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Contents

Foreword

This report was prepared by Ana Villellas Ariño, María Villellas Ariño and Pamela Urrutia Arestizábal. The authors hold research positions at the Conflict and Peacebuilding Programme in the School for a Culture of Peace (ECP) at Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (UAB).

The report provides an analysis of the Ahotsak (Voices) initiative, which emerged in the 2000s as a movement calling for more effective participation of women in finding solutions to the Basque conflict. The initiative provides an excellent example of how women from different political backgrounds have worked together across divides in pursuit of a shared goal of peace. Beginning with an analysis of the context in which the initiative emerged and later expanded, the report highlights some facilitating factors and methodological aspects of Ahotsak. The authors provide an account of the various obstacles the Ahotsak movement faced, while also acknowledging its positive impact on the transformation of the conflict. The authors consider the issues of sustainability, legacy and lessons learned from this initiative. The paper concludes that although there are conflicting views about whether the movement has disappeared or is on standby, the initiative demonstrated that dialogue was possible, and it succeeded in mobilising women from across backgrounds.

DPI wishes to thank the authors for this enlightening report from which women in other conflict situations may take inspiration and draw lessons.

The views and opinions expressed in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official position of DPI.

Kerim Yildiz
Chief Executive Officer
Democratic Progress Institute

1. Introduction

Ahotsak (Voices) was a movement that emerged in the 2000s, calling for a greater role for women in the search for solutions to the Basque conflict. The initiative was notable for bringing together a wide variety of local and sectoral actors, mainly women from across the political spectrum in the Basque Country and Navarre in Spain, except for the Popular Party (PP) and the Navarrese People's Union (UPN). It also united women from the South of France/ French Basque Country.[1] It also gathered members of unions and feminist organisations. Ahotsak argued that it was necessary to commit to dialogue without prejudices or conditions. Using a methodology based on the least common denominator (focusing on what united them, rather than on what divided them), the diverse members of Ahotsak managed to agree on three basic premises for undertaking a new approach. Described in the movement's founding declaration, which was made public on 8 April 2006, these principles underscored the importance of: 1) identifying peace as a collective demand and a political priority (which had to be endowed with content and go beyond negative peace or the absence of violence); 2) recognising the legitimacy of all political projects, without exception, and the importance of promoting them through exclusively democratic means; and 3) respecting the right of Basque society to decide whether to transform or uphold the legal and political framework.[2] The initiative was welcomed for

1 Some Basque nationalists call for the unification of Basque Country as a geographic space that includes the three provinces of the Basque Autonomous Community of Spain (Álava, Guipúzcoa and Vizcaya), the Community of Navarre and three regions in the South of France (Lapurdi, Babe Nafarroa and Zuberoa).

2 See Annex 1: "Ahotsak Founding Declaration".

emphasising dialogue as a mechanism for seeking agreement, for staging the ability to reach agreements with political content across conflict divides and for making the role of women in resolving the conflict visible. Ahotsak gave rise to hopes and expectations, resonated at the local level and received support in different parts of Spain. However, the movement also faced several obstacles and was especially vulnerable to the vicissitudes of the conflict, which determined its brief existence starting with the gradual cutback of its activities in 2007, after the separatist Euskadi Ta Askatasuna group (ETA) resumed the use of violence.[3]

This report analyses the Ahotsak movement and is divided into six sections in addition to this introduction. Firstly the report reviews the context of the Basque conflict and the circumstances in which Ahotsak emerged. Secondly, it studies how Ahotsak evolved over its history, distinguishing three separate stages. Thirdly it highlights some facilitating factors and methodological aspects of the initiative. Fourthly it focuses on the obstacles faced by Ahotsak, while in fifth place it focuses on its positive impacts. The final section of the report deals with issues of sustainability, legacy and lessons learned. Methodologically, the report takes a qualitative analytical approach based on 17 semi-structured interviews with a wide range of actors, including female MPs who were part of the driving force behind Ahotsak, female representatives of trade unions and feminist organisations that became involved in the initiative and women who participated in the Ahotsak forums at the municipal level, as well as other political and social actors involved in the efforts

3 See Annex 2: "Chronology: Context of the conflict and the peace process that framed the emergence of Ahotsak

to transform the conflict in the Basque Country and peace and gender researchers. The interviews were conducted between April and June 2018. Meanwhile, a review was also conducted of media articles chronicling the Ahotsak movement, other publications dealing with it and the statements that it issued itself.

2. The Context in which Ahotsak took root

The Basque conflict refers to the disputes regarding the identity-related and self-government demands of a significant sector of the Basque population and to the clash of political projects, all within a plurinational and complex demographic context, mainly encompassing the Autonomous Community of the Basque Country and part of Navarre in Spain, along with parts of the South of France, also historically considered part of the Basque Country. Cultural, linguistic and territorial elements, among others, have historically mobilised a broad sector of the Basque population. The conflict has been marked since the second half of the 20th century by the direct violence perpetrated by the armed group ETA, created in the 1950s during Franco's dictatorship, which demanded self-determination for the Basque people and the creation of an independent state. The restoration of democracy in Spain paved the way for the current 'State of Autonomies', in which specific broad competences are granted to the Basque Country and Navarre. Throughout decades of conflict, multiple forms of violence were denounced, including deaths caused by ETA's violence (837 deaths), deaths by security forces action (94) and paramilitary groups (73), as well as other human rights violations, including torture by security forces and ETA's economic extortion.[4] Almost all governments in Spain have attempted to negotiate with ETA at some point, with many difficulties. Negotiations in 1981

4 For more information on human rights violations in the Basque conflict, see VVAA, *Informe-base de vulneraciones de derechos humanos en el caso vasco (1960-2013)*, June 2013. This report was commissioned by the Peace and Coexistence General Secretary of the Basque Government,
http://www.euskadi.eus/contenidos/informacion/documentos_paz_convivencia/es_def/adjuntos/informe_base_vulneraciones.pdf

and 1982 led to the dissolution of ETA political-military at the Seventh Assembly in 1982. The Conversations of Algiers in the late 1980s under the social-democratic PSOE-led government failed. The conservative PP-led government's approaches to ETA in the late 1990s, accompanied by truces, were also unsuccessful.

Ahotsak took root in a context of great stress and tension. The Spanish government was controlled by the Popular Party (PP), which, under the leadership of José María Aznar (1996-2004), denied that any political conflict existed and focused its strategy on fighting ETA. After the peace talks between the PP government and ETA ran aground in 1999 and the 1998-1999 truce that followed the Lizarra-Garazi Agreement[5] was scrapped, the Basque armed group resumed violence and intensified its threats and attacks against politicians belonging to the PP and the Socialist Party (PSOE), killing 46 between January 2000 and May 2003,[6] including socialist icons like Fernando Buesa (PSE), Juan Mari Jáuregui (PSE), Ernest Lluch (PSC) and others. The PP and the PSOE then signed the Anti-Terrorist Pact (Agreement for Freedom and against Terrorism, 2000) and the Law on Political Parties (2002). The Supreme Court banned Batasuna (and its predecessors Herri Batasuna and Euskal Herritarrok) in 2003,[7] considering them "the political complement

5 The Lizarra-Garazi Agreement was signed in September 1998 between Basque nationalist political, social and trade union forces and Euskal Batasuna. Non-nationalist Basque majority forces (PSOE and PP) were left out of the agreement, which called for dialogue with ETA. Please see the text of the agreement at:
https://www.libertaddigital.com/suplementos/pvascoe/documentos/pacto_estrella.pdf

6 Eguiguren, Jesús, and Rodríguez Aizpeolea, Luis, *ETA. Las claves de la paz. Confesiones del negociador*, Barcelona: Aguilar, 2011.

7 The name of the party that has brought together the pro-independence (abertzale) left has changed over the years, partly as a consequence of the different bans on it: Herri Batasuna, Euskal Herritarrok, Batasuna, Communist Party of the Basque Lands, ANV, Bild, Sortu and EH-Bildu. Some of these are coalitions with other parties, such as EH Bildu.

of ETA". The Constitutional Court upheld this ruling in 2004.[8] It was a context of decades of human rights violations, including but not limited to torture by the security forces, financial extortion by ETA and threats from the armed group that resulted in the need for bodyguards.[9]

The general political atmosphere was characterised by a lack of communication among the parties to the conflict. However, at the same time, a discreet channel of secret talks began in 2000 between Basque Socialist leader Jesús Eguiguren and the leader of Batasuna at the time, Arnaldo Otegi.[10] Furthermore, as Fisas notes, other steps were also taken between 2002 and 2003 in the form of proposals and the search for more promising scenarios.[11] These included the document "Un escenario de paz" [A scenario for peace] (2002) by Batasuna, which recognised different feelings of national belonging, among other aspects, and the book *Con mano izquierda* [*With the left hand*, which refers to the ability to do something complex discerningly or with flexibility and 'savoir faire'] (2002), by the Socialist politicians Gemma Zabaleta and Denis Itxaso, which proposed talks with Batasuna in April. Given this background, Ahotsak emerged as an initiative by female politicians in the Basque Parliament who were convinced of the need to act to

8 La Vanguardia, "El Constitucional confirma la ilegalización de Batasuna", *La Vanguardia*, 16th January 2004, http://www.lavanguardia.com/politica/20040116/51262787086/el-constitucional-confirma-la-ilegalizacion-de-batasuna.html

9 For a description and quantification of human rights violations in the Basque case, see the report commissioned by the Secretariat of Peace and Coexistence of the Basque Government: varous authors, *Informe de vulneraciones de derechos humanos en el caso vasco (1960-2013)*, [Report of human rights abuses in the Basque situation] 2013. http://www.euskadi.eus/contenidos/informacion/documentos_paz_convivencia/es_def/adjuntos/informe_base_vulneraciones.pdf

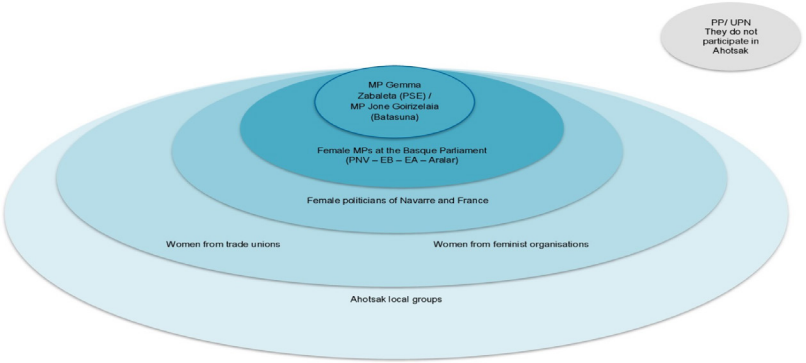
10 Eguiguren and Aizpeolea, 2011.

11 Fisas, Vicenç, *Yearbook on Peace Processes 2012*, Barcelona: Icaria, 2012.

change the status quo, break the dynamics of isolation and develop a new narrative to overcome their respective political proclivities and promote a peace process.

3. History of Ahotsak

The history of Ahotsak unfolded in three stages, starting in 2002. The first stage was one of confidential and non-public rapprochement between two female MPs at opposite ends of the national political spectrum (with the exception of the PP), Gemma Zabaleta (PSE) and Jone Goirizelaia (Batasuna), between 2002 and 2003, approximately. The second stage of the movement was one of expansion, at first to other female MPs of the Basque Parliament and later to other female politicians and trade union figures. This went on until April 2006, when the founding text that launched the third stage was published. During its third stage, Ahotsak focused its activity on the public sphere. These stages were shaped directly by how the conflict evolved.



3.1 The Beginnings of Ahotsak: Rapprochement Between Gemma Zabaleta and Jone Goirizelaia

The main promoters of the movement, Gemma Zabaleta and Jone Goirizelaia, were at opposite ends of the political spectrum (except for the PP). Zabaleta was a leading socialist and an MP in the Basque Parliament for the Socialist Party of the Basque Country (PSE). Goirizelaia was a prominent leader and lawyer of the *Abertzale* pro-independence left and an MP in the Basque Parliament representing Batasuna.[12] Zabaleta travelled with security escort due to ETA's violence, whilst Goirizelaia's party faced being outlawed. Drawing on their personal relationship through building trust, these two politicians began a series of confidential meetings in 2002 aimed at finding solutions to the conflict in the Basque Country. Contact between the two was facilitated by the use of spaces provided by pro-dialogue and pacifist civil society organisations like Elkarri and research centres dedicated to Track II initiatives such as the Autonomous University of Barcelona's Escola de Cultura de Pau (ECP). The politicians made joint public appearances for interviews, talks and discussion forums. This initial dialogue sought to discover "where the other side gets it right", in the words of Jone Goirizelaia, and "what else could we do to achieve peace", according to Gemma Zabaleta.

Zabaleta and Goirizelaia started from the basis that their respective political organisations were among those most affected by the

12 Jone Goirizelaia was a MP during the 2001-2005 legislature, but not during the 2005-2009 legislature due to the banning of Batasuna.

developments of the conflict and found that rapprochement was possible between them.[13] "We have to try to craft a narrative, to create a political discourse favourable to a peace process based on everything we share", they concluded, according to Zabaleta. Once trust was built between them, Zabaleta and Goirizelaia opened their tiny circle to elected representatives of all the political parties with seats in the Basque Parliament. Female MPs from all parties except for the PP joined them: the Socialist Party of the Basque Country (PSE), Batasuna, Eusko Alkartasuna (EA), the Basque Nationalist Party (PNV), Ezker Batua (EB) and later, Aralar. Female members of the PP were also invited to participate, but their party did not allow it (see section 5).

3.2 Ahotsak Grows: Widening the Circle and Confidential Work

Around 2004, Ahotsak began a second stage of discreet but broader work, including confidential meetings and work on mutual understanding with participants of all the political parties represented in the Basque Parliament, which it achieved with all but the PP. In this second stage, Ahotsak was structured and established as a platform for dialogue in which the members decided that participation in the initiative would take place on an individual basis, though the influence of the parties led to ambivalent situations (see section 4). They were committed to a methodology guided by the principle of "working on what unites us and not on what divides us".

13 Precisely that same approach was at the starting point of the secret talks of Otegui and Eguiguren started two years earlier.

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This second stage of Ahotsak was built on the previous experience of alliances and cooperative work of these female MPs of the Basque Country who ended up becoming part of the movement. Specifically, Ahotsak's methodology drew on joint work and consensus building by female MPs in the Basque Parliament's Women and Youth Committee and Labour and Social Action Committee. "What we had in common was the fact that we dealt with social issues. There we were trained to reach agreements" was how Kontxi Bilbao (EB) described it. The work done in these committees led to the Domestic Partnership Law in 2003, which in retrospect all MPs participating in Ahotsak view as a turning point. The approval of this law with the support of all political parties (except the PP) provided an unusual image in Parliament, in contrast to the rigid political polarisation at that time, which in most cases prevented the political parties from reaching such broad agreements.

Therefore, the initial alliance between women far apart on the political spectrum, Gemma Zabaleta (PSE) and Jone Goirizelaia (Batasuna), was enormously important for creating Ahotsak, which was supported by the experience of parliamentary alliances working in areas unrelated to the Basque conflict. Buoyed by the trusting relationship and dialogue between Gemma Zabaleta and Jone Goirizelaia, recognition that they had been able to work together on social issues led the MPs to embark on a process to address the conflict in the Basque Country together and seek possible ways to solve it by defining points of agreement among women with different views of the conflict. As Nekane Altzelai (EA) pointed out, "We were talking about these issues in a relaxed and friendly

atmosphere that created bonds of trust and even friendship. That made us think that if we can agree in these areas, we can also start talking about issues related to how each of us viewed the Basque Country, the right to decide, the suffering of the victims and the prisoners among others". This process structured Ahotsak as a space for established dialogue, with frequent meetings, a methodology for seeking agreements and a certain agenda (see section 4) whose ultimate goal was to help to resolve the conflict and to promote women's participation in finding solutions to do so.

Ahotsak's work gradually expanded. From an initial project between two people when it first took root, and its expansion to a small group of MPs, Ahotsak later embraced female politicians from the Basque Country, France and Navarre. The Basque MPs used their contacts with women from sister political parties in those other regions to get them to join Ahotsak, include them in the dialogue and enlist their support. Once contacts were made with political parties (including the French Socialist Party, for example), the next step was to recruit the unions. Women from all active unions in the Basque Country were invited to participate in Ahotsak. Thus, representatives of the main unions, including the major Spanish unions' branches in the Basque Country, participated in meetings and in building agreement to find solutions to the conflict.

Ahotsak's inception and political, regional and sectoral expansion was facilitated by the Spanish central government's political situation after the PSOE's rise to power in 2004, led by José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, and the implementation of a talks-based approach to the Basque question, which led to a peace process.

Following the expansion of the Ahotsak, the participants managed to agree on a founding text that established basic principles for finding a solution to the conflict in the Basque Country (see section 1). They decided to make it public in April 2006, thus giving way to the next stage, of public character.

3.3 Public Stage: Socialisation of the Ahotsak Talks and Agreements

Ahotsak was not disclosed to the public until the environment was more receptive. It took place after ETA's permanent ceasefire announcement in March 2006. The presentation ceremony was held at Miramar Palace in San Sebastian on 8 April 2006, with 200 women participating, and the text was read publicly by three female journalists in Spanish, Basque and French. Ahotsak served as a forum for women across the ideological spectrum who claimed a role as active agents to transform the conflict. The drafting of the founding text also showed that different parties could reach agreements through dialogue, even if those agreements were minimal, and spurred the peace process on at a key time. The content of the Ahotsak declaration was welcomed by various social and political actors, including the then *Lehendakari* Juan José Ibarretxe (president of the Basque Government). It also had the implicit authorisation of the ruling party. For example, during the 2006 peace process, the leader of the PNV suggested as a way to overcome existing obstacles that Ahotsak's principles should be the starting point for establishing the table of political parties of the Basque Country foreseen in the peace process. To this day, some

Basque actors think that the political parties have been unable to formulate a joint discourse like Ahotsak did and that there has not been another initiative with the same level of social and political diversity.

After the founding text was disclosed, what its members called the "socialisation" of the movement began, intensifying its public activities. Ahotsak was expanded to include women from feminist organisations. Relations between the feminist movement and female politicians were not always easy and the fact that they had not been included in preparing and presenting the initial declaration made dialogue difficult at times (see section 5). However, once they entered Ahotsak, their participation enriched the discussion. The feminist movement placed greater emphasis on the need for women to participate in all areas of decision-making and in incorporating a gender perspective based on the international framework defined by UNSC Rresolution 1325.[14] After women from feminist organisations were included, Ahotsak's public statements contained references to the experience of women in other contexts of conflict that had been able to overcome national, political, ethnic or religious divisions to make their voices heard in peace processes.

In this third stage, Ahotsak publicly presented the initiative several times in the Basque Country and in cities in the rest of Spain. The most important event took place at Euskalduna Palace in Bilbao on 2 December 2006, when 5,000 signatures of support were

14 In July 2006, Ahotsak's founding text was enriched by contributions from the feminist movement.

presented with 2,000 people attending. The initiative acquired great social importance. Events were organised in towns and cities in the Basque Country, usually at the request of local stakeholders that wanted to learn about the movement first-hand and get the chance to listen to its members directly. Ahotsak members worked hard across the Basque Country to present the initiative to encourage groups of women in cities and towns to replicate their experience to "meet each other through words and focus on common ground, not on political differences", according to Kontxi Bilbao (EB). These events were usually attended by several MPs from different political parties to give greater visibility to Ahotsak's broad ideological spectrum, including representatives of trade unions and feminist organisations. The unusual diversity of the attendees was also remarkable, as it was often composed of political rivals, who hardly shared spaces or listened to each other, as well as ordinary people that were not politically mobilized. In addition, the female MPs who promoted the initiative stressed that these events showed the high degree of trust that had been built between Ahotsak members, since they all felt represented by everything that the others said. Events were also organised in other Spanish cities like Madrid, Barcelona and Santiago de Compostela. A support movement called *Dones catalanes per Ahotsak* (Catalan women for Ahotsak) was created in Catalonia.

Meanwhile, a process began to create local Ahotsak groups, which emerged in towns like Arrasate, Durango, Gernika, Elgoibar, Tolosa and others, in an attempt to replicate the initiative at the municipal level. These groups brought together women from different political parties who usually had not worked together previously.

An illustrative example is that of Ahotsak Elgoibar, which united women from Batasuna, EA, the PNV, the PSE (occasionally) and the LAB union. These women, who were all grassroots political activists and did not participate in municipal institutional policy, except for one who was a council member, met on several occasions, thereby creating a platform for dialogue between different groups to reach agreements similar to those of Ahotsak in all regions. Much of the time that the local Ahotsak groups spent working was devoted to building trust, since the local political dynamics linked to the conflict had shaped relations between people from different parties.

Ahotsak's intense public activity during 2006 decreased when ETA returned to violence, carrying out an attack in terminal T4 of the Madrid Airport on 30 December 2006. This attack was a turning point for a process that already faced many obstacles. ETA's violation of the truce killed two Ecuadorian citizens, buried the peace process and drove the members of Ahotsak further apart. The movement tried to respond to the new situation with a statement. The text was considered an achievement by some participants for its ability to articulate a common message given the context, but was considered insufficient by others who wanted a more forceful and explicit condemnation of the violence. The drafting of a new statement in February showed the internal differences even more clearly amidst increased political and media pressure. As a result, Ahotsak's public activity dropped off significantly starting in 2007.

4. Enabling Factors and Working Methodology

Regarding the effort to establish Ahotsak and its methodology, we could emphasise different aspects related to the search for safe spaces, confidence building mechanisms, the influence of factors like "political invisibility" and the ambivalence of individual participation alongside political activism and the exercise of political office, the commitment to work discreetly, the methodology of seeking out agreements that prioritise common ground over differences, the careful use of language and the consideration (or lack of consideration) of the experiences of women in other contexts of conflict. President of the Government at that time, José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, whose term of office extended from 2004 until 2011, mentions several of these aspects by identifying key aspects to build a peace process, noting that "there are three previous stages to try to achieve peace in a conflict. First, an unequivocal determination. The unmistakable determination always has to come from those have more power. Second, recognition. If they ask me what word I would choose as the key to the resolution of a conflict: recognition of the other. And the third is trust. Discretion constitutes a principle that feeds, enriches a basic condition to work in a conflict, which is trust."

Before its work was made public, the MPs that formed the driving force met in confidential safe spaces, mainly belonging to Parliament, and took advantage of informal moments to talk, such as meal times. Jone Goirizelaia (Batasuna) emphasised that they began to meet "in places where we were comfortable and safe and

certain that what we were doing was not going to come to light". One of the members sat on the Parliamentary Committee, so she had a very large office located in a discreet part of Parliament that they often use to meet. When Ahotsak expanded to include other groups, the meetings were also held elsewhere and even moved to San Sebastian to facilitate the movement of those who came from France or Navarre. Local Ahotsak groups like in Elgoibar met at a union's headquarters to avoid using the headquarters of any particular political party, although it was a pro-independence union.

Confidence building and the importance of personal relationships among the early members of Ahotsak were fundamental for strengthening the movement. One interviewee stressed her initial reluctance to join the group because of the distrust she felt at that time resulting from parliamentary rivalry. The facilitating work that some of them did was essential to overcoming her reluctance and disagreement, as it promoted trust and rapprochement. The women interviewed constantly referred to the importance of empathy and their personal relationships as starting points before moving towards more important political agreements.

The influence of the relative "political invisibility" of women in Parliament can also be highlighted. This made rapprochement easier in the early, non-public stage, since, with some exception, they were not the most visible members of their parliamentary groups, the visible leadership positions being held by male MPs. "Since we were not visible in politics, we could do the work", said Nekane Alzelai (EA). Other factors can be identified from the

period before the work was made public, such as the fact that it was exclusively internal, with no external support or facilitation beyond discreet communication with some interlocutors within each party.

The ambiguities stemming from the personal participation of those active in Ahotsak need to be pointed out given their political party membership and exercise of political office. Ahotsak's participants chose to get involved in the initiative individually and did not want to be a "conveyor belt" for their respective political parties, as Gemma Zabaleta (PSE) put it.[15] Nevertheless, they carried out their work under the influence of their parties. Dialogue with fellow party members was important for MPs at the farthest ends of the political spectrum (Batasuna and PSE), since the agreed text published in April was implicitly endorsed by the respective political parties. There are several ways to interpret the parties' endorsement of the text. On the one hand, it shows that MPs could not act with total freedom and that the parties' elites maintained a certain degree of control over the movement. On the other hand, the endorsement greatly strengthened the document and also showed that the members of Ahotsak were in some way able to force the parties to accept positions more conducive to dialogue than before. In any case, this endorsement was not official or public in nature. The women who participated in Ahotsak did so individually, but their membership in political parties and their role as MPs undoubtedly supplanted and shaped the movement.

15 Emakunde/ Basque Institute for Women, Presentation by Gemma Zabaleta, *Congreso internacional Sare 2006: Mujeres generando las paces*, Emakunde 2007. http://www.emakunde.euskadi.eus/contenidos/informacion/publicaciones_jornadas/es_emakunde/adjuntos/sare2006_es.pdf

Ahotsak members decided to work discreetly and non-publicly, a precaution that met the need to protect the movement until it could be established in an atmosphere of less social, political and media polarisation as a result of the conflict. The disagreements between the political parties were so glaring that initiatives were rejected only because they did not appear to support the same project together. Thus, the political context did not allow for a public effort of this kind and the MPs worked in secrecy and the times were conditioned by this context. These efforts at rapprochement and consensus building could not go public until ETA declared a truce. The lack of ETA violence was such a decisive factor that once it resumed, Ahotsak's work was hampered.

As mentioned above, the members of Ahotsak chose to focus on a methodology for seeking agreements, looking for and stressing what unites them over their differences. They also defined a working agenda to agree on a document that focused on two central subjects: peace (a commitment to exclusively peaceful means and positive peacebuilding beyond just the lack of violence) and politics (it has to be possible to defend all political projects and it should also be possible for these projects to become a reality, changing the legal and political framework if necessary). Once the items of the agenda were chosen and agreements were made, the statement was drafted. Special care was taken in the use of language, with a vocabulary that was not exclusive, in which all could feel represented and fully agreed. According to Kontxi Bilbao (EB), "every word, every sentence, was dissected so that we could say what we wanted to say without anyone feeling hurt, manipulated or distorted". Jone Goirizelaia (Batasuna) emphasised that they tried to "escape from

pre-existing language". It was a document that represented the "maximum" that each member could achieve and the acceptable "minimum", taking the others' positions into account.

Except for the feminists, most Ahotsak members said that in the early days they did not take women's movements for peace in other countries or UNSC Resolution 1325 as external benchmarks. They agreed that they were not guided by these experiences. However, other people interviewed who were active in the peace process in different areas (civil society and government) said that various public events about the role of women in peacebuilding had been organised in the Basque Country at around that time, so there was some social knowledge about the subject that Ahotsak could have also soaked up indirectly. As indicated above, the addition of feminist groups to Ahotsak helped to deepen this aspect, and in fact the declaration made public on 2 December echoed both UNSC Resolution 1325 and the contributions of different women's movements to peace. In any case, the women, peace and security agenda did not seem to play a decisive role in Ahotsak's work.

With regard to external support, it should be noted that Ahotsak did not have any structural financial support and only received specific backing for organising events such as the one at Euskalduna Palace in Bilbao that brought together 2,000 women. It was a movement based on the personal commitments of its participants.

5. Obstacles

Ahotsak faced different obstacles that shaped its history. The main ones included visible and invisible barriers erected by political parties, their machinery and groups within the parties, related in large part to discrimination against women in the political sphere; media pressure; and the breakdown of the permanent ceasefire by ETA, which entailed external and internal obstacles to managing the changing situation. Other lesser difficulties were also faced, such as difficulties between Ahotsak's female politicians and feminists, as well as conciliation issues in some participating sectors.

- **Barriers from political parties**

Ahotsak faced visible and invisible barriers coming from the political parties, their systems and groups within the parties. This was especially true of the men of the parties, but also some women. This obstacle was considered very important by all the women working in politics of the founding group of Ahotsak. The interviewees alluded to invisible barriers such as attitudes and reactions by groups within the political parties, which ranged from the parties' scepticism towards Ahotsak to underestimation or even contempt for the work of female MPs. Those who experienced this, as well as the politicians and peace activists, attributed it to the influence of male chauvinism in the political culture. They said that behind that scepticism or underestimation, the men of the political parties felt somewhat threatened that they were becoming less important in light of Ahotsak's growing social and media power.

More tangible barriers included warnings, interference and direct pressure. These were related both to the masculinised context of the parties and the difficulties linked to Ahotsak's two-fold nature, as a platform for individual participation, but whose promoters were simultaneously members of political parties and/or held seats in Parliament. Thus, as part of these more tangible obstacles, the parties inserted political figures loyal to party machinery and tried to impose their assumptions and interests on Ahotsak's working dynamics, threatening the methodology of seeking agreements.

Another form of direct pressure was the public censorship of some members of Ahotsak. For instance, women from the Executive Regional Commission of the PSN requested that Ainhoa Aznárez (PSN) be reprimanded for belonging to Ahotsak. Aznárez was not even supported by the party's secretary general. Others, like Gemma Zabaleta (PSE), had to negotiate their parties' approval for the movement's various actions, such as the founding statement. Despite the fact that she was participating as an individual, Zabaleta did not want to compromise her party, so she had to negotiate with various party figures to obtain approval from all the machinery of the organisation. These arduous negotiations were an obstacle due to the difficulties and risks involved, but once they were settled, they also added value, since they moved the party towards a position of dialogue and recognition of the other.

Direct pressure from the political parties increased after ETA's declaration of a permanent ceasefire, especially on the women of the PSE, EB and the PNV. "Not everyone supported the peace process within the Socialist Party itself, so obviously they were the

ones who gave me the most problems. After the T4 bombing, I received calls from those people telling me that this [Ahotsak] had to disappear. I received all these types of pressure", said Gemma Zabaleta (PSE).

Pressure from political parties also hindered Ahotsak's greater ability to cross the political divide more broadly. The PP's position made it impossible for female politicians of that party to participate in Ahotsak. Some of its MPs participated in meetings before Ahotsak became more structurally defined as an initiative to help to resolve the conflict, but given the rigidity of the party, the participation in Ahotsak was not possible.

Unlike Ahotsak's female politicians, women involved with trade unions and feminists did not experience this type of pressure from their respective organisations, but enjoyed their support. Trade union participants in Ahotsak said that trade unions in the Basque Country had previously engaged in cooperative relationships regarding women's rights, from those ideologically closest to the pro-independence left to those closest to non-nationalist parties. This added value to those union's experience with Ahotsak.

- **The lack of political power**

Another obstacle to Ahotsak's work was the limited organic influence that the female politicians who promoted it had on their parties. This limitation was present throughout Ahotsak's core driving group and specifically in its two most visible faces and representatives of the two most mutually distant positions on the

conflict: Gemma Zabaleta (PSE) and Jone Goirizelaia (Batasuna). Thus, experts from the Basque Country indicated that although both were somewhat important to their parties and were acquiring great symbolic influence, they were also "outsiders" to their respective parties' machinery and lacked enough organic clout to impose their position within their parties, which placed them in a very weak position against them.

Yet this factor is relative, since Ahotsak did not aspire to be a decisive player in the negotiating process or to directly influence the political and military actors, but sought to socially influence people, especially women in the Basque Country, through individual participation. In addition, and offsetting their lack of organic influence, both knew how to build alliances and win support from key figures at the highest level of their parties and in the peace process under way. These key figures included Jesús María Eguiguren, the president of the PSE between 2002 and 2014 and architect of the exploratory talks with Arnaldo Otegui (Batasuna) that led to the 2005-2006 peace process; Batasuna leader Arnaldo Otegui and other figures from Batasuna; and the president of the Basque government, Juan José Ibarretxe (PNV). "Eguiguren was the essential ally (...) I told him, I am going this way, the document has this content, is taking on this dimension... and above all discussed with him the parts that could be more sensitive from the perspective of the peace process", said Gemma Zabaleta (PSE). A notable ally of the movement was the president of the Basque Country at the time, Juan José Ibarretxe, who was influenced by the lessons learned from Northern Ireland, South Africa and Western Sahara on the role of women in peace processes

after direct talks with prominent figures from those places, thereby boosting his support for Ahotsak.

- **Media pressure**

Pressure from the media was another problem with which Ahotsak had to contend. The working dynamics of the movement were covered various times by the media. The obstacles included but were not limited to leaks in the press shortly before Ahotsak's public launch (the newspaper *El País* reported its existence two months before it came to light and published its founding statement) and before its last statement in February 2007, as well as media treatment that put Ahotsak's working methodology at risk by insisting on issues that had not been agreed.

As noted by Onintza Lasa (EA), a member of Ahotsak's core driving group, "Sometimes the media's questions differed from our ways of working. For me that was a lot of pressure. Sometimes their questions focused on points that we had not agreed on or talked about anyway, or on which we could not reach common ground. Those ways of working of the media gave me enough pressure. I would say: 'Let us work', because if we are already reaching agreements at this pace, nobody should try to pressure us. These things take time and are working out, but publicity and spotlights are often contrary to good work". Like policies, media pressure increased after the ceasefire was broken.

- **The breakdown of the ceasefire: between the changing context of the conflict and the lack of sufficient internal consensus**

A fundamental hindrance for Ahotsak was the scrapping of ETA's permanent ceasefire. The truce had been declared on 24 March 2006 during a new peace process between the Spanish government and ETA, which had been preceded by exploratory talks and formalised in 2005 in the Congress of Deputies. The attack took place amidst obvious difficulties in the negotiations between Madrid and ETA since the middle of the year[16] and one day after the Spanish Prime Minister addressed the Congress of Deputies and predicted that the peace process would improve in 2007. After the attack, the government terminated the negotiations, although at the present time this failed process is identified as crucial for the later end of the violence. President Rodríguez Zapatero himself indicates that "the attack of the T4 was a hard blow, mainly because two people died in very dramatic circumstances, two Ecuadorians. But at the same time it was the certificate or the precursor of the definitive end of ETA. I do not have any doubt. (....) The T4 did not change my convictions, in fact, it accelerated my convictions. (...) When an event of this nature occurs, the immediate impact is "well, this is over, we cannot..." Well, it's not my way of thinking, on the contrary. It should intensify everything that can amount to a process of rapprochement and dialogue. And it is almost easier

16 The new peace process began with a preliminary stage of contacts and confidential exploratory talks between Eguiguren (PSE) and Otegui (Batasuna) in 2002, which gave way to a negotiating process in 2005. For more information, see Fisas, Vicenç, *Yearbook on Peace Processes 2012*, Icaria, 2012, and Aizpeolea, Luis R., "Así fue el diálogo con ETA", *El País*, 10th June 2007. https://elpais.com/diario/2007/06/10/domingo/1181447553_850215.html.

to do it socially than politically, because you have the restriction of public opinion, the accusation of being excessively kind, naive or a friend of terror, or even all at once. I always knew that I risked almost everything by believing in the possibility of peace and the end of ETA, but I always thought it was worthwhile.

Ahotsak had revealed itself publicly during a truce after four years of Ahotsak working behind the scenes. Thus, the truce facilitated Ahotsak's transition from a non-public initiative of dialogue in a context still marked by violence and fraught with political tension in the public sphere to a vehicle for public dialogue with the peace process under way. In that sense, Ahotsak even had to wait for a few months for ETA to formalise a permanent ceasefire before it could go public due to the political pressure it received after the newspaper *El País* reported that it existed. In the same way, the breaking of the truce placed Ahotsak in a very difficult position and ultimately led to its dissolution. After the truce was broken, Ahotsak issued two public statements, but its public activity petered out throughout 2007 until practically ending, with only a few sporadic later appearances, though it never ended with any official public statement or event. Several factors were responsible for its demise (or its standby status, depending on the interpretations of the women involved).

On one hand, the attack unleashed greater political and media pressure. In fact, some Ahotsak participants said that this external pressure and the rapidly worsening situation of the conflict were the main causes of Ahotsak's gradual demise. On the other hand, ETA's violation of the permanent ceasefire placed Ahotsak in the

position of having to respond, given the media and social attention that it had attracted.

The internal management of this response was unsatisfactory, since it created a gap between the expectations of some participants and the agreed public response. At the same time, the gap seems to be closely related to obstacles stemming from the dual situation of individual participation and political party membership or the exercise of public office, since political party membership implicitly set limits on management of the response to the new situation. Thus, some interviewees pointed out that the female politicians of Ahotsak were tightly constrained in what they could do or how far they could go in reacting to the breakdown of the ceasefire. They also said that their initiative depended on a ceasefire situation.

The interviewees differed in their interpretations of the internal process to formulate a public response to the breakdown of the ceasefire. Over 10 years later, there is still apparently no general consensus about the internal process, as evidenced by the accounts of the representatives of the farthest ends of the political spectrum, Gemma Zabaleta (PSE) and Jone Goirizelaia (Batasuna). For Zabaleta, it was a clearly insufficient response at a time when individual courage was required to reject the attack and the ceasefire violation in clear terms, thereby overcoming the limits set by the parties. "The women of the nationalist (pro-independence) left did not know how say what had to be said, which was that the bombing was wrecking the peace process, that the bombs were not acceptable, in a much clearer way. I think they were afraid of taking that step, so that was disappointing for me", Zabaleta

said. For her, that fateful insufficiency dashed members' hopes and broke the Ahotsak movement. In contrast, Goirizelaia thought that the agreement that was reached faithfully reflected Ahotsak's background and internal diversity. For her, the attack did not break Ahotsak, which, she pointed out, did continue working, although some time later it shifted to a more discreet stage due to a political context that was hardly conducive to media exposure. Several Ahotsak members place value on the fact that they achieved a joint answer, even if it was a minimal agreement.

The women of Ahotsak managed the response to the violation of the permanent ceasefire on their own, with no external support. In retrospect, one Ahotsak participant who represented a feminist movement pointed out that they would have needed external help to work and manage disagreements. Thus, even though it had women linked to conflict resolution and the pacifist movement, such as Lokarri, Ahotsak did not develop close relations with those local actors or make use of them or other facilitators of group processes in difficult times. Amidst the crisis, the Autonomous University of Barcelona's Escola de Cultura de Pau supported Ahotsak through a public statement promoting it.[17]

- **Other obstacles**

Ahotsak also faced other, smaller obstacles, including difficulties in the relationship between female politicians and women from the

17 Europa Press, "La Escuela de Cultura de la Paz de Barcelona respalda a Ahotsak y llama a fortalecer las iniciativas civiles y sociales", *Europa Press*, 24th January 2007. http://www.europapress.es/nacional/noticia-escuela-cultura-paz-barcelona-respalda-ahotsak-llama-fortalecer-iniciativas-civiles-sociales-20070124115921.html

feminist movement at the beginning of Ahotsak's public period. Unlike the women from trade unions, the feminists were invited to join once Ahotsak had already become established. Feminists criticised and expressed misgivings about this because the initiative claimed to promote the role of women in conflict resolution, but had left them out of the process. Yet after this beginning marked by distrust and grievance, relations improved and the feminist movement made contributions to Ahotsak (see section 6). However, certain misgivings lingered due to the media focus on Ahotsak's politicians, whilst other participants (trade unionists and feminists) received much less attention. There were also differences regarding content and approaches that persist in the current peace process.

On the other hand, the driving core of Ahotsak did not face many roadblocks related to family conciliation, as they were political, union and feminist figures accustomed to the rhythms of political, union and social processes. In addition, the union and feminist participants in the core driving group enjoyed the advantage of being freed of duties for the union activity by their organisations, including participating in Ahotsak on an individual basis. However, conciliation was a challenge for other Ahotsak members from secondary circles and local groups, whose participation was more complex. Ahotsak tried to alleviate these impediments by paying attention to issues like the dates and times of general meetings and meeting locations, taking the geographical dispersion of its members into account.

6. Positive Impact of Ahotsak

The Ahotsak initiative had an outstanding positive impact. Its achievements included giving visibility to the possibility of dialogue and the methodology of searching for agreements between different points of view; mobilising a large number of women in support of dialogue; strengthening a social climate in support of the peace process; humanising relations between people with different political ideologies, with a positive impact for social coexistence; and having an indirect positive impact on the transformation of the conflict over the long term.

- **Visibility of dialogue and agreement between groups with different views**

Through Ahotsak's agreements, activities and media coverage, one of its main achievements was how it gave visibility to the possibility of dialogue between groups with different views. It also showed how its consensus-building methodology ("focusing on what unites us") made it possible to reach agreements. Whilst these aspects were not entirely new,[18] the use and impact of the language and methodology of seeking agreement and of "recognition of the other" were multiplied given Ahotsak's wide scope.

- **Mobilisation of women**

Ahotsak also managed to mobilise broad swathes of women of different political leanings in the Basque Country to promote mutual

18 For more information on civil society peace initiatives in the Basque Country, see Fisas, Vicenç, ¿Llegó la hora? *Promesas de paz para el País Vasco*, Barcelona: Icaria, 2010.

social recognition across conflict divides and the implementation and appreciation of dialogue between groups with different views. Thus, it led to many situations of active listening and dialogue between different people, since Ahotsak's many events and activities brought together people (especially women) who hardly shared space before. This mobilisation had qualitative and quantitative dimensions. Quantitatively, Ahotsak mobilised a large number of women who participated in its activities both locally and on a larger scale, such as the ceremony on 2 December at Euskalduna Palace in Bilbao.[19] Qualitatively, Ahotsak mobilised women from all areas of Basque society, including politics, unions, culture, academia, economics, sports, feminism and others. Ahotsak also fostered the creation of various local groups, which started their own working dynamics and reached their own achievements. "Ahotsak made it possible for women with different sensibilities to start talking and working together. It even helped them to hear testimonies from different areas that they had never heard before and began to share their points of view, their concerns and sometimes their pain", said Elixabete Piñol (PNV).

- **Support for the peace process**

Likewise, in its short public lifespan, Ahotsak helped to strengthen the social climate in support of the peace process and resolution of the conflict. "What was new was that just like Eguiguren and Otegui, there was an aura around Jone Goirizelaia and Gemma Zabaleta as well. And it also coincided with the peace process of

19 Guenaga Bidaurrazaga, Aitor "Ahotsak pide compromiso a las mujeres para hacer "irreversible" el proceso*", El País*, 3 de diciembre de 2006, https://elpais.com/diario/2006/12/03/paisvasco/1165178401_850215.html

2006. It was an organisation that was emerging, with different characteristics, bringing together women... All of that created hope around them, hope for the future and the conviction that this peace process could be the one that leads to a solution, so there were many expectations. At that time it was the initiative outside the parties that had more impact", said Basque peace process expert Paul Ríos. Although Ahotsak was not a *decisive* actor in the 2006 peace process, it did play the role of a necessary "citizen network" to support peace negotiations, Ríos continued. In fact, at times that the peace process reached an impasse, politicians like the president of the Basque government were called to overcome it through the basic agreements reached by Ahotsak.[20] As President Rodríguez Zapatero recognizes, in a context of polarization and conflict such as that of the Basque Country, "everything that contributes to creating a social climate and climate of opinion in which the words peace, dialogue, understanding, encounter, coexistence, are the determining words. Everything that involves rapprochement or that includes diverse actions towards unity of political actors, or cultural initiatives, all that helps, without any doubt ".

- **Humanisation of political and personal relationships with "the other"**

Ahotsak also had a positive impact on humanising politics and relations between people with different political ideologies. Ahotsak's scope of action not only included the events it organised, but also the informal socialising that took place after the events in squares and cafeterias. Through recognition of the other and the

20 Fisas, Vicenç, *Yearbook on Peace Processes 2012,* Barcelona: Icaria, 2012.

normalisation of that recognition, Ahotsak shattered prejudices and relational barriers. "I particularly remember one presentation in Eibar. A woman with security escort came to the presentation and spoke about the terrible situation she was experiencing and, above all, what she suffered for her family, what it was like to live with that threat [of ETA] and that she had encountered contempt and isolation in town that made her feel bad. At the same talk, other women told their experiences of being arrested, tortured [by security forces], of having a family member in prison far away and after travelling great distances they often found that they could not see him. Everyone told their own story, but with respect, and you noticed the empathy. Although it was a very small contribution, we were establishing the seed of something positive there: to get women who had each lived in their world, with their own problems to open up thanks to Ahotsak and take the chance to put themselves in someone else's shoes", said Elixabete Piñol (PNV). "We were able to have a coffee in the town square all together. And that was already a lot", said Juli Arregi (Batasuna), a participant in the local Elgoibar group. The humanisation of relations between people with different views is important, given that one of the challenges of peacebuilding in the Basque Country was (and remains) coexistence and reconciliation. In that sense, the ongoing maintenance of human relations created at that time is a positive part of Ahotsak's legacy. "There is still a minimum of contact. If we see each other on the street, we can talk, which didn't happen before Ahotsak. Many years have passed, but I'm still talking to these people", said Miren Arrate (EA).

- **Long-term resolution of the conflict**

Despite the breakdown of the peace process and the dissolution (or standby status) of Ahotsak, its work left far-reaching and indirect positive impacts on conflict resolution. "I think that it showed the PSE and Batasuna other ways of seeing things and that there were other possibilities (...)" said Paul Ríos. "Ahotsak not only managed to get people with different viewpoints to sit at the same table, but also to discuss what they agreed on. Statements were issued by Ahotsak that the parties have still not released jointly (...) I think there were models of resolution, of acceptance of the other side's position and of listening that have greatly benefitted the steps taken later in the peace process in the Basque Country", said the former president of the Basque government, Juan José Ibarretxe (PNV), who was in power during the Ahotsak era.

According to Paul Ríos, an accumulated set of factors, including Ahotsak's impact and legacy, helped to hone the Basque pro-independence left's internal debate on its strategies. As such, it finally decided on exclusively non-violent routes, which was decisive for the direction that ETA would take in later years. Therefore, there seems to be an indirect thread linking Ahotsak and its positive influences with the period that started in 2010-2011, which led to a multilateral peace process ending with ETA's disarmament and dissolution in 2017-2018.

7. Sustainability, Legacy and Lessons Learned

In 2007, Ahotsak withdrew and curtailed its public activity. After the statement and public declarations of January 2007, in which its members took different approaches to ETA's attack, but said that they would continue working with Ahotsak, political and media pressure rose and internal problems in reaching sufficient consensus intensified. These obstacles re-emerged around the time of Ahotsak's next and last public statement in February 2007, a preliminary and unapproved draft of which was leaked to the press. The Ahotsak movement was greatly weakened by these external and internal difficulties. Some participants distanced themselves from it, like Gemma Zabaleta, thinking that it had come to an end. Internal discussions then took place among other participants of the core driving group regarding whether or not it was a good idea to continue Ahotsak publicly without a "full picture". For several female MPs, continuing to host public events with only part of the political spectrum could have distorted the meaning of Ahotsak. "The picture had to include us all, because if it could be associated with a certain political sensitivity, would we still be enhancing Ahotsak, or would we be detracting from it?" said Elixabete Piñol (PNV).

From then on, the priorities of the women who continued participating in Ahotsak shifted to internal work and attempts to promote some projects, such as planting a tree in different towns and cities, indicating a space for dialogue. Rooted in the Basque tradition of gathering around the tree of Gernika to

resolve conflicts through dialogue, this initiative was supported by Nobel Peace Laureate Wangari Maathai. It did not succeed, however, and had a limited scope. In later years, Ahotsak has had an intermittent, ad hoc public presence, but many of the founding core members like Zabaleta (PSE) consider Ahotsak's work to be done. In addition, most female MPs of the driving core left politics years later and their new personal situations and needs for work-life balance (raising children, caring for older parents, professional responsibilities) no longer allowed them to keep up such an intense pace of involvement.

The local Ahotsak groups ended up fading away, each at their own pace. Their disappearance highlights the dependence of local groups on Ahotsak's global project or its core group and the challenges of sustainability that this entailed for local groups. "I felt sad and really we in the group felt sad, because Ahotsak was a way of demonstrating to the public that agreements can be reached, but if Ahotsak was broken at the global level, it could not move forward with us alone. If they don't send you work from above, you could say, then you end up leaving it (...) we could function when there were general or provincial meetings. If you see results from your work, you continue, but when you no longer see those results, it loses its luster. We never said: "Let's not meet anymore", but we left it gradually, until the end when it disappeared without us realising it", explained Miren Arrate (EA), from the local Ahotsak group in Elgoibar, one of the most active groups.

There are currently conflicting visions about whether the movement has disappeared or is on standby status. Ahotsak had given rise to

many expectations and its complex dissolution or phase change may have caused certain feelings of frustration and orphanage; and certain distrust towards female politicians among some segments of society. However, despite difficulties in the last phase of Ahotsak, in the social imagination Ahotsak lives on as a brave initiative that showed that dialogue was possible and that mobilised women from across backgrounds.

Ahotsak enjoyed no direct continuity with other projects, or only did so tangentially. Even so, in subsequent years other platforms emerged to promote the role of women in transforming conflicts, such as Emagune, in which some women who participated in Ahotsak have a certain degree of involvement, such as Jone Goirizelaia (Batasuna), one of the driving forces behind the initiative, which emerged in the university sphere, as well as women from the feminist and union movements. Experts on women and peace processes, who did technical support work for Emagune, indicated that surprisingly enough, Emagune did not initially plan to maintain continuity with Ahotsak. Another platform is the Social Forum to Promote the Peace Process, which consists of civil society actors involved in the stage of the multilateral peace process that began in 2010-2011. Despite its disappearance or standby status, Ahotsak is one of the players that formally appears as one of the driving forces of the Social Forum. Women who participated in Ahotsak, such as Jone Goirizelaia (Batasuna) and Nekane Altzelai (EA), also participate in the Social Forum. The Forum also has a gender working group and the mainstreaming of a gender perspective in the peace process is one of its lines of work, although it has had much less public visibility and concrete results

than its other areas of work, such as DDR, memory, coexistence, prisoners and fugitives.

All the Ahotsak participants interviewed for this report, as well as all Ahotsak's external partners that were interviewed, highlighted its enormous value, despite the difficulties in its final stage. Ahotsak is recognised as having had a positive impact in several ways (see previous section) among them, the current situation of ETA dissolving would not have been possible if the road had not been paved by multiple initiatives like Ahotsak. The Ahotsak experience left behind some useful lessons for women involved in dialogue-focused initiatives in conflict settings, which were also mentioned in the interviews:

- A useful premise to move forward is the awareness that it is not possible to continue living in a situation of collective suffering. A proactive and approving attitude to rapprochement also helps.
- When starting an initiative to promote dialogue, it is important to be aware that it can go well or badly, but it is still worthwhile. However meagre it may be, it can be a step forward, since small pathways bring a solution to the conflict closer.
- Building trust is crucial. To accomplish this, it is usually necessary to work discreetly for a period of time, during which confidence building allows the participants to recognise "the other". Initiatives with participants from different sectors should devote attention and time to building trust among them.

- Confidence building and the search for common ground make it easier to reach agreements, however minimal they may be. It is important to promote those agreements, no matter how meagre or insignificant they may seem. Large agreements require more limited agreements beforehand.
- In addition to trust, honesty, transparency and total sincerity are key for the participants of any dialogue initiative, since what is at stake are issues that are higher than the interests of their own parties, such as the end of suffering in a society in conflict. A deep conviction and personal commitment beyond the pressure of political parties and armed organisations can be important.
- It is important to understand where the other side's narrative comes from and how it sees the truth, as well as to put everything that happened in the conflict on the table, since it helps to avoid narratives of victimisation.
- The methodology of building agreements on what unites, rather than on what divides, is crucial for initiatives to promote dialogue in divided societies.
- Initiatives to promote dialogue require leaving aside egos, prominence and political or other benefits.
- It is important to articulate the movement, strengthen the social base and protect the platform from the beginning and throughout its existence, especially when difficulties arise. Protecting the platform also implies giving space and time for reflection on the process and how it operates at every stage. A movement that has a strong social base provides a greater guarantee of long-term sustainability.
- The absence of violence produces better conditions for

moving forward, whereas reaching agreements whilst violence persists is more difficult. At the same time, it is during difficult times when peace initiatives are most needed, so their strength in critical stages is key. In this vein, it may be useful to detect risk factors in a timely fashion (such as signs that the conflict is about to get worse) as a preventive warning and have mechanisms to address them.

- In case of disagreement, it may be useful to request external support from actors able to provide facilitation and support that inspire trust or legitimacy with the participants.
- In case of disagreement, leaks in the media can be harmful.
- It is important to manage social expectations in order to avoid frustration among society.
- It is uncommon for a new initiative to be totally new or trailblazing. Finding connections with previous experiences and achievements and collaboration with previous or simultaneous initiatives can strengthen its transformative impact and expand its possibilities of receiving support and finding solutions in difficult times.

8. ANNEX 1

Ahotsak Founding Declaration – San Sebastián/Donostia, 8th April 2006

[SPANISH]
El colectivo de mujeres ahotsak, voces de mujeres para la paz, hace pública su declaración para contribuir al proceso de paz vasco.

Quienes suscribimos esta declaración somos mujeres de distintas ideologías, tradiciones y sentimientos que, a título personal, y partiendo desde lo que nos une y desde lo que nos separa, queremos explorar pasos hacia delante en la búsqueda de la paz y de la reconciliación.

Con esta declaración no pretendemos sustituir a nada ni a nadie, desde el lugar que ocupa cada una, nuestra única intención es dar un impulso a la situación actual e intentar ayudar en la búsqueda de soluciones aseverando que el diálogo sin prejuicios y sin condiciones es un buen punto de partida como lo es el respeto a los derechos de todas las personas.

Trabajar por un presente y un futuro de esperanza nos obliga a poner en valor una militancia común al margen de la nuestra propia: la militancia por la paz ante tantos saboteadores que la paz tiene siempre en todos los conflictos en los que es necesario alumbrarla.

Creemos que las mujeres debemos ser, por lo tanto, agentes activas por la paz y participar en un nuevo proceso de esperanza que se debe abrir en nuestro país.

Hoy por hoy, y dado el modelo social en el que vivimos, el protagonismo de los hombres y las mujeres no es el mismo en la vida política de nuestro país. No obstante, y en tanto que padecemos las consecuencias de un conflicto político que en nada nos es ajeno, venimos a reivindicar la participación y el protagonismo que las mujeres también debemos tener a la hora de buscar soluciones. Debemos ser sujetos activos de la solución, al igual que hemos sido sujetos de lo que hasta ahora ha sucedido.

Por ello queremos que se pueda abrir una etapa nueva bajo tres premisas básicas:

1.- La consecución de la paz es una exigencia colectiva y una prioridad política. Es también una tarea de todas y todos y no consiste únicamente en ausencia de cualquier violencia. El concepto de paz desde nuestro punto de vista no está vacío de contenido, sino todo lo contrario. Para nosotras tiene que ver con la democracia, la justicia social, con un proceso de cambio que permita a la ciudadanía dar por concluidos conflictos históricos, cerrar una página en términos de derechos y libertades.

2.- Todos los proyectos políticos se pueden y se deben defender. No hay que imponer ninguno. Hay que buscar un escenario democrático que permita y garantice el desarrollo y la materialización

de todos los proyectos en condiciones de igualdad, por vías políticas y democráticas.

3.- Si la sociedad vasca, la ciudadanía del País Vasco o Euskal Herria desea transformar, cambiar o mantener su actual marco jurídico-político, todos y todas deberíamos comprometernos a respetar y establecer las garantías democráticas necesarias y los procedimientos políticos acordados para que lo que la sociedad vasca decida sea respetado y materializado y, si fuera necesario, tuviera su reflejo en los ordenamientos jurídicos.

En este sentido, entendemos que también deberán abordarse los condicionantes que determinan la diferente participación social de las mujeres y hombres, a fin de que se garantice la igualdad de derechos y oportunidades inexistentes en la actualidad. Esto conlleva el reconocimiento de nuestros derechos, los de las mujeres, y sólo será posible desde el compromiso firme de todos los agentes partícipes en el proceso.

Quienes suscribimos esta declaración creemos que es posible la solución, y pensamos que para ello todas y todos nos debemos reconocer como tales, que debemos intentar ver la parte de verdad que tienen las otras personas. Para nosotras, dialogar es el paso previo para acordar y ello es fortalecer la democracia, no debilitarla.

Nosotras no buscamos el éxito electoral ni la defensa de nuestra opción política, sindical, social y cultural no buscamos el aplauso de nadie ni nos intimida la crítica feroz; nos anima pensar que merece la pena trabajar por que las cosas no sigan igual, para hacer creíble

el camino al que siempre hasta ahora se ha tachado de imposible por quienes no quieren que tenga solución.

Las mujeres que suscribimos esta declaración, como lo han hecho otras mujeres en otros procesos de paz, trabajaremos para blindarlo, para que no embarranque, para que no se frustre. Asimismo, para que las mujeres seamos parte activa del mismo, para reivindicar nuestro papel y nuestro protagonismo, tanto durante el proceso como en la solución. En definitiva, trabajaremos para establecer las garantías democráticas que permitan la participación de toda la ciudadanía fortaleciendo el proceso y su solución.

Por ello hacemos esta aportación, estamos dispuestas al contraste, al diálogo, al acercamiento, a la negociación, a poner todo lo que esté de nuestra parte en la tarea de construir la paz sobre las premisas que planteamos.

En Donostia a 8 de Abril de 2006.

[FRENCH]

"Ahotsak", voix de femmes pour la paix, rend publique sa déclaration pour contribuer au processus de paix basque.

Nous qui souscrivons ce document, sommes des femmes d'idéologies, de traditions et de sensibilités diverses qui, à titre personnel, voulons tenter une nouvelle démarche en vue de la paix et de la réconciliation en partant de ce qui nous unit plutôt que de ce qui nous sépare.

Nous ne prétendons pas avec ce document, remplacer qui que ce soit ou quoi que ce soit. Notre seul désir est de contribuer, en fonction de la place que chacune d'entre nous ocuppe, à faire évoluer la situation actuelle en tentant d'aider à la recherche de solutions. Nous sommes convaincues que le dialogue, sans préjugés et sans conditions, constitue un point de départ adéquat, au même titre que le respect des droits de toutes les personnes.

Le fait d'oeuvrer pour un présent et un avenir empreints d'espoir nous oblige à mettre en avant, au-delà de notre propre militance, une militance commune, en faveur de la paix face à tant de saboteurs auxquels la paix est toujours confrontée dans tout conflit où une lueur de paix est indispensable.

Nous sommes convaincues que nous les femmes devons donc être des agents actifs pour la paix en participant au nouveau processus d'espoir qui doit s'ouvrir dans notre pays.

Au jour d'aujourd'hui, le modèle social en vigueur étant ce qu'il est, la participation des hommes et celle des femmes n'est pas la même dans la vie politique de notre pays. Cependant, dans la mesure où nous subissons les conséquences d'un conflit qui ne nous est en rien étranger, nous tenons à revendiquer la participation et la place des femmes, dans le cadre d'une recherche de solutions.

Dans cette perspective, nous voulons l'ouverture d'une étape nouvelle selon les trois prémisses fondamentales suivantes:

1.- L'obtention de la paix est une exigence collective et une priorité politique; une tâche qui incombe à tous et toutes. Il ne s'agit pas seulement et uniquement de l'absence de toute forme de violence quelle qu'elle soit. À cet égard, le concept de paix n'est pas de notre point de vue, un concept creux, vide de sens, bien au contraire. Pour nous autres, la paix s'apparente à la démocratie, à la justice sociale, à un processus de changement qui permette aux citoyennes et aux citoyens de considérer des conflits historiques comme étant résolus et, en termes de droits et de libertés, de tourner une page.

2.- Tous les projets politiques peuvent et doivent pouvoir être défendus. Aucun ne peut être imposé. Il convient de rechercher un cadre démocratique qui permette et garantisse le développement de tous les projets sur un même pied d'égalité, par des voies politiques et démocratiques.

3.- Si la société basque, les citoyens et citoyennes du Pays Basque ou Euskal Herria, désirent transformer, changer ou maintenir le cadre juridico-politique qui est le leur aujourd'hui, nous devrions

nous engager à respecter et à établir les garanties démocratiques nécessaires et les procédés politiques accordés afin que les décisions prises par la société basque soient respectées et si nécéssaire reflétées et materialisées dans les institutions juridiques.

Dans ce sens, nous pensons que les aspects qui déterminent une participation différente des femmes et des hommes dans la société devront aussi être abordés, de sorte que une égalité des droits et des opportunités inexistante aujourd'hui, soit garantie. Cela suppose la reconnaissance de nos droits, ceux des femmes, qui ne peut être possible que par le biais d'un sincère engagement de tous les acteurs participant au processus.

Nous qui souscrivons ce document pensons qu'une solution est possible et que pour y parvenir nous devons toutes et tous nous reconnaître en tant que tels et distinguer la part de vérité que détient l'autre. Le dialogue est pour nous le pas préliminaire à une compréhension mutuelle; un pas qui contribue à renforcer la démocratie et non à l'affaiblir.

Nous ne recherchons ni le succès électoral, ni à défendre nos propres options politiques. Nous ne cherchons pas à être applaudies par quiconque et la critique ne nous intimide pas. Ce qui nous encourage, c'est de penser que, parce que les choses ne sont pas immuables, cela vaut la peine de travailler afin de rendre encore plus crédible une voie qualifiée jusqu'ici d'impossible par ceux qui s'opposent à toute forme de solution.

Nous les femmes qui souscrivons cet accord, comme l'ont déjà fait

d'autres femmes, au sein d'autres processus de paix, oeuvrerons de sorte à le renforcer et à éviter de piétiner sur place et de déboucher sur un échec. Il en va de même de notre volonté à ce que les femmes soient totalement parties prenantes d'un processus vis-à-vis duquel nous revendiquons notre rôle et notre protagonisme, tant dans son déroulement, que dans sa solution. Nous travaillerons en définitive, en faveur de la mise en place de garanties démocratiques qui permettent la participation de tous et toutes les citoyen(ne)s et le renforcement du processus et de sa solution.

Là est l'objet de cette contribution. Sur la base des prémisses définies précédemment, nous sommes ouvertes à tout échange de points de vue, à tout dialogue, à tout rapprochement, à toute négociation et sommes disposées à faire tout ce qui sera en notre pouvoir pour aider à construire la paix.

Donostia/Saint Sebastien, 8 avril 2006.

9. ANNEX 2

Chronology: Context of the Conflict and the Peace process that framed the emergence of Ahotsak

1997	ETA's murder of PP Councillor Miguel Ángel Blanco in 1997 causes a huge uproar in the entire country and a profound political and social rejection of the Basque pro-independence left in Spain, which was then further isolated.
1998	*The Good Friday Agreement in Ireland is reached in April 1998, becoming a major benchmark for a broad swathe of Basque nationalists*
	ETA's announcement of a truce in September. The truce, which lasted 14 months, creates a highly favourable climate for the Basque pro-independence left (Herri Batasuna) to win more votes in the regional elections held during that period.
1999	People's Party (PP) starts its first rapprochements with ETA, which culminated in a meeting held in Zurich in May 1999. The government transfers several ETA prisoners imprisoned far from the Basque Country to jails closer to home during this period. Transfer of prisoners has been a historic demand of the Basque pro-independence left.
	ETA ends the truce and returns to violence. Some of these have major repercussions (such as the murders of Socialist politicians Fernando Buesa and Ernest Lluch)
2000	PP and PSOE sign the Anti-Terrorist Pact and agree to develop a joint strategy against ETA.
	The leaders of the PSE (Jesús Eguiguren) and Batasuna (Arnaldo Otegi) held first secret contacts.

2001	*The attacks in New York and Washington on the 11th of September 2001 reinforces the struggle against any kind of terrorist group, affecting ETA. Batasuna started using a new discourse in its communiqués.*
2002	Batasuna publishes a document entitled "A Scenario of Peace", in which for the first time they aired concepts such as earning the support of the entire population. Socialist leader Gemma Zabaleta presents a book with Denis Itxaso entitled "With the Left Hand", in which they advocated opening a dialogue with Batasuna.
	Lehendakari Juan José Ibarretxe launches his ill-fated proposal for a "free association" with Spain.
	Basque women MPs Gemma Zabaleta (PSE) and Jone Goirizelaia (Batasuna) start non-public confidence-building contacts.
2003	Batasuna is outlawed. Shortly after, the Basque pro-independence left (which was then identified by a new abbreviation AUB), publishes a document containing "ten points for reflection". Among these, suggestions included: no longer excluding anybody, opening up a plural process and eliminating all expressions of violence.
	ETA's tacit truce gets under way (from June 2003 until March 2006)

2004	An attack perpetrated in Madrid by Islamists with close ties to Al-Qaeda causes 193 deaths (11th of March 2004). The attack leads to a conviction that no more deaths could be accepted nor justified in Spain, including the Basque Country.
	PSOE's wins the national elections. The government of José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero pledges from the start to resolve the Basque conflict during its legislature. ETA sends a letter asking for dialogue.
	Confidential contacts held since 2000 between PSE and Batatasuna lead to the so-called "Anoeta Declaration". Batasuna's leader, A. Otegui, publicly issues a proposal to create two separate negotiation tables: one with the government and ETA (to talk exclusively about the status and future of ETA prisoners and the laying down of weapons) and another with all the political forces (to lay the groundwork for the political solution to the conflict).
2005	Spanish PM J.L. Rodríguez Zapatero sets forth his peace proposal in a plenary session of the Spanish Parliament in May, thus formalising the process that had been exploratory until then.
	The Irish group IRA permanently give up its armed struggle in July 2005
	Representatives of the Spanish government meet over the summer and in November with the former ETA leader Josu Urrutikoetxea "Ternera" in Oslo and Switzerland.

2006	ETA declares a permanent ceasefire (March)
	Ahotsak launches its founding statement (8th April) and initiates its public activities.
	In June 2006 Zapatero announces that the government would begin direct talks with ETA in order to put an end to the violence. The process is constantly criticised by the main opposition party, PP, which was against any dialogue with ETA despite the fact that when it was governing it had maintained contacts with the armed group between 1998 and 1999.
	The formation of the negotiation table of political parties resulted in difficulties. Between September and November 12 meetings were held in the Loyola sanctuary between the PNV, the PSE and Batasuna in what was called the "Loyola process", which ended when Batasuna demanded that Navarre be included as part of the Basque Country.
	Once the first direct negotiation table between ETA and the government was established, the first meeting between a delegation from the PSE and Batasuna is held in July
	The peace process experiences a crisis in the second half of 2006 as a result of the failure to create the negotiation table of political parties, the renewed outbreak of street violence, the lack of understanding on the sequential order of the measures that each party was supposed to take, the repressive attitude of the courts towards Batasuna, among other factors.
	At the plenary session of the Basque Parliament of 22nd September 2006, the president of the Basque government, J.J. Ibarretxe, proposed six measures aimed at advancing in setting up the negotiation table of political parties. The proposed measures included the establishment of the principles contained in the Ahotsak manifesto as a point of departure for prior agreement.

2006	Ahotsak holds a massive public meeting in the Euskalduna Palace (Bilbao) on 2nd December, with women from all political parties except the PP, as well as women from social, economic, cultural and sport-related backgrouds. The event acknowledges the existence of obstacles in the peace process and calls all conflict-parties to commit to dialogue without pre-conditions and to make the peace process an irreversible one.
	ETA detonates a powerful bomb in the Terminal 4 parking area at the Madrid-Barajas airport killing two people (30th December). The government officially announces the breakdown of negotiations and the political parties begin a debate on whether or not communication should be maintained with Batasuna. Many of the political forces state that all dialogue with ETA should be cut off until the organisation gave up violence and announced its dissolution.
2007	ETA claims responsibility or the December 2006 Madrid-Barajas bombing. The attack ends the permanent ceasefire declared by the armed organization.
	In January 2007 Ahotsak releases a public statement where it shows solidarity with the victims of the ETA attack, commits to dialogue and peaceful resolution of the conflict, and shows different interpretations of the attack.
	In February 2007 Ahotsak releases another public statement where it reaffirms the relevance of the principles contained in its April 2006 statement.
NOTE: References to international processes or events that had influence on the Basque conflict are shown in italics	

Source: The authors' own elaboration based on Fisas, Vicenç, *Yearbook on Peace Processes* 2012, Barcelona: Icaria, 2012.

10. About Democratic Progress Institute

Aims and objectives of DPI include:

- To contribute to broadening bases and providing new platforms for discussion on establishing a structured public dialogue on peace and democracy building.

- To provide opportunities, in which different parties are able to draw on comparative studies, analyse and compare various mechanisms used to achieve positive results in similar cases.

- To create an atmosphere whereby different parties share knowledge, ideas, concerns, suggestions and challenges facing the development of a democratic solution in Turkey and the wider region.

- To support, and to strengthen collaboration between academics, civil society and policy-makers.

- To identify common priorities and develop innovative approaches to participate in and influence democracy-building.

- Promote and protect human rights regardless of race, colour, sex, language, religion, political persuasion or other belief or opinion.

DPI aims to foster an environment in which different parties share information, ideas, knowledge and concerns connected to the development of democratic solutions and outcomes. Our work supports the development of a pluralistic political arena capable of generating consensus and ownership over work on key issues surrounding democratic solutions at political and local levels.
We focus on providing expertise and practical frameworks to encourage stronger public debates and involvements in promoting peace and democracy building internationally. Within this context DPI aims to contribute to the establishment of a structured public dialogue on peace and democratic advancement, as well as to widen and create new existing platforms for discussions on peace and democracy building. In order to achieve this we seek to encourage an environment of inclusive, frank, structured discussions whereby different parties are in the position to openly share knowledge, concerns and suggestions for democracy building and strengthening across multiple levels.

DPI's objective throughout this process is to identify common priorities and develop innovative approaches to participate in and influence the process of finding democratic solutions. DPI also aims to support and strengthen collaboration between academics, civil society and policy-makers through its projects and output. Comparative studies of relevant situations are seen as an effective tool for ensuring that the mistakes of others are not repeated or perpetuated. Therefore we see comparative analysis of models of peace and democracy building to be central to the achievement of our aims and objectives.

11. About the School for a Culture of Peace

The School for a Culture of Peace (Escola de Cultura de Pau, hereinafter ECP) is an academic peace research institution located at Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona. The School for a Culture of Peace was created in 1999 with the aim of promoting the culture of peace through research, Track II diplomacy, training and awareness generating activities.

The main fields of action of the ECP are:

- **Research**. Its main areas of research include armed conflicts and socio-political crises, peace processes, human rights and transitional justice, the gender dimension in conflict and peacebuilding, and peace education.

- **Teaching and training**. ECP staff gives lectures in postgraduate and graduate courses in several universities, including its own Graduate Diploma on Culture of Peace at Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona. It also provides training sessions on specific issues, including conflict sensitivity and peace education.

- **Track II diplomacy**. The ECP promotes dialogue and conflict-transformation through Track II initiatives, including facilitation tasks with different actors and on various themes.

- **Consultancy services**. The ECP carries out a variety of consultancy services for national and international institutions.

- **Advocacy and awareness-raising**. Initiatives include activities addressed to the Spanish and Catalan society, including contributions to the media.

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