



In response to the article by Keith Johnson published in *The Wall Street Journal*

PATXI BAZTARRIKA STATES THAT "NO LANGUAGE CAN BE DISCREDITED" DUE TO THE NUMBER OF ITS SPEAKERS AND HE DEMANDS "RESPECT" FOR BASQUE

According to the Basque Vice-minister of Language Policy, Keith Johnson shows "contempt for Basque language and language diversity, as well as his ignorance".

The Vice-minister of Language Policy of the Basque Government, Patxi Baztarrika, has answered to the article titled "Basque inquisition: How do you say shepherd in Euskera?", published in *The Wall Street Journal* by Keith Johnson. In that article, Johnson states that Basque is a poor language that has to use loans from other languages for words such as democracy or independence. He also explains that the language policy carried out by Basque institutions discriminates against Spanish language and forces citizens to learn Euskara, a language spoken by less than a million people, while Spanish is spoken by 425 million people.

"No language can be discredited because of the number of its speakers. (...) The difficult task is to rescue and to enforce Euskara, not to protect Spanish and its users from the alleged linguistic revenge: in this issue, like in everything, respect causes respect, while intolerance provokes intolerance. (...) Languages do not hate themselves; only fanatic people that manage them do. (...) These words are not my own, but Fernando Savater's. He wrote them some years ago and I use them now because I completely agree with them. They are an appropriate answer to the statements by Keith Johnson", has indicated Baztarrika. In accordance to him, the article by Keith Johnson shows "contempt for Basque language and language diversity, as well as his ignorance". Ignorance because linguistic loans are a proof of "the vitality and health of any language. For example, English words empire, stupid, idiot, arrogance, superficiality, frivolity or language are loans from Latin". Moreover, he has remarked that the words quoted by Johnson to underrate Basque (science, democracy, independence) are also loans in English and in a lot of languages in the world. In fact, "almost all the English scientific words come from Latin or Greek".

In opinion of the Vice-minister, despising Euskara means "despising linguistic plurality and diversity", which is "the general rule" of all modern societies. "In the



modern world,
the general rule is linguistic plurality. Monolingualism is the exception."

From his point of view, the words in that article ooze with a "standardizing, excluding and imperative" conception of the society, "which rejects difference". They are the "accurate reflection" of the monolithic conception of the "law of the jungle" by people who consider that languages "start and end at themselves" and that forget that the richness of modern societies also lies in language diversity.

After clarifying that the Basque language policy, carried out by institutions with the participation of the "immense majority" of the Basque society, is "democratic, opened and respectful towards Spanish", Baztarrika has highlighted that "they do not expect to impose" the use of Basque, but they aim to create "opportunities to use" Euskera, so that people who wish to speak in Basque in the different areas of social life and to live in Basque "can do it".

The head of language policy has insisted that Basque institutions do not want to "impose anything". "We do not expect to impose monolingualism, not even Basque monolingualism. We want to have less inequalities in the Basque society, including issues concerning language. Therefore, we have to work to revitalize and normalize the use of Basque to achieve real equality between Basque and Spanish."

He has also stated that "we do not work against anything or anyone. We love and respect Spanish, as it is also a language of Euskadi. We work for Euskara from the respect. We work for the co-existence of both languages and therefore, for the Basque society".

Baztarrika has closed his statement by reminding that the Basque Government considers that Euskara and Spanish are languages that "do not separate us, but join", and that the attitudes and statements such as the article published in *The Wall Street Journal* are the ones that generate "rejection and disagreement". "That archaic, poor and old reasoning is opposite to co-existence and equality, but fortunately, it has few followers in the Basque society."