



On the 26th June, ELA held an extraordinary congress in Bilbao to adapt its statutes to its new organisational structure

Turning the project into reality

The extraordinary confederal congress held in Bilbao on the 26th June approved the changes to the statutes arising from the implementation of the so-called "4x12=29" organisation plan, whose measures include the restructuring of the ELA professional federations.

During June, the Construction and Wood Federation and the Igeko Federation (chemical, energy, paper, graphic arts, communications and transport) merged into the ELA-Hainbat, and the Public Services Federation and the Teaching Federation into ELA-Gizalan.

Furthermore, the two remaining federations, ELA-Metal and ELA-Zerbitzuak (employees, technicians, shops and food sector), have also held extraordinary congresses and elected new members to their boards.

The changes to the statutes also include other amendments, such as increasing the number of members on the National Council, where they will now be 196 instead of 116 members to ensure that it has a more comprehensive dimension and is more representative of ELA's internal situation.

Generational and gender reshuffle

Both the organisational plan and the federations' extraordinary congresses also seek to consolidate the generational and gender reshuffle initiated by ELA several years ago. In fact, the average age of the National Committee, the trade union's ruling body regarding policy, is around 40 years and a third of its 36 members are women.

The Extraordinary Confederal Congress took place two and a half years after the 10th Ordinary Confederal Congress was held in December 2000. The ordinary congresses are held every four years.

ELA is ready to face the changes in the world of labour



On the 26th June, ELA held the first extraordinary congress in its history, with its purpose being to amend the statutes in order to ratify a whole series of organisational changes. We discussed this when we interviewed the secretary-general, Jose Elorrieta.



Jose Elorrieta, ELA's secretary-general, outlined the key points of the Extraordinary Congress

“Changing in order to be able to fight better”

-During your speech to the congress, you insisted on the need for permanent updating.

-It is something fundamental. An organisation that does not become an end in itself has to be continuously adapting in order to be a cutting-edge tool.

The scopes and strategies of the collective agreements have to be subordinate to achieving the demands.

-You referred to three basic tasks:

-One of them is to strive for a democratic and civil

process in order for the Basque people's right to self-determination to be recognised. A second objective is a fairer and committed model of society. And the third, without order meaning hierarchy, is to achieve collective wage agreements that improve conditions in the work place.

-You also referred to three basic ideas:

-The first is the autonomy to think and act, which is based on the political independence of the top officials and on the trade union's financial independence. The second idea is the nature of the demands, of the counter-power, that will allow us to prepare and organise our social base. And the third concept is that we need to form partnerships with all the movements, and not just

trade unions, which share the same values, objectives and ways of fighting as we do.

-All the professional federations have held their congresses during June.

-The congresses have had two objectives: to complete the mergers needed to ensure that the four resulting federations have a more balanced structure and to elect new members to the ruling bodies, including a larger number of women.

-The “Integral Regional Union” seems to be the main theme of the organisational restructuring process.

-Following the death of Franco, the model that ELA adopted in 1976 was based on two parallel professional and territorial structures. We ini-

The federations have new ruling bodies and with a larger number of women.

territorial structure was in charge of providing services. The outcome of the Integral Region is that the professional federations in each region work closely with the multi-sector structure to diagnose and establish the objectives and action strategies. The Regional Union thus becomes a mini-confederation, with its own political dimension, trade union action and services.

Personal generosity

-4 x 12 = 29 is the slogan.

-The thing is that trade unionism and mathematics do not always agree.

tially tended to entrust the professional federations with the trade union action, while the

The 4 x 12 = 29 slogan means that thanks to the 4 professional federations and 12 regional unions working together, we are going to develop 29 local unions that will provide us with a very dense territorial network.

-All these changes are in line with the Organisation Plan approved four years ago.

-Yes, this plan, apart from the structural aspects that we have already mentioned, provides a systematic way of working, with priorities and areas of work with respect to membership, renewing and increasing the number of members, collective bargaining, trade union action...

-It must not be easy to implement such wide-ranging changes in an organisation.

-The consensus regarding the changes is only seen from the collective feeling of the leaders and members, and the generosity of the oldest members to make room for the younger ones to move up the ranks. It is the first lesson that the new leaders have to learn.

ELA HAS GONE FROM INSTITUTIONALISATION TO COUNTERPOWER

Following Franco's death, ELA opted for institutionalisation and the search for consensus: social dialogue, bipartite and tripartite discussions, conflict solving procedures, etc. I believe that it took us a long time to realise that the European model that we aspired to was entering in an irreversible crisis, as the result of an aggressive neoliberalism, determined to end the trade union-labour status and the foundations of the welfare state. The outcome of this offensive was a notable deterioration of social and labour conditions: unemployment, job insecurity, less purchasing power for the workers and a boom in profits, with the governments opting for conservative policies (less taxes on unearned income, budgetary surpluses and reduction of welfare spending, privatisation of social services, etc.).



The consensus was therefore broken... That was the case, and ELA believed that we should not continue to feed this myth. To the contrary, the situation required trade unionism offering an alternative power, based on demands, aimed at fighting for the collectives (young people, women) working under unacceptable conditions. The growing inequality had to be corrected using collective bargaining and social action.

This is the objective of ELA's new organisational model.



(Extract from the speech given by Leire Txakartegi, in charge of small and medium-sized companies)

"The small company is playing an increasingly more important role in the job market in the Basque Country. Deregulation of working conditions and job insecurity are more serious in these companies. It is mainly women and young people that are hit by these conditions. It is therefore necessary to ensure that the reaction is in line with this new situation.

A stronger organisation and more mediators are needed to achieve this. On the other hand, more resources and a more exhaustive control system would make it easier to reach the small company. Not only the number, but also the level of participation of the delegates and the evolution of the trade union members have to be taken into account in this control system.

We also have to create trade union nuclei in the small company and introduce it into the multi-sector dynamics. We have to strengthen the political resolve of the representatives of the small and medium-sized companies. The work of these people is more than just providing a service. They are political and trade union representatives and this is the character that we have to continue to develop within the region".

■ THE GREAT CHALLENGE, IN SMALL AND MEDIUM-SIZED COMPANIES

ELA newsletter

Solidarity of Basque Workers

ELA's 6 federations have merged into 4: Metal, Gizalan (Public Services+Teaching), Zerbitzuak (Employees, technicians, shops and food sector) and Hainbat (Chemical, energy, paper, graphic arts, communications and transport + Construction and wood)

All for one...



ELA-METAL

- * Sector of Activity: Metal.
- * Membership: 30,652 people.
- * Percentage of women: 11.03%.
- * Total percentage of ELA membership: 30.12%.
- * Members of the ELA National Committee: Adolfo Muñoz (General Secretary), Jose Luis Zubizarreta (Responsible for Organization), Mari Cruz Elkoro (Permanent).



ELA-ZERBITZUAK

- * Sector of Activity: Employees, technicians, shops and food sector.
- * Membership: 20,488 people.
- * Percentage of women: 51.90%.
- * Total percentage of ELA membership: 20.13%.
- * Members of the ELA National Committee: Dani Gomez (General Secretary), Unai Martinez (Responsible for Organization), Sonia Ontoria (Permanent).



ELA-GIZALAN

- * Sector of Activity: Public Services and Teaching.
- * Membership: 28,532 people.
- * Percentage of women: 61.58%.
- * Total percentage of ELA membership: 28.03%.
- * Members of the ELA National Committee: Patxi Agirrezabala (General Secretary), Amaia Aierbe (Responsible for Organization), Maribel Maguregi (Permanent).



ELA-HAINBAT

- * Sector of Activity: Chemical, energy, paper, graphic arts, communications, transport, construction...
- * Membership: 22,092 people.
- * Percentage of women: 13.19%.
- * Total percentage of ELA membership: 21.70%.
- * Members of the ELA National Committee: Gurutz Gorraiz (General Secretary), Esteban Pereda (Responsible for Organization), Izaskun Sorondo (Permanent).