

1. The Basque Country

The Basque Country is a nation in southwestern Europe. It is currently divided between two states: **France** and **Spain**. Our country is located on the coast of the Bay of Biscay, on both slopes of the Western Pyrenees that separate Spain and France.

The Basque Country is the territory which is historically, ethnically and culturally Basque. Spanish and French may call Basque Country (Pays Basque, País Vasco) only to a portion of the country, not the whole nation. Nevertheless, Basques conceive their country as embracing the area of the traditional seven provinces: **Bizkaia, Gipuzkoa, Araba** and **Nafarroa** on the Spanish side, **Lapurdi, Nafarroa Beherea** and **Zuberoa** on the French side.

These provinces are divided among three politico-administrative structures. Two are within the Spanish State: the **Basque Autonomous Community** (formed by Araba, Bizkaia and Gipuzkoa) and the **Autonomous Community of Navarre** (Nafarroa alone). The three provinces within the French State are not autonomous. They form, along with Bearn, the french department of **Pyrenees Atlantiques** (capital Pau, in Bearn), which is part of the region of **Aquitaine** (capital Bordeaux).

The Basque Country is a little nation: just 20.864 sq. km and 2.9 million people. Only 650.000 of them speak basque, mostly in the Spanish side (only 70.000 in the French side). There is another minority language in the Basque Country: [Occitan](#); several hundred people (or a few thousand) speak Gascon and Bearnais dialects of Occitan in the french side of the Basque Country.

The Basque name of the Basque Country is **Euskal Herria**.

The Basque word for the language is **Euskara**.

Euskal Herria is formed from **euskal**, the combining form of Euskara, plus **herri** 'country', with the article.

Euskadi is also used for the Basque Country. This is a political name, coined at the end of the 19th century. Sometimes spelled as **Euzkadi**, it has been translated as **Basque Fatherland** or **Basque State**. Lately, Euskadi is used just to name the territory under the Basque Autonomous Government (only three provinces out of seven).

That territory, the **Basque Autonomous Community** is officially called **Euskal Autonomia Erkidegoa** in Basque (initials: **EAE**), and **Comunidad Autonoma Vasca** in Spanish (initials: **CAV**). It is important to note that most of the Basque Country lies outside the borders of this autonomous administration.

What Spaniards and French call "Spanish" or "French Basque Country" is called Northern or Southern Basque Country by the Basques:

Ipar Euskal Herria or **Iparralde** for the northern part (under France).

Hego Euskal Herria or **Hegoalde** for the southern part (under Spain).

2. Meet the Basques

The Basques called themselves **euskaldunak** (singular, **euskaldun**). The word is formed from **euskara** 'Basque language' and **-dun** 'who has'; it literally means 'one who has (i.e., speaks) Basque'. Euskaldun means properly only 'Basque-speaker'. Ethnicity or being part of the Basque Nation is therefore a question of language. You can be Japanese and euskaldun, but you can be born in the Basque Country and not be euskaldun. With no euskara, there is no Euskal Herria. Without our language, the Basque Country will not exist, from our point of view.

Spanish, French or English do not have comparative terms to this Basque word (euskaldun). You may read from a Spanish source that "most Basques do not know the Basque language". Well, you should notice that **basque** or **vasco** are ambiguous from the native point of view, and we would more properly say that "we euskaldunak (native Basques, Basque-speaking people) are a minority in our own country".

At the same time, there are no proper words in Basque for ethnic Basque or person born in the Basque Country. Neologisms as **euskotar** or **euskal herritar** are used to define such terms.

3. The Basque language

Euskara, the language of the Basques, is an isolate language. It is not related to any other language at all, despite serious (and less serious) attempts to find similarities between Basque and other linguistic families or given languages.

It is a peculiar language, with distinctive lexical background and grammar. Being isolate and relatively strange (compared to other European languages), Basque is supposed to be extremely difficult. But this is not true. [Larry Trask](#), an English linguist that commands Basque perfectly, writes: "*In fact, Basque is a rather easy language to pick up, while mastering it is no more difficult than mastering any other language. The pronunciation is easy, the spelling is regular, there is no grammatical gender, there are no noun-classes or verb-classes, and there are no irregular nouns and hardly any irregular verbs*". A curious fact about Basque is that even pidginized forms of it have evolved far from the Basque Country, for instance in Iceland (more info [at another page](#) of GeoNative).

Other features may shock you, for instance: pluri-personal verbs, the 3-number system (singular, plural and indefinite), allocutive speech, ergative construction, the 20-or-so declension cases (very easy to learn: they are just strictly regular postpositions), particular word order, positional nouns... Many of these features are strange to European language speakers, but are not that rare among the world's languages.

4. Language status

The positions of the various existing governments in the Basque Country with regard to the promotion of Basque are very different. The language has official status in those territories which are within the Basque Autonomous Community, but only partially in Nafarroa, which is divided by the law in three distinct language areas (this law is strongly rejected by the Basque-speaking people of Nafarroa).

Nevertheless, co-officiality with Spanish does not mean equal status. Spanish rules and the Basque-speaking have great difficulties to deal with their administration in their own language, despite the law that grants that right.

Basque has no official standing in the Northern Basque Country, the part under France. French language laws and political culture are extremely hostile to regional languages. An absurd example of discrimination: If you have French nationality, you cannot use Basque to declare in a French court, but if you have Spanish nationality, you can do so, as Basque is officially recognised at the other side of the frontier.

5. Basque links

General stuff

- * Buber's Basque Page. English-language Internet guide to Basque resources.
<http://students.washington.edu/buber/Basque/>
- * Eusnet / Jalgi. Basque Internet Service Providers
<http://www.eusnet.org/> / <http://www.jalgi.com>
- * Euskal Herria Journal. An independentist site.
<http://www.freespeech.org/ehj>
- * <http://osis.ucsd.edu/~ehj>
- * Elkarri. This group promotes dialogue for a peaceful settlement of the Basque conflict.
<http://www.encomix.es/~elkarrit>
- * Basque Arts - Basque Culture and products now on sale on Internet
<http://www.basquearts.com>
- * Jalgi Hadi: a personal homepage
<http://www.geocities.com/Athens/9299/jalgi.htm>
- * EHE: pro-language association
<http://www.geocities.com/CapitolHill/7012>
- * Basque Red Net (Euskal Sare Gorria):
<http://www.basque-red.net>
- * Eugenio Alberdi's page (great!)
<http://www.csd.abdn.ac.uk/~eugenio/basque.html>
- * Basque Autonomous Govt. site (for 3 provinces only):
<http://www.euskadi.net>
- * Kaixo. Basque search engine.
<http://www.kaixo.com>
- * Basque in Navarre, official information and maps
<http://www.cfnavarra.es/euskera/english/imapa.htm>