

Report by Derek Doyle on the Unveiling of the Children's Statue in Santurtzi

Translation from Deep L, revised by MDL Power with added notes

On a cool and rainy day on the 18th of November at the premises of the Fishermen's Guild of the Port of Santurtzi, a very moving ceremony was held to commemorate the evacuation of more than 20,000 children to different countries, including France, Belgium, Russia and the United Kingdom (some 4,000) 85 years ago, after the bombing of Gernika on the 26th of April 1937.

Around a hundred people attended the event which was presided over by the *Lehendakari*¹, Iñigo Urkullu together with, Aintzane Urkijo, the Mayoress of Santurtzi, Beatriz Artolazabal, Minister for Equality, Justice and Social Policies of the Basque Government, Jose Antonio Rodriguez Ranz, Deputy Minister for Human Rights, Memory and Cooperation and Aintzane Ezenarro, Director of Gogora, the Institute for Memory, Coexistence and Human Rights.

Needless to say, the real protagonists of the event were the dozen of those children who had to go into exile, such as Fausto Benito, Jose Mari Laseca, Flori Diaz, Bitori Iglesias, Jose Luis Etxebarria, Azucena Fernandez, Emilia Alas, Candido Asensio, Celia Agirre, Imanol Basañez, Ilu Fernandez, Luis Cianca and Mercedes Baranda as well as many of their relatives, including Belen Cañada from our association BCA'37 UK-Euskadi and her sister.

The event, which began at 12.30 p.m. in the Cofradía, started with the screening of a video with the testimonies, sometimes moving and sometimes funny, of several of the evacuated children. This was followed by an on-site interview with two of the evacuees, Flori Diaz (England) and Bitori Iglesias (Russia). Both spoke warmly of their experiences in their new homes in exile and the affection and care of their *new parents*.

After the interviews, the Mayoress of Santurtzi and the Lehendakari gave speeches commemorating the exile of the children and thanking the different countries that opened their doors to receive them in those years for welcoming them. And it goes without saying that it is regrettable that similar experiences are still being experienced in Ukraine, close to us in Europe today.

And so we reached the climax of the event. The unveiling of the statue on the quay of the port of Santurtzi, a short distance from where, on 21st May 1937, the children said goodbye to their parents and embarked on the steamship Habana to escape the terror and destruction of the fratricidal war.

The Lehendakari, the Mayoress of Santurtzi and the Councillor were accompanied by the *niña*² Ilu Fernandez and the *niño* Imanol Basañez to the statue of a girl and a boy carrying a suitcase and they then proceeded to unveil and thus inaugurate the monument to the memory of those evacuated to the different host countries in that distant but still present May 1937 that we must not forget.

Ending with an *aurresku*³ of honour, the Lehendakari closed the ceremony with the cry "The images of 85 years ago, the images of today, reaffirm our rejection of war, non-violence and dialogue as a method for resolving conflicts".

1 The *Lehendakari* is the Basque leader - contd

- 2 *Niña* is a girl, *niño* is a boy
- 3 *The Auresku* is a traditional Basque Dance