**SPEECH IN FLANDERS**

*Een goede namiddag iedereen. Ik breng je een groet uit het Baskenland!*

I would like to begin my speech by saying that it is an honor for me to share with you the celebration of your national holiday. It is always nice for me to come to Flanders, and even more so on a day like today. Basques and Flemish people need to make it clear, on days like today, that we are neither Spanish nor Belgian, and that we need independence to be able to develop fully as a People. LEVE VRIJ VLAANDEREN!!!

Basques and Flemish people share many things. We share a long struggle for the freedom of our two nations. We share a long struggle in the defense of our language and our identity. You Flemish liberated yourselves from Spanish domination in the 18th century. You were luckier than us, who are still suffering from it. You know very well the nature of the “Spanish Fury”, the SPAANSE WOEDE, as you say in your language. You can imagine how we Basques feel, having to endure it on a daily basis.

Let me now summarize the situation of our country. The Basque Country is an Atlantic nation, like yours, a nation with the oldest language in Europe, a nation denied, divided and subdued, struggling to maintain its identity and not to be assimilated. A nation divided between two states, Spain and France. And on the Spanish side, also divided into two different administrations, because that is what the Spanish State decided after the death of the dictator Franco. We are a divided and fragmented country.

The Basque Country under Spanish administration has a certain degree of autonomy, although it has neither national recognition nor full self-government. The Basque Country under French administration does not have even a minimal political autonomy, because as you know France is a centralist and Jacobin state, which does not recognize languages other than French.

You Flemish have always been in solidarity with the Basques, and we are indebted to you. Therefore, today I would like to thank you publicly for this solidarity.

* We Basques do not forget that in 1937, when General Franco seized control of the Basque Country by force, our President Agirre took refuge first in Paris and then in Brussels, where he was cordially received.
* We Basques do not forget the solidarity we received from the Flemish people during Franco’s dictatorship. We fondly remember Willy Kúijpers, who accompanied us on more than one occasion, during Franco's dictatorship, in the celebration of our national holidays, the Aberri Eguna, when this national holiday was forbidden. Willy was arrested by the Spanish police at the Aberri Eguna in 1975 for displaying the Basque national flag, which was banned at the time. When he later became an MEP he always strongly defended the Basque national cause.
* Nor should we forget that other great Flemish patriot, Walter Luyten. Walter was also a great friend of the Basques, and was a frequent visitor to our country. In 2007 he received a well-deserved tribute in Gernika.
* Impossible to forget Ludo Dockx. *A friend of the Basques with capital letters*. Every year in Antwerp he organised a festival to collect money for the ikastolas in Iparralde -- the Basque schools in the Northern Basque Country -- where the children study entirely through Basque. You know that in French public schools there is no possibility to study through the Basque, Breton or Corsican languages. The Basque schools in the Northern Basque Country will always remember the great Ludo, friend, collaborator and loyal supporter.

Yes, we Basques owe a great debt to the Flemish people. You have always understood and supported our national claims. It is high time that the Basque People also understand and support yours.

And what about the linguistic area? You are an example for us to follow. We admire your struggle to keep your language alive, a model struggle. You have always understood very well that language is the soul and driving force of a nation, the most important sign of identity of a People, and you have fought to defend it. We Basques also believe that language is what makes us a nation, our distinguishing feature *par excellence*. And this despite the fact that our language has gone, in 150 years, due to strong Spanish and French repression, from being the majority language of the country to being the language of only 25% of the population. But we are determined not only to keep it alive, but also to recover and restore it to being once again the hegemonic language of our country.

I would like to end by hoping that the ties between the Basque Country and Flanders will become much stronger in future. Long live solidarity between the stateless nations of Europe! Independence for Flanders and Euskal Herria!

VLAANDEREN ONAFHANKELIJK!!!

GORA EUSKAL HERRIA ASKATUTA!!!!