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## Urkullu. Other emerging Readers: Bieiras, Laura Mintegi



### Íñigo Urkullu

The leader of the centre-right Basque Nationalist Party (EAJ-PNV) and next *Lehendakari* or president of the Basque Autonomous Community was born in 1961 in Alonsotegi, near Bilbao, to a working-class nationalist family. After earning a bachelor's degree in Teaching and Basque Philology at the Catholic Seminary of Derio, he taught at several schools and became a full-time politician in 1984, when he won a seat in the Basque Parliament. As for his career in the PNV ranks, he was successively head of the youth wing of the party (EGI), member and then chairman of the ruling body of the party branch in Biscay, and finally chairman of the national executive in 2007.

Soft-mannered, cool-tempered and remarkably sober both in public and in private—he is known for his non-drinking habits, a rarity in the local context, where wine-drinking is a cultural, traditional element—serious-minded Urkullu is also portrayed as a cautious and moderate nationalist who struggles to strike a middle course between full sovereignty for the Basque Country and the present status of advanced autonomism within the Spanish State.

Urkullu's primary goal at the 21 October regional elections was to recoup for his party, a dominant force since the establishment of the Community in 1980, the government it lost in 2009 to a non-nationalist alliance between the Basque Socialist Party (linked to the Spanish PSOE) and the People's Party (PP). The results fulfilled his expectations and now Urkullu, as president-to-be, is holding talks with the other parties to calibrate the possibilities of carrying through his agenda in a complex scenario defined by economic hardship, the end point of ETA's terrorist activities, and the forceful comeback of the nationalist radical left.

Urkullu emphasizes that his top priorities are to overcome recession, to generate employment and the preservation of the welfare state. He envisages nevertheless a "new self-governing status" for the Basque Country by 2015, to be reached through "dialogue and agreement", not divorce from Spain. "In today's world", Urkullu says, "secession is too big a word"—but he then goes on to demand recognition of the Basque Country as a "European nation" and of the right of the Basques to decide their collective future.

Married and a father of three, Urkullu enjoys cycling and hiking. He collects wind instruments—including *txistus*, the traditional Basque flute, which he used to play as a boy.



### Laura Mintegi

Writer Laura Mintegi was head of the list for the Euskal Herria Bildu coalition (EH Bildu, or Bildu for short) at the 2012 regional elections in the Basque Country. Bildu is a coalition of four leftist pro-independence groups, one of them linked to the outlawed Batasuna, ETA's former political branch. Born in 1955 in Navarre but raised in Biscay, single and mother of two, Mintegi is an award-winning novelist and a member of the Academy of the Basque Language --her works have been translated into Spanish and other European languages. She holds a degree in History and a D. Phil. in Psychology and she heads the department of Literature and Language teaching at the University of the Basque Country. Never a militant herself, she comes from the Batasuna environment: she was an activist and, once, a candidate to the European Parliament.

The *Abertzale* Left, whose leader Arnaldo Otegi is currently in prison, chose Mintegi, little known to the wide public, as a "technical" and "humane" face to put up front. And she has lead them to a historic second place at this year's elections, behind the PNV, after having been legally banned from running at the two previous elections. Radical in her ideas, but calm and self-possessed in her manners, Mintegi focused her campaign on the fight against the economic crisis through non-liberal means and, with less emphasis, on the independence of the Basque Country --which, she maintains, must escape from the ruinous "black hole" the Spanish state has turned itself into. She competes for the hegemony of Basque nationalism with the PNV, but she is open to agreements with them. Mintegi believes most of Basque society wants a country "without winners or losers", and so she has been reluctant so far to expressly condemn ETA.



### Xosé Manuel Beiras

Economist and writer Xosé Manuel Beiras (Santiago de Compostela, 1936) is considered to be the historic leader of Galician left-nationalism, an ideological option he has fought for from various political platforms. Son of a distinguished *Galleguista* politician, his multidisciplinary curriculum comes from the Sorbonne, the London School of Economics and the University of Santiago de Compostela, where he is a professor.

His political militancy dates back to the anti-francoist underground. In 1982 he was one of the founders of the Galician Nationalist Block (BNG), for which he acted as figurehead and spokesperson until 2003. Under his leadership the BNG, a non-unitarian front where communist and pro-independence sensibilities prevailed, reached its electoral ceiling in 1997 and 2001, when it ended up second to the ruling conservative People's Party (PP). Beiras was five times candidate for president of the Xunta de Galicia. In 2012 he was back in the headlines: first, as the driving force behind a BNG splinter party, ANOVA, and second, as figurehead of the Galician Left Alternative (AGE) coalition, which came third at the October regional elections.

Physically impressive --he is tall and stocky and sports a bushy white beard and long hair--, Beiras has cultivated an image of bohemian intellectual and political maverick with a sharp mind and an incisive tongue. He calls for a "civic rebellion" to stop the "plundering" of Galicia and he radically opposes the economic policies of the PP both in Galicia and in Spain at large. Beiras is also, at the same time, a prolific essayist and a translator into Galician of authors such as Camus and Anouilh. After a marriage of many years, he is now romantically involved with painter Aurora Pereira.