that the debate be conducted "calmly".

Berria, 14/01/05