NEW PRIORITIES OF BASQUE TECHNOLOGY POLICY. FIRST IMPRESSIONS

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Three priority factors emerge in the technology policy landscape current Basque Country (see here): intelligent specialization, the drive for the transfer of R+D+I results to the industry and, finally, the improvement of the efficiency and effectiveness of the investment made.

The approach does not represent a great leap forward in the path of transformation of the Country, but it is true that it is a realistic approach and also one that is possible if the long-term objective is not lost sight of and the current situation of budgetary crisis is contemplated. as a moment of transition in which it is time to fully exploit the capacities and differential elements of the Basque system of science, technology and innovation, pouring them into the market.

Smart specialization

Despite having been pioneers in this field, what intelligent specialization consists of Concentrating public and private efforts, resources and capacities in activities that have specific differential advantages in the international context continues to be a major challenge for the Basque economy.

In the mid-1990s, the Basque Country implemented the cluster policy (at that time there was no talk of smart specialization) and a set of priority clusters was selected (in 2002 they were active 11 clusters) which were given priority treatment in competitiveness policy. The reality, however, is that the list of clusters has been growing notably, becoming one more element of the competitiveness policy that has little to do with specialization. Subsequently, plans have been launched to diversify the productive fabric (not specialization), betting on sectors based on science and technology (biosciences and nanosciences) with very uneven market results.

Our opinion is that smart specialization is a good idea and that the Government is not wrong in choosing it as a priority. For a small country like ours, focusing is the only way to gain enough critical mass to compete globally. Experience shows, however, that it is not an easy subject to put into practice because it implies prioritizing and betting on some activities over others. Close and deep public-private collaboration, maximum cooperation between agents and maximizing the functioning of the market are the elements to take into account, to minimize the risks inherent in specialization strategies (see Is it smart specialization the new path to innovation?)

Transfer of R&D&I results to industry

Notable progress has been made in this area in the Basque Country and a very important part (around two thirds) of the R&D carried out by technology corporations and other agents such as business R&D Units is carried out based on contracts with companies. This, however, does not mean that there is not a great margin for improvement in this field. On the one hand, so that a growing percentage of the projects go beyond the R&D stage and actually become new marketable products and, on the other, so that the group of RVCTI agents (particularly the Research Centers Cooperative, whose mission is to create a new productive fabric), strengthen their market orientation based on cooperation and networking.

Now, what are the keys to make this process more dynamic and achieve significant progress? Surely the most solid advances will be produced by working with companies to strengthen their leadership and their commitment to innovation as a factor of competitiveness. Let us not forget that the transfer of R&D is a fundamental responsibility of the companies and it is these, ultimately, that have to be mentalized to invest decisively in these processes that are highly costly and risky.

In this context, however, it is particularly important to take into account that a good part of Basque companies are in sectors with low and medium-low technological intensity (56.5% of the industrial

GVA in 2010 with a demand for technology and companies that are only very unsophisticated for innovation These are the ones that develop complex innovation strategies (