

«THE WELL-BEING OF GIPUZKOA IS LINKED TO THE NECESSARY DIGITAL, ENVIRONMENTAL AND DEMOGRAPHIC TRANSITION OF THE INDUSTRY»

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Egun on Unai, first of all thank you for accepting the invitation from NAIDER. Its purpose is to be an ally in the process of transforming the business fabric of Gipuzkoa. What are the routes of transformation that you consider to be priorities? What are the main challenges for the business fabric to continue along these lines?

Today, as a social and economic network, we are facing three major transitions: digital, environmental and demographic. In order to maintain competitiveness and ensure economic sustainability, the business fabric must continue to progress in terms of production and the digitalisation of all other processes in general. Moreover, in the short term, environmental sustainability, or the development of products in a circular economy, will become a competitive factor for companies, not only because legislation will push us in this direction, but also because markets and customers will attach increasing importance to it.

In the face of these changes, I would like to mention two of the main challenges facing the business fabric: demographic change and people's new values in relation to work; companies must make their projects attractive in order to attract new workers. In addition to interesting projects, it is essential to have initiatives that have developed an innovative business culture. It is also a challenge to continue trying to increase the size of companies in Gipuzkoa; having smaller or larger companies is not in itself better or worse, but in the face of these changes it is true that a critical size helps the company.

By leading the way in decarbonising our manufacturing processes and developing new products, we have many opportunities to reach new customers and markets.

Gipuzkoa's economy is based on the strength of its industry, a specialised industry that is highly competitive in European and international markets. There are clouds on the horizon: doubts about the future of the German car industry, the drumbeat of tariff wars, etc. Can Gipuzkoa maintain and promote the competitiveness of its companies without jeopardising

the social model it has built?

In order to guarantee this social welfare, it is essential to have a strong economy. All sectors of the economy contribute, but industry and related advanced services generate much of the wealth of Gipuzkoa's economy. Many of our companies are exporters, based on niche activities and producing products with high added value. Although the main foreign markets have been Germany and France, the attraction of other markets such as the USA or Mexico has also been evident over the past year.

Beyond the clouds, today's economic situation in Gipuzkoa is generally good and solid. According to the latest data, we have an unemployment rate of 5.3% in the region and a highly diversified industrial activity. However, the geopolitical situation means that we need to look carefully at 2025. Helping to create, maintain and be competitive, in other words working for a strong economy, is the only way to maintain the quality of life that Gipuzkoa has.

A sustainable transition is essential for Gipuzkoa and its competitiveness. What are the implications of the decarbonisation process for the regional industry? What level of commitment does Gipuzkoa's industry need to achieve in order to decarbonise?

The necessary decarbonisation processes represent a major challenge for our industry; there are a number of energy-intensive business activities. At the same time, a sustainable transition will create new opportunities for our businesses. As mentioned earlier, our companies are used to providing high value-added products and services. As we work towards decarbonisation in an exemplary and committed way, I would say that we have many opportunities in our manufacturing processes to reach new customers and new markets by developing new products.

The continuous development of the premises of the circular economy of the products produced will become a factor of competitiveness for companies, not only because legislation will push us towards it, but also because markets and customers will increasingly attach importance to it.

The Council makes available to the companies and agents of the territory various competitive promotion programmes and calls for aid. Other organisations, such as SPRI, launch their own initiatives. What do you think of this series of programmes? How do you think they'll be updated in the future?

In terms of funding from the Gipuzkoa Provincial Council, 2025 will bring many new developments; the department's aim is to complement the funding available to other institutions. For this reason, our main focus is on small and medium-sized enterprises. For this reason, it is very important that the programmes are easy to understand and that applications and justifications are submitted as quickly as possible. All new calls for proposals should have a direct impact on the competitiveness of companies.

The level of implementation of the aid we had in 2024 was very high. We've been approached by many companies with different projects, and the funds we had for each line have run out.

You stress that Gipuzkoa has positioned itself as an ecosystem based on knowledge and innovation, with relative leadership in R&D at the European level. Could you tell us more about initiatives to strengthen this ecosystem and promote the transfer of knowledge to the business fabric?

Gipuzkoa is rich in universities, technology centres, research centres and R&D infrastructure. At the territorial level, 2.76% of the GDP is R&D. In this case, the challenge is to transfer this knowledge to small and medium-sized enterprises. A pilot project has just been launched by BRTA, Innobasque and the development agency Iraurgi Berritzen, within the framework of the collaborative governance that we also have in the Gipuzkoa Provincial Council and in the region.

On the way to building an innovative territory, you identify entrepreneurship as an indispensable lever of transformation. What intangibles should be promoted to foster a culture of entrepreneurship and intrapreneurship?

Although we often hear that we are losing this characteristic of being an entrepreneurial territory, it is enough to visit the different incubators in the territory and learn about various initiatives of university students to confirm that this root still exists in the territory. In many cases, moreover, the protagonists of all these initiatives, which are entrepreneurs, are immigrants who have been born in other territories and come to live with us, and this places value on the fact that the territory has ecosystems and special characteristics for the development of entrepreneurial ideas in it. Getting to know and value these entrepreneurs and their projects can be key to creating a culture of entrepreneurship.

Lurraldeko hainbat ekintzailletza ekimenen protagonistak etorkinak dira, honek balioan jartzen du lurraldeak baduela ekosistema eta ezaugarri berezi batzuk ekintzailetzako ideiak bertan garatzeko.

It is necessary to strengthen an innovative culture that encourages creativity in order to promote intra-entrepreneurship in companies; the search for diversity of people, training and people from different backgrounds will promote innovation in the organisation; it is essential to have the support of management.

The valleys of Gipuzkoa are highly urbanised and the industrial areas available for expanding companies or new investments are limited. How do you think the attractiveness and functionality of the current industrial areas can be improved? Do the companies themselves have anything to do with the rehabilitation and reactivation of the estates in which they are located?

Gipuzkoa is not only a small region, but it is also made up of very orographically closed valleys. As a result, the supply of land is limited and, in addition to creating new land as required, it is also important to update and make the existing land more attractive. In many cases, the old pavilions are in the hands of private individuals and their adaptation is in their hands. As far as the Council is concerned, and within our competence, the Road Infrastructure Department, for example, has recently started to improve access to the Itziar industrial estate.

The strength of the regional development agencies is characteristic of Gipuzkoa. Cooperation and shared management between the Council and the development agencies for economic promotion and business competitiveness policies is also promoted. You yourself were head of the Business Promotion and Competitiveness Department at Tolosaldea Garatzen. What are the new challenges for development agencies in the future? What are the keys to managing their activities and their model of relationship with the Council?

I would like to stress that the competitiveness of the territory is the result of the work and action of various actors. In recent years, development agencies, their policies and strategies have been an important factor in the territorialisation of the Council, because they have a close regional perspective. In this definition and implementation of common paths and common public policies, a special effort has been made in recent years to train technicians in development agencies and to co-create processes. It is important to have a broad territorial perspective, respecting the nature and characteristics of each region, in order to define common paths on more general competitiveness issues.

Regional development agencies, taking advantage of their confidence and closeness to businesses, must become the main driving force for the transformation of small and medium-sized enterprises.

Development agencies need to be close partners to SMEs in their regions; their main challenge is to become high value-added friends. Using the trust and closeness they already have with businesses, they must become the main driving force behind the transformation of small and medium-sized enterprises.

Given the many issues you have raised, what are the main challenges facing Gipuzkoa, and what is the Council's flagship project in each of these challenges?

We must protect and safeguard the sectors and activities of current importance, which must be accompanied by public policies and lines of support in order to remain competitive. With regard to the maintenance and strengthening of current sectors, one of the main challenges, in addition to anticipating the above-mentioned changes and transitions, is the correct organisation and implementation of generational change in the business sector.

Enpresak sortu, mantendu eta lehiakorrak izaten laguntzea, alegia, ekonomia sendo baten alde lan egitea, Gipuzkoak duen bizi-kalitatea mantentzeko bide bakarra da.

New economies must be promoted through new sectors, but given the small size of the territory, the Council's bets must be very targeted. The most important of these are the Department's strategic projects:

- To be a reference in the field of industrial cybersecurity -the Cybersecurity Center of Gipuzkoa

ZIUR is created in 2019 to achieve this goal-

- To be a reference in southern Europe for business capabilities that require intelligent and sustainable mobility - this is where the MUBIL Centre and the Pole are located-
- Gipuzkoa QUANTUM; in line with the BasQ strategy promoted by the Basque Government, Gipuzkoa is promoting skills and business initiatives in quantum computing and its industry is exploiting them.
- GANTT, which supports advanced gene therapy companies in the life sciences and the creation of new companies.

Mila esker Unai for your kindness in answering our questions.

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