No sleep for the Li-ion: Basque firm develops first lithium-ion battery prototypes for electric cars

Basque firm Cegasa is currently working on the first prototypes for lithium-ion batteries for use in electric cars.

Until recently, the firm had tended to concentrate on the production of small batteries for hand tools, torches and the like. Now, however, it is in the R&D phase for the earliest electric car battery prototypes and, according to company sources, Cegasa should have a pilot electrode and cell factory up and ready to run in 2010, electrodes and cells being basic features of the new batteries. It has also begun development work on a new lithium-ion battery prototype to replace petrol as vehicle fuel in the near future. “Although there was a lot of talk a few years back about fuel cells,” announced a recent company press release, “the lithium-ion battery is in fact beginning to shape up as a real mid- to long-term alternative for the new generations of electric cars all over the world.”

Lithium-ion, or Li-ion, batteries are devices designed to store electric energy using lithium salt as an electrolyte to procure the ions required for the reversible electrochemical reaction that takes place between cathode and anode.

Although similar in concept to the one used to make alkaline batteries, the Li-ion cell manufacturing process has some significant differences, including the need for dry salts, which means company production facilities in Vitoria will have to be adapted and some major investments made.

Summary of a news item published in Deia, 25 September 2009

On the move: MOT services transfer to Arasur from Miranda de Ebro

Araba Logística yesterday sold 11,000 square metres of land at the Arasur logistics park to Atisae, which is to relocate the official local Spanish MOT service there from the nearby Bayas industrial estate in Miranda de Ebro. Management sources at Atisae said the firm planned to build facilities with four inspection lines, which would have the a capacity to process 60,000 vehicles a year, including 25,000 heavy vehicles. If everything goes to plan, the MOT station will be up and running some time next year.

Specializing in regulation vehicle control and inspection, Atisae also plans to offer hazardous merchandise and perishable goods certification services at the new station. Moving the MOT station to the Arasur service zone will help to consolidate this part of the park, a process begun with the Hotelandgo.com hotel, the Maialen Maitia restaurant (both run by the Husa group) and the high security lorry park, awarded to the firm Saba Aparcamientos. It also includes the new service area managed by Rompetrol. Atisae has interests in the services sector, concentrating on quality control and management at 18 centres throughout Spain.

Measuring two million square metres, Arasur is already one of southern Europe’s leading logistics parks. Over the next nine years over a million square metres of
pavilions will be built there. Management at the park reckon the buildings will require an investment of around €360 million.

Summary of a news item published by Diario de Noticias de Alava, 24 September 2009

Gains on gas: major Spanish power company sells 25 per cent of regasification facility to German investment fund

Spanish power giant Iberdrola announced yesterday that it had agreed to sell 25 per cent of Bahía Bizkaia Gas (BBG), the company managing the regasification plant in the outer zone of the port of Bilbao, to investment fund RREEF Infrastructure, a Deutsche Bank group member.

Before the operation can go through, however, it will have to be approved by the Bahía Bizkaia Gas (BBG) board, as the other three stakeholders in the regasification facility (BP, Repsol and the Basque Energy Board, EVE) have signed internal agreements which gives them a preferential purchase option.

Besides its 25 per cent stake in Bahía Bizkaia Gas, Iberdrola has sold RREEF its 30 per cent holding in Saggas, the regasification facility at Sagunto, in Valencia, for a total of €200 million, debt included.

Executive sources at Iberdrola said the operation would mean €27 million in gross capital earnings for the group.

In effect, Iberdrola is selling its direct 25 per cent stake in BBG and its indirect 30 per cent stake in Saggas, which entails selling the power giant’s 60 per cent interest in Iniciativas de Gas. Fellow Spanish electricity company Endesa holds 40 per cent of IdeG, which in turn owns 50 per cent of the share capital of the Sagunto facility.

Summary of a news item published by Deia, 2 July 2009

The softest cell: Spanish telecom operator winds up €430 million investment in Basque Country this year

Spain’s leading telecom operator Telefónica is all set to round off a €430-million investment plan originally launched in 2006. The icing on the investment cake will be the extended deployment of its cell phone broadband service to 17 municipalities in the Basque Country. Telefónica regional head honcho Oscar Alegria announced yesterday that the broadband data switching service was to be expanded to 8 MB. Alegria made the announcement at the presentation of the Information Society in Spain 2008 report.

Cell phone broadband means users can go online from state-of-the-art cell phones like iPhone and laptops, netbooks included.

Alegria stressed that expanding broadband for cell phones in the Basque region was a strategic move by Telefónica, as the extension was a “key factor” in the future development of the information society in the region.
As part of the move, Telefónica will be using HSUPA technology to increase data switching capability to a maximum of eight megas in the region’s three provincial capitals and 14 other municipalities, including Mondragón, Zarauz, Irun, Rentería, Llodio, Baracaldo, Bermeo, Sopelana and Guecho.

Furthermore, Alegría underscored the fact that broadband data traffic from cell phones had doubled over the last year and tripled in laptop PCs.

Telefónica announced recently that it now registered 270,000 connections on its fixed ADSL broadband service in the region.

At present, Telefónica has 1.8 million accesses in the Basque Country, including fixed and cell telephone, Internet on broadband and its Imagenio TV channel. Imagenio now had some 30,000 users.

The Italian job: Basque energy group promotes €900-million solar power park in Sicily

 Barely a week after signing an historic €1,700-million contract to build what will eventually be the world’s largest wind farm in Argentina’s Patagonia region, the Alava-based Guascor group has once again reaffirmed its leadership in the renewable energy and power systems sector. According to a company press release, group subsidiary Guascor Solar Corporation (GSC) has struck a deal with Sicilian regional Department of industry to stimulate photovoltaic solar energy on the southern side of the island, at a place called Gela.

In principle, the project is expected to take three years. In that time GSC hopes to approve projects worth more than €900 million generating a minimum 180 MW of installed capacity. This latest agreement signals Guascor’s debut in Italy, making it the first company to formalize a project of this kind, which will in turn enable it, in the words of the GSC press release, “to take up a strong position in photovoltaic solar energy in the zone as a first step in its strategy in Italy.”

Prior to the promotion of solar farms in the area, over the next few months GSC is to install double-axis and fixed photovoltaic structures with a commitment by the Sicilian authorities to give the go-ahead to projects of a minimum 180 MW to 2012.

With building work set to begin at the end of the year, the actual facility start up will be the first step in the Alava-based corporation’s ambitious strategic plan for Italy. The agreement signed with the Sicilian authorities, which is part of the new regional energy plan to promote renewable energies (PEARS), also envisages the possibility of installing CSE high concentrated solar power, a technological sector in which Guascor is a world leader.

Paper sum: paper mill to install €50 million cogeneration facility

Alfonso Gallardo group member firm Papresa and natural gas supplier Naturgas have created a joint venture to start up a €50-million cogeneration power facility paid for fifty-fifty by the two partners.
Papresa’s new 50MW cogeneration electricity power station should be up and running in two to three years. Its capacity is virtually the same as other paper mills in the Basque province of Guipúzcoa, for instance Zikuñaga in Hernani.

The new Papresa facility is part of a €100-million investment in the Renteria-based paper mill the Alfonso Gallardo group committed to after acquiring it in December 2007 for €200 million.

A cogeneration power facility figured as a key strategic feature in an earlier investment plan drawn up by Papresa, Spain’s leading newsprint paper producer, prior to being bought out. The power facility was already seen as a decisive tool in reducing production costs by supplying its own electricity, and because a major factor in obtaining resources that may exert a highly positive influence on the financial statements through the sale of energy to a power distributor, which, in this case, will be Naturgas.

Electricity and gas distributor Naturgas already has plenty of experience in the field of installing electricity cogeneration plants, through Millennium Energy, which manages this kind of facility.

The Naturgas subsidiary runs two electricity cogeneration facilities at the Port of Bilbao with a joint capacity of 20MW. Another stakeholder in the facilities is Cadem, itself part of the Basque Energy Board (EVE) group. Naturgas also manages a 10MW facility in the port of Barcelona.

Summary of a news item published by Noticias de Gipuzkoa, 27 May 2009

Making its point better: Basque rail control device producer to invest €19 million on new factory in France

Basque rail track connection designer Jez Sistemas Ferroviarios is to invest €19 million on starting up a factory in Arberatze, in France, which will enable it to increase turnover by 50 per cent to €68 million in 18 months.

Jez Sistemas Ferroviarios has its HQ in Llodio (Álava), where it designs and manufactures rail track devices and connections, sidings and rail crossovers, the latter two being its major products at the factory, which produces some 3,800 crossovers and 500 siding points.

With a 245-strong workforce, the company also has a factory in India, where, with business partner the VAE group, it took stakes three years’ back in a foundry, where it produces a range of parts used in the points systems it makes. Jez Sistemas is to continue with its internationalization strategy with a new factory in Arberatze, now under construction and which, if all goes to plan, should be inaugurated later this year.

The new 25,000-square-metre factory is to specialize in making crossovers for the European market, in particular to countries like Austria, Switzerland, France, England and Italy. With a workforce of between 280 and 300 people, the idea is for the factory to register turnover of €20 million, from an annual figure of roughly 4,000 crossovers. This figure will be added to current Jez sales, which came to €47 million in 2008, up 20.5 per cent on 2007, when billing came to €39 million.

Summary of a news item published by Estrategia Empresarial, 15 May 2009
Developing nicely: Bilbao city promotion company to invest €110 million in 2009

Bilbao riverside promotion and development company Bilbao Ría 2000 approved an investment budget for the year worth €110.38 million, the biggest in its history, up 63 per cent over the €67.44 million deployed in 2008. In view of the property crash and the need to continue developing initiatives like Garellano and Olabeaga, Bilbao Ría 2000 has reached a credit policy with local savings bank BBK and Spanish banking giant BBVA for €180 million to mature in 2015. The policy annuls the one signed in 2007 for €78 million to finance the Basurto-Garellano operation.

The guarantees required by both BBK and BBVA before giving the policy the green light include the commitment to a mortgage guarantee on the land belonging to Bilbao Ría 2000 and a comfort letter from all partners involved.

This year’s investments will concentrate on continuing the work under way or planned in Bilbao: the car park in the Campa de los Ingleses and Mazarredo, covering FEVE rail track in Basurto, the new police and fire service HQ in Miribilla, the completion of the Alhóndiga arts and leisure centre and the archaeological work in the plaza Corazón de María. In Baracaldo work will continue on covering the Bilbao-Santurce rail line at Reketa, laying out the plaza Pormetxeta and the Larrea roundabout project.

Led by Bilbao city mayor Iñaki Azkuna, Bilbao Ría 2000 awarded local firm Lantec the €234,750 technical aid contract for the work at the new Basurto-Zorroza civic centre in Zankoeta. José María Menchaca Araluce’s architectural studio has also drawn up plans to include how the building can be used. Viconsa was also awarded the €304,989 contract to repair the final section of the Helguera river drainage project.

Cushion for cash: new platform in Basque Country to attract high value added foreign investment

Basque Soft Landing, a new initiative promoted jointly by Basque regional development agency SPRI, the region’s three provincial councils and its technology park network, has come into being with the mission of attracting high quality foreign investment to the Basque business world. At the BSL presentation held yesterday at the Zamudio technology park near Bilbao, representatives from the promoters described the idea behind the initiative as being to “encourage high value-added foreign firms working in industries like the biosciences, nanotechnology and alternative energy, to set up in the Basque Country. Basically, the promoters have start-ups and spin-offs in mind.

According to the promoters, the new service offers interested firms a number of advantages, one of the most outstanding being the opportunity to “discover at first hand the social and economic situation in the region and get a coordinated, structured vision of Basque technology infrastructures.” To begin with, BSL will provide a “first approach” phase to the Basque Country, involving a visit for each potential project. Later on, any firm looking to set up in the region “will receive all the support they might need from local institutions.”
Near pavilions: worldwide logistics firm extends business premises in Basque Country

Rhenus Logistics is currently consolidating its business interests in the Basque Country. In recent months it has enlarged its delegation in Irún, on the French border, which concentrates on international transport, with a new 6,000-square metre pavilion. The firm’s Bilbao office, specializing in special projects and sea shipping and freight, also runs a 4,000-square-metre pavilion on the Port of Bilbao’s ZAL-2 wharf.

The key role of Rhenus Logistics’ Bilbao office is clear from the fact that it shares, with the Belgian office in Antwerp, the German office in Hilden, the firm’s Dutch office in Rotterdam and the one in Saint Petersburg, coordination of the Rhenus group logistics projects involving merchandise whose weight or size (or both) requires differentiated operational treatment.

Clients habitually using this type of Rhenus Logistics service come from the energy industry, including wind farms, refineries, solar power facilities, nuclear power stations and biodiesel factories, from the environmental industry, particularly water treatment plants, from industry in general, including rolling-stock and manufacturers and the producers of special vehicles, the construction industry (usually involving shipping very large-scale machinery and prefabricated structures) and engineering firms.

Rhenus’ Bilbao office, headed by Markus Schaub, manages shipping and the logistics of a broad range of materials, including wind turbine blades tens of metres long, train wagons, construction machinery, large machinery, silos, generators and even the transfer of entire factories from one part of the world to another. To this end, the firm uses articulated lorry platforms, special river barges and freight-carrying aircraft like the Antonov 124-100.

Apart from the worldwide Rhenus group structure, the Special Projects Department in Bilbao is supported by the PPG Project Professionals Group, of which it is an active member. This association comprises more than a hundred firms from around the world specializing in the management of special projects.

In early 2009, Rhenus Logistics was awarded the most complete Authorized Economic Operator certification under the AEOF simplifications and safety mode.

With sales of roughly €3,300 million, Rhenus is one of the leading logistics firms in the European market. The company’s 15,000-strong workforce is distributed over 230 locations offering contract logistics, freight logistics, port logistics and public transport services.

In Spain, Rhenus Logistics has a network of 14 offices with more than 100,000 square metres of logistics platform space.
Catering for growth: Basque food and agricultural cooperative group announces major four-year investment plan

Mondragon Corporation member cooperative Erkop, which works in the food and services industry, unveiled its new 2009-2012 strategic plan, which includes investments of €18 million, the creation of 3,800 new jobs and turnover of €230 million by the end of the period in question.

In the strategic plan’s first operational year, forecasts are optimistic. Management at the cooperative group expect to end 2009 with billing of €161 million. Job growth rates should also remain at present levels throughout the year. Some 239 new jobs are expected to be created at Erkop, all of them at Auzo Lagun canteen and hotel catering and cleaning cooperative and member of the Erkop group.

Last year, the Erkop group clocked up sales of €148 million and profits of €6.3 million, up 21 per cent over 2007. Once again, growth in sales came basically from Auzo Lagun, whose sales were up 28 per cent to €128 million. By year-end 2008, the Erkop workforce had grown by 1,201 employees to 6,152. At €7.5 million, investments during the year were 34 per cent higher than planned.

Besides Auzo Lagun, the group’s four other cooperatives are all major players in the Basque agricultural industry.

Summary of a news item published by Estrategia Empresarial, 15 May 2009

Dough on the go: new bakery to open precooked and frozen bread mix factory this year

Basque Bakers’ Federation spin-off Ogimahaia is investing €12 million on a new factory in Salvatierra (Álava) which will produce pre-cooked frozen bread in a range of formats, as well as frozen dough.

Controlled by the 25 leading Basque bakers, which together produce around 60 per cent of local bread, Ogimahaia plans to open its new mega-bakery at the end of the year. With a 15-strong workforce, the new factory will offer its promoters’ clients pre-cooked bread and frozen dough.

Local engineering firm GEI-2A has designed the new €12-million facility according to the very latest building standards for the food industry. Managing the building work is construction company Byco, which has just eight months to complete the job.

When finished, the new bakery will take up 5,200 square metres of the 12,400-square-metre lot. It will be fitted out with cutting-edge equipment destined to put Ogimahaia at the forefront of the sector.

Specific features of the building work include finishes with flooring specially designed for the food industry, anti-acid slabs and epoxy resin coatings, and cold chamber panels with humidity joints to ensure the continuity of insulation at very low temperatures. Another feature is the high tech industrial concrete flooring for the transelevator in the automatic warehouse.

Another important factor in this kind of pavilion are the spans between the pillar-less roof beams, which aid the production process. Furthermore, the 1-hour fire-
resistant cooler doors are specially designed to withstand low temperatures. Loading bays will be made in stainless steel.

A recently issued strategic plan for the food industry in the Basque Country revealed the high dispersal levels in the local bread and cake industry. Today, some 485 companies employ 5,700 people, and the authors of the plan warned that cooperation and joint efforts would be needed to canvass customer requirements and adapt products and services accordingly. The plan also noted an increase in demand from super- and hypermarkets, to the detriment of traditional shops. Other markets on the up are hotel and restaurant chains, canteens and hospitals.

Summary of a news item published by Estrategia Empresarial, 31 March 2009

Into the final straight: Basque candidature for Spallation Neutron Source to invest extra €30 million

Nobody ever imagined that winning the competition to provide a home for the Spallation Neutron Source would easy or cheap. The Basque candidature, competing with Sweden and Hungary to become the HQ for what would be the most ambitious scientific project ever developed in Spain, will require an additional investment of €30 million, triple the initial capital, to update the project. Central government’s Ministry of Science & Innovation has undertaken to put up 50 per cent of the amount required. Now the Basque regional government has to find the other €15 million.

“The extra cash is to give the project the push it needs and make it a genuinely cutting-edge initiative”, said ESS-Bilbao Delegate Committee chairman Juan Tomás Hernani yesterday. In other words, the extra investment will put the Zamudio Technology Park into pole position when the time comes for the final decision.

Hernani was speaking at the closing event of the ESS-Bilbao Initiative Workshop, an international congress held at Bilbao’s BEC exhibition centre and attended by 151 experts from 51 scientific institutions in 12 countries. Over three days, the experts discussed what form the European Spallation Source should take. Requiring a €1,500 million investment, this superlab is expected to generate around 15,000 jobs in its first year. Hernani described the workshop as “a big effort to integrate the voices from the entire scientific community in a debate about how we should all work together to construct the Spallation Source.”

Also at the BEC was Ian Anderson, director of the USA’s own SNS, and considered a world authority on the subject. Although he made it clear that the USA was taking a neutral role in the battle between the three candidatures ("we’ve no preferences as to where they decide to build it", he was reported as saying), Anderson declared that as far as R&D and innovation was concerned, “ESS-Bilbao is ahead of the rest.” He also stressed the commitment of Spanish central and Basque regional governments to “endowing the candidature with the additional funds for implementing R&D and innovation.”

After praising the Spanish candidature, the US scientist declared the experts in large-scale accelerators at the BEC “have been really impressed with ESS-Bilbao and by the progress the candidature has made,” after acting on some of the recommendations made in July by the International Consultancy Council.
In the final straight, the truth is that international cooperation has been a key factor in the consortium’s bid to relaunch its candidacy.

As Hernani says, “the way ahead is through projects in cooperation with the leading international institutions that need to tackle the same technological challenges we have here at ESS.” The consortium’s international technology cooperation portfolio now features ISIS Oxford, UK, SNS, Knoxville, USA, the European Organization for Nuclear Research, Geneva, the Saint Petersburg Nuclear Physics Institute, the French Atomic Energy Commission and the National Institute of Nuclear Physics in Legaro, Italy.

But besides technology, politics is likely to be decisive in the location of the Spallation Neutron Source. On July 1, Sweden, an interested party in this particular race, takes over the presidency of the European Union. This means that the Spanish candidature is virtually obliged to announce its supporters before the Czech presidency (neutral, in principle) comes to an end. Asked about progress on the diplomatic front, Hernani kept his head down and called for “prudence.”

Summary of a news item published by Deia, 19 March 2009

Building for the future: Mondragon university to open new faculty for electronics research

In 2010, Mondragon University’s Higher Polytechnic School campus will boast a new faculty by 2010 that will double student intake capacity at the Electronics, Computer & Telecommunications engineering schools, taking it to 900. The €18-million building (the largest investment in infrastructures in the University’s history) will house an electronics and embedded systems research and innovation centre with the mission to become a Spanish benchmark in the design and development of smart technology in areas like energy and transport.

“Computer, electronics and telecommunications students will be able to synchronize their training and university education while taking part in innovation and research projects throughout their careers,” says Bixente Atxa, director of the MU’s Higher Polytechnic School. Starting from an “integral” education and the research work done, MU will try to find responses to an “essential challenge” to the Basque economy. As rector Iosu Zabala says, “we all want Basque firms to compete on equal terms at the international level in an increasingly globalized sector and to endow them with their own cutting-edge technology.”

The new, four-storey building will be located at the Garaia innovation centre, where building work is already going ahead on a 13,000-square-metre plot. With so much more space available, the new building will exceed the student intake capacity of the Higher Polytechnic School, now at 574 students, with the eventual total possibly going as high as 900 students.

Summary of a news item published by Noticias de Gipuzkoa, 18 March 2009

Power purchasing: Iberdrola acquires supplies worth €1,000 million in Basque Country
Spanish power giant Iberdrola has become one of the lead for firms for Basque industry. Sources at the electricity multinational confirmed that in 2008 it had made purchases from Basque firms amounting to €1,000 million, while also executing investments of a further €250 million. In all, the power company’s electricity business in the Basque region, taxes included, has had an economic impact of around €1,650 million.

A whole range of Basque firms, from SME to member cooperatives of Guipúzcoa-based Mondragon Corporation, are now major Iberdrola suppliers.

Mesa, Incoesa, Tecuni, Tamoin, ZIV, Kaefer, Idom and Lointek are just some of the names of local providers to a firm, which, as company chairman Ignacio Sánchez-Galán stressed in Bilbao at a press conference before tomorrow’s AGM, wants to be part of the solution to the serious economic crisis.

At present, Iberdrola has 2,600 MW of installed capacity in the Basque Country, which produced 7,300 million kWh in 2008 for 1.2 million clients. It currently has a 5,000-strong workforce in the Basque region.

In the Basque Country, the power company has 159 substations, 10,025 transformer stations, almost 813 kilometres of very high and high voltage lines, 8,424 kilometres of medium voltage lines and more than 14,000 kilometres of low voltage lines. Iberdrola’s economic impact in the region in 2008 totalled €1,650 million. Sixty per cent of that amount (€1,000 million) came from purchases made by the company from more than 500 Basque firms.

Summary of a news item published by Diario de Noticias de Alava, 19 March 2009

Freeze frame: local fish conservation firm rounds off 7-million investment at new freezer plant

Lomatun Trading, a company controlled by Conservas Ortiz, the Bermeo Fishermen’s Guild, and Arrankoba, an umbrella company for the fishing guilds of Ondarroa and Lequeitio, has inaugurated a factory that will help to capitalize on the catches made by the Vizcaya fishing fleet. Located on the Lamiaran-Aranburu industrial estate in Mundaka, the new factory will freeze fresh fish. Designed by engineering firm Proyser Tecinco, the new 3,160-square-metre facilities have two freezer tunnels, three low temperature storage chambers, a fresh fish reception and conservation refrigerator, an antechamber/gallery, and a product transformation room.

Freezer technology suppliers Ramón Vizcaíno installed the freezer elements for Lomatun Trading, employing a more efficient, eco-friendly ammonia-based technology worth €1 million-plus. With an initial workforce of seven, the new facility at Mundaka comes into operation this month to coincide with the start of the new mackerel fishing season. According to annual forecasts, the facility should store about 2,500 tons of frozen bonito and other tuna-style species for the Basque canning industry, plus another thousand tons of mackerel, principally for export to Eastern European markets. Mackerel is selling well in countries like Rumania and Bulgaria, and the three partners in Lomatun Trading managed to commercialize nearly 3,500 tons last year. The Bermeo Fishermen’s Guild, which markets the catches made by its fifty-strong fleet of vessels, registered nearly 5,000 tons of mackerel and 1,400 tons of bonito in 2008, which generated turnover of €6.5 million. For the last two years, the Bermeo Guild has had an agreement with super- and hypermarket chain Eroski to
commercialize whole and carved bonito, using a control process developed by local food technology centre Azti-Tecnalia.

Summary of a news item published by Estrategia Empresarial, 1 March 2009

FORU for all: local oil refinery to begin construction work on €810 million “coke factory”

Petronor chairman Josu Jon Imaz announced yesterday that construction work on the Fuel Oil Reduction Unit (FORU), better known locally as the “coke factory”, would be starting, assuming all deadlines were met, at the end of February. He reckoned the €810 million project should be up and running in 1Q 2011.

Imaz insisted that without FORU, the Petronor oil refinery would inevitably run into “serious” problems of viability in the not-too-distant future. He declared that the unit’s start-up would enable the company to consolidate its activity for “a good few years.”

Having obtained the necessary licences from the Muskiz town council last Tuesday (official notification has yet to come through), Imaz said Petronor planned to start building before March comes in, as the contract awards “are well under way.”

Without the new Fuel Oil Reduction Unit, the refinery would have real problems in surviving, largely because today 25 per cent of the fuel it produces is already unusable in eco-friendly Europe. So a quarter of its production has been shipped to America, a state of affairs he described as “clearly unsustainable from all points of view.”

Finally, the new project would mean the “consolidation” of Petronor’s activity, as the company’s viability is assured for “a good few years.”

Summary of a news item published by Noticias de Gipuzkoa, 14 February 2009

Venturing to invest: Basque venture capital fund acquires stakeholdings worth €18.5 million in 2008

Basque semi-public venture capital management company SGECR ended 2008 with 27 projects approved requiring total investments of €18.5 million. Capital managed to December 2008 amounted to €85.8 million, distributed between five Funds/Companies managed by SGECR. At present, SGECR’s 69 business stakeholdings are worth £58 million.

Founded in 1985 by the Basque regional government, via its regional development agency SPRI, SGECR canvasses public and private financial resources, which it then uses to set up venture capital funds and companies. These take temporary minority stakeholdings in the capital of unquoted non-financial companies.

Today the company manages five funds and companies in all. One is Ezten, created in 1996 and boasting with a portfolio of 36 investee companies, with €36.2 million invested. The second fund is Suztapen, with 11 investee firms and assets of €25.5 million. SGECR has assets of €5.4 million in Ekintzaile XXI, which targets innovative
businesses and currently has 11 investee companies. The fourth fund, Elkano XXI, concentrates on investments in high-tech firms in any phase of their business lives. Elkano XXI assets come to €12 million, invested in five companies. Finally, Seed Gipuzkoa has six stakeholdings with assets of €6.5 million.

The 2008 figures confirm the upswing of recent years, practically doubling the figures for 2005 regarding both the number of projects approved and the actual amounts invested. In all, from 2005 to 2008, operations worth €57.3 million were approved for 83 projects.

Another interesting feature concerns disinvestment as a source of funds for new investments in other businesses that need cash injections to set up, grow or consolidate. In 2008 disinvestments freed up €16.3 million and meant capital gains of €8.9 million of the funds managed by SGECR.

Finally, estimated billing in 2008 by SGECR investee companies came to €579.5 million, with a total workforce of more than 2,700.

Summary of a news item published by Estrategia Empresarial, 15 February 2009

**Say you want a (nano) revolution: Basque Country widens research network with new nanoscience centre**

Small is different. This variation on a well-known theme, included in the press releases issued by cooperative research centre CIC Nanogune, was never so apt as at the crowded inauguration event for this new scientific organization destined to lead Basque research into nanosciences from the University of the Basque Country’s San Sebastián campus. Local politicians and authorities from the world of science took part in an event that ended as a paean to the nanouniverse, to the power of the unbelievably small to change the world.

Being big by working the miniscule is Nanogune’s target: making the Basque Country an international benchmark in nanoscience and nanotechnology (the microscopic study of matter and materials). “This is a field that’s crucial for achieving the kind of sustainability needed to guarantee the future of mankind,” says Nanogune director Jose María Pitarke. “The world’s most advanced countries already see it as a challenge, and we want the Basque Country up there with the best in the nano-revolution.”

As Pitarke explained in his inauguration speech, Nanogune has a twofold objective: to produce excellence in research and to uphold the commitment to contribute to the region’s economic growth, adding that “the centre’s huge capacity means scientific progress and growth will not be jeopardized by lack of space impeding the creation of more laboratories. There should even be enough space for a nanobusiness incubator.”

In over 6,000 square metres, Nanogune will be fitted with leading edge equipment facilitating experiments and research that would be out of the question at other centres, particularly as most European centres are unlikely to match the kind of installations at Nanogune.

During his inauguration speech, regional president Juan José Ibarretxe completed the content of the original motto: “the nanorevolution is an essential ingredient for the industrial future of the Basque Country.”
Let's work together: unique automotive research centre opens in Basque Country

The inauguration of the AIC Automotive Intelligence Center marked a watershed in the history of Basque industrial innovation. This R&D and innovation centre is unique in integrating a broad range of value added activities on the same premises. Basically, its mission is to get companies located at the centre to work together and thus improve their competitive levels.

By inauguration day, with 18 organizations already settled in and employing 250 highly qualified professionals, the HQ building’s 20,000 square metres had begun to seem too small. The €62 million the Vizcaya Provincial Council has invested in the project also covers a second phase that includes an extension to the HQ, which will have a further two R&D and innovation development units. A further five such units are being built on a site in Erma and the third part is planned for the site in Iurreta, now owned once again by the Provincial Council, where Basque public TV and radio corporation EiTB was based before moving to Bilbao.

AIC director Inés Anitua, who also doubles as director of Basque automotive cluster ACICAE, announced that firms at AIC will be looking with particular interest at the potential of the electric car. Anitua also insisted the centre was not just open to local firms. AIC is there for “any company from anywhere in the world that shares our vision and wishes to contribute its own skills.”

Two hundred and ninety automotive component firms currently work in the Basque Country, with annual turnover of €9,600 million and a total workforce of 41,000. The industry contributes upwards of 16 per cent to the regional GDP.

Not just any port of call: Basque fishing town to house applied innovation centre with backing from MIT

The old fishermen’s guild building in Bermeo is to house a research and innovation centre with support from MIT, the world famous Massachusetts Technology Institute. Part of the complex’s 800 square metres, located in the town’s port area, are reserved for a project the local authorities have been brewing for months with the aid of its provincial and regional counterparts. Although the project involves some ambitious plans for the development of nearby Urdaibai, its effects are expected to be felt throughout the Basque Country. The new complex, which should be up and running in the next few years, will have the mission of becoming a Basque benchmark for applied innovation, bridging the gap between the generation of ideas and their application in business, institutions and associations.

Besides having to tackle the challenge of becoming a benchmark for the entire region, the innovation development factory will also be striving to improve the social and economic situation of the Busturia area, a zone of special characteristics, its 22,000 or so hectares including the environmentally crucial Urdaibai Biosphere Reserve, which tends to work against industry or other businesses setting up there.

Helping Busturia involves setting up strategic alliances with leading international technology institutes able and willing to provide support for the project in areas like
training, designing new business ideas, applying knowledge accumulated in the region in recent years, promoting innovative culture, analyzing international trends or transforming local social and business circles, particularly in strategic sectors. Having MIT on the scene is a key factor, particularly as it is expected to install a delegation in the area to transmit its knowledge from its own premises.

It should not be forgotten that MIT only has three other delegations of this type in Europe and the one in Bermeo will be Spain’s first. The strategic agreement for MIT’s disembarkation in Urdaibai has already been formalized and will shortly be presented in public. But the centre will also work closely with the Basque authorities and regional development and innovation agencies.

For the future, the complex will be working to become part of the vanguard in learning and will also be associated with a ship-laboratory, featuring among other things a transparent bow, moored on Bermeo jetty.

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