



Parlamento Europeo
Europako Legebiltzarra

Izaskun Bilbao Barandica
Vice Presidenta grupo ALDE (EAJ-PNV)/ADLE taldeko Lehendakari ordea

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Dear Commissioner Navracsics:

I am writing to inform you that the Swedish authorities who are organising this year's Eurovision Song Contest have published a list of flags "specifically not allowed" as part of the rules that must be observed by the audience attending the event. On that list, alongside the flag of the so-called "Islamic State", is the *ikurriña*, the official flag of the Autonomous Community of the Basque Country.

The banning of regional and local flags in itself does not seem to be compatible with the slogan "united in diversity", but the inclusion of the Basque flag on a blacklist together with that of the Islamic State is incomprehensible. The *ikurriña* is the official flag of Euskadi, one of Europe's oldest nationalities. The Basque Country is currently one of the regional autonomous communities of the Spanish state. Article 5 of its Statute of Autonomy (a basic law of an EU Member State) stipulates that the *ikurriña* is the official flag of the Basque Country, a status which it has enjoyed since 1978. This statute was approved by the Basque people in a referendum.

In fact the *ikurriña* was already the official flag of the Basque Country when its lawful authorities opposed the coup staged by General Franco in 1936. Following Franco's victory his fascist dictatorship dissolved the Basque institutions and banned the flag. The recovery of self-government and the symbols associated with it was the result of decades of democratic, civil struggle on our part, so the inclusion of our flag on a list of specifically banned symbols, and its comparison with the flag of the so-called Islamic forces is an error that one would not expect of a country with the standard of education and democratic track record of Sweden. It is an offence to all the people of the Basque Country.

We believe that it is anti-European to introduce bans of this type: history has shown that they do not help to foster peaceful coexistence or spread the basic values of peace and stability. Those values include respect for diversity and, particularly, for nations with their own languages and cultures which, due to the vicissitudes of history, do not currently have states of their own. For these political and administrative reasons their citizens sometimes suffer attacks on their fundamental rights, such as the one that has taken place here. Such aggressions would be unthinkable if Euskadi were itself an EU Member State. This decision seems more characteristic of a dictatorship than of a Union constructed as an area for peace, stability, prosperity and freedom on the basis of respect for all the different identities of which it is composed. It is a measure that

izaskun.bilbaobarandica@europarl.europa.eu
www.izaskunbilbao.eus www.europarl.europa.eu
@IzaskunBilbaoB
Rue Wiertz 60 ASP 9G 258 1047 Bruselas Tfno: +3222845528



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denies social, institutional and political realities and as such would be more to be expected of a totalitarian regime of a type that, fortunately, no longer exists in Europe.

As a result, I ask you as Commissioner for Culture to contact the Swedish authorities and formally request that they end this boycott. I ask you to explain to them that the Statute of Gernika is legal and democratic in nature, as are the symbols associated with it. I also ask you to pass on to the organisers of the Eurovision Song Contest our contention that this arbitrary decision, which can be based only on ignorance, is far removed from democratic values and culture and is offensive to the Basque people, particularly to those who staged the civic resistance against one of Europe's bloodiest, longest lasting dictatorships and sought to recover freedom and self-government for the Basque Country. General Franco is not a role model that we should be following in Europe today.

Thank you in advance for your attention and your assistance,

Best Regards,

Izaskun Bilbao Barandica
Vice-Chair of ALDE group (EAJ-PNV)



izaskun.bilbaobarandica@europarl.europa.eu
www.izaskunbilbao.eus www.europarl.europa.eu
@IzaskunBilbaoB
Rue Wiertz 60 ASP 9G 258 1047 Bruselas Tfno: +3222845528