

XVI Congress of ELA



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ELA
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“There is no democracy if our right to influence politics is not respected”

The proposal by the Executive Committee obtained 90.37% of the votes at ELA's 16th Confederal Congress held on the 2nd and 3rd of June in Bilbao. Therefore, Mixel Lakuntza will once again take on the role of Secretary General for the next four years. A congress that has also been used to analyse the work carried out over the last four years and to lay the foundations for all the future work. ►

On the 2nd and 3rd of June, ELA held its 16th Confederal Congress at the Bilbao Euskalduna Palace. A congress which, amongst many other questions, was used for analysing the work carried out over the last four years, debating the road map for the next four years, choosing a new Executive Committee or for updating the trade union's principles, 50 years on.

Mitxel Lakuntza re-elected as the Secretary General

Mitxel Lakuntza will hold the position of Secretary General of ELA again for the next four years. This was decided by the 736 delegates who took part in the Congress. The Executive Committee proposal, headed by Lakuntza received 629 votes, 90.37%. There were 37 votes against (6.75%), 18 blank votes (2.58%) and 2 invalid votes (0.28%). A support that shows the trade union's internal unity.

In total, there are three new members of the Executive Committee: Ane Bilbao Alzelai (Legal Services), Luis Fernández Centeno (Unionisation. Militancy. Confederal Events) and Unai Oñederra Egaña (Training. Iparralde. Sovereignist Strategy). These three people replace Xabi Anza, Amaia Aierbe and Joseba Villarreal. The first two are leaving the Executive Committee having reached the maximum age permitted for holding executive positions and Villarreal will have other responsibilities within the trade union from now on.

"ELA has won the trade union battle"

In his first speech following his re-election as Secretary General, Lakuntza wanted to emphasise the trade union's work and he denounced the fact that if the right of the trade unions and other social agents to influence politics is not respected, there is no democracy.

"They only accept the opinions and activity of the social agents and trade unionists who agree with

NEW EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

- **Mitxel Lakuntza Vicario (Iruña, 1976):** General Secretary.
- **Amaia Muñoa Capron-Manieux (Aix-En-Provence, 1974):** Deputy General Secretary. International.
- **Ane Bilbao Alzelai (Gasteiz, 1993):** Legal Services.
- **Luis Fernández Centeno (Iruña, 1973):** Unionization. Membership. Confederal Actions.
- **Leire Gallego López de Goikoetxea (Gasteiz, 1989):** Gender Equality Policies. Social Action. Migration Policies.
- **Iván Giménez Gil (Iruña, 1976):** Communication.
- **Pello Igeregi Santamaría (Sopela, 1981):** Collective Bargaining. Occupational Health. Basque Language.
- **Alazne Mantxola Mintegi (Legazpi, 1988):** Treasury.
- **Aitor Murgia Esteve (Berango, 1988):** Research Office. Social Policies. Environment..
- **Unai Oñederra Egaña (Donostia, 1973):** Training. Iparralde. Sovereignty Strategy.
- **Leire Txakartegi Iramategi (Ondarru, 1973):** Organization.
- **Ane Miren Zelaia Arieta-Araunabeña (Durango, 1989):** Membership. Union Elections. Management System. Gender Equality Plan.



the system and they question the legitimacy of those of us who are outside this consensus. There will be no democracy if the basic rights of the trade unions and of other social

agents are not respected, including the right to influence politics; this has another name and it is not called democracy." ■

“The strikes have meant that ELA has signed the largest number of work agreements, which are also the best ones”

The representatives of ELA meeting at the Bilbao Euskalduna Palace expressed their total support for the management report presented by the Executive Committee.

The congresses are used to define the trade union's targets and lines of work for the future. But before looking towards the next few years, it is essential to analyse what has been done over the last years. This is the Congress' first milestone: to look back and reflect on what has been done since the last Congress.

The delegates have shown their total support for the management report presented by the Executive Committee.

Important achievements over the past 4 years

Collective bargaining has taken significant part of the presentation of the Management Report. The Secretary General, Mitxel Lakuntza, acknowledged that over the last four years ELA has faced up to “a multitude of obstacles”, but he wanted to launch an optimistic message. For example, the important achievements reached over these years.

“The employers' associations had blocked many agreements. Additionally, the precariousness in several sectors and companies was added to high inflation. But, in spite of the problems, we have managed to face up to the obstacles. You just have to look at the data. The agreements



signed by ELA guarantee better conditions than those signed by other trade unions. For example, in 2023 the average wage increase reached in the agreements signed by ELA was 5.76%, while in the agreements not signed by ELA this figure was 4.17%. This data is even better if we take into account the female-dominated sectors; the average wage increase for women in the agreements signed by ELA reaches almost 7%.”

Lakuntza is clear about the reason for this. “It is not by chance that ELA is the trade union that signs more

and better agreements. Accordingly, I would like to emphasise the strength behind the idea of striking. Taking the data into account, 80.54% of the days of strikes called in 2023 in the Autonomous Community of the Basque Country (ACBC), (there is no official data for Navarra) were organised by ELA. Therefore, the agreements signed by ELA guarantee better conditions than those signed by other trade unions. ELA obtains more and better agreements because it has the capacity to strike.”



Important achievements have been reached, but there is still a great deal of work ahead of us. Lakuntza acknowledged this as follows: "Many sectors are still blocked. Both in Navarra and in the ACBC. In the public sector and in the sectors run by the Navarra government there is a predominance of blocking or of agreements signed by minorities, as has occurred with public education."

ELA, the trade union that signs most agreements

There are some people who affirm that ELA does not have the capacity to reach agreements. Lakuntza wanted to make it clear that these statements are "a lie". "ELA is the trade union that signs most agreements. Over 250 agreements on average every year."

For this reason, the Secretary General wanted to underscore the legitimacy of ELA. "This is also democracy,

direct democracy. ELA has once again stood in the trade union elections and once again, it has won." This is accompanied by the data. ELA is the majority trade union in Euskal Herria, with a representation of 35.79% in Hego Euskal Herria¹. In the ACBC, it has a representation that is over 40% and in Navarra it is very close to 23%."

Women, the keystone for the growth in membership

ELA's treasurer, Alazne Mantxola, referred to the work in recent years in membership and in the trade union elections. She was satisfied with the work carried out. "We have evolved with a rise in membership. ELA's membership has grown: from 2021 to today the trade union has 3,234 more members."

Mantxola wanted to give a special mention to the increase in women members, as they make up

98.82% of the growth between the congresses. That is to say, the net increase in membership is of 3,234 people, while the increase in women members is 3,196.

ELA, the first trade union

The results of the trade union elections were also satisfying. In fact, it is the trade union with the largest representation in Hego Euskal Herria. In December 2024, it held 36% of the representation in ACBC and Navarra, with a total of 9,568 representatives, 901 more than four years ago. Here it is also worth underlining that the importance of the women representatives is 65%.

Mobilisation in the face of neoliberal aggression

These years have not been easy for the working class. For this reason, the Deputy Secretary General Amaia Muñoa applauded the fact that "in

this period between congresses, in Euskal Herria mobilisations have increased considerably.”
“ELA is proud to form part of this counterweight framework.”

Muñoa repeated that ELA is a trade union that works alongside the most precarious working class and recalled ELA's proposal for the most precarious sectors: “ELA: Minimum wage. It has prepared a new proposal: to reach 65% of the Gross Domestic Product; 1,795 euros in the calculation for 2024. That is to say, linking the minimum wage to the wealth generated.”

Euskal Herria is not an island isolated from the world. For this reason Muñoa also referred to the international situation. In fact, inevitably, many of the things occurring internationally also have a vital influence in our environment. “There are five main threats at this moment on an international scale: social inequalities, climate change; wars; migratory policies and the rise of the extreme right.”



And of course, she devoted a special space to the genocide against Palestine. She harshly denounced the European Union's dependence on the United States and the lack of capacity that it has shown for making even

minimal decisions. “The foundations lie on economic interest, the desire to protect the business by private companies, including companies in the Basque Country.” ■





THE SAME PRINCIPLES, BUT RENEWED

The first day of the Congress concluded with an event where seven members from both yesterday and today threshed out what ELA has been, what it is and what it will be. A simple event, but one with great symbolic value. ELA wanted to take advantage of the 16th Congress to update the principles passed at the 3rd Congress, held in 1976. At that time, this declaration was a review of the founding act and the trade union's first statutes (1911), establishing the essential features that still define us today: a Basque, abertzale, socialist, independent trade union, funded by its membership.

However, those principles reflected its historical context, both in the content and in the language used. In the almost five decades that have passed, ELA has undergone a deep-rooted evolution and its principles must reflect this transformation.

This new Declaration, which obtained unanimous backing, clearly and accessibly synthesises the values, aims and trade union model that ELA has consolidated over these years. It includes our feminist, ecologist, internationalist and classist fights, as well as our commitment towards a sovereign and Basque-speaking Euskal Herria. It is a text that projects a long-term view, which updates and strengthens the collective identity of ELA. In short, these new principles explain what ELA is today, what it defends and the direction it wants to take, with the aim of strengthening its identity and sharing its values both inside and outside the organisation.



“We want to organise the working class to transform society”

The Programme approved by the National Committee, that is to say, the document that summarises the objectives and the strategic lines of the trade union for the next four years, was unanimously backed.

The second day of the Congress started with the Programme debate. Four people were in charge of this Programme. **Amaia Muñoa**, Deputy Secretary General, centred part of her speech on talking about sovereignty and what this word means for a class trade union such as ELA. Muñoa underscored that sovereignty is a daily political practice that must be in the hands

of the citizens, the working class and the people. “In ELA, inevitably, we link sovereignty to well-being and people’s needs.”

Leire Txakartegi, talked about organisation, that is to say, “of ourselves, of our weaknesses and strengths, to ensure that the trade union is as effective as possible in the defence of the workers’ rights.

The objectives and lines of work that are included in the organisational heading are long-term, and they will not come to an end in a period of four years. Membership, the drive forward of trade union elections, the holding of trials, unionisation or organisation of militancy.... Although we are doing all this day by day, we will always find things to improve because we are very demanding of ourselves.”

Aitor Murgia, analysed the socio-economic situation of Euskal Herria. "In Euskal Herria there are many crises that have developed in a context characterised by decades of applying neoliberal policies. These policies, driven by the main parties that have governed the country, have promoted the deregulation of working conditions and have opened the door to abuse by companies."

"They have also rejected progressively taxing high incomes, income from capital and business profits, as well as refusing to push for effective redistribution policies. They have also maintained a very small public investment in basic services such as healthcare, education, housing, social protection and industrial policy, while they have committed to outsourcing and privatisation in key sectors such as professionalised care. While, since the last congress the large corporations have increased their profits, the workers have been immersed in a process of impoverishment with a clear loss of purchasing power."

Pello Igeregi analysed the collective bargaining situation. To do this, he explained ELA's strategy for the next four years. "When moving against governments and employers' associations who want to build a working world based on precariousness, the working class can only respond with a conflict strategy." In this context, he alluded to a conclusion that has been ratified again since the last Congress. "All the good news from the last four years has been reached as a result of strikes. We vindicate the narrative of fighting because it is the only effective narrative for changing the crude reality that they want to impose on us. We are not going to apologise for calling strikes, we are proud of them! Showing our teeth to those who oppress the workers is a joy, facing up to those pay your wages is great and the next four years in this trade union we are going to continue enjoying ourselves enormously." ■



THREE URGENT RESOLUTIONS

In between the approval of the Programme proposal and the Congress, many things have happened. For this reason, in the Congress three resolutions were debated and voted on, questions that have been in the news in recent months and which the trade union wanted to give special importance to.

The first resolution "Against the warmongering and militarisation of Europe" repeats ELA's position against warmongering and the military escalation in Europe. "The rise in warmongering is putting democracy and the working class at risk."

The second resolution "Discussing wages with the employers' associations and building sovereignty" vindicates the fact that the Minimum Interprofessional Salary may be set by the Parliaments of the Basque Country and Navarra. As is well known, at present this is the remit of the State. "All over the world, the minimum wage is an instrument for social cohesion and the sharing out of wealth."

The third resolution is titled "Towards a new framework of sovereignty and social justice in Hego Euskal Herria". This resolution includes the fact that ELA "is the first trade union in Euskal Herria and for this reason it is the responsibility of the trade union to be a transforming instrument to guarantee the social, working, cultural and political rights of Euskal Herria."



“Palestine will live on”

The speech given by the Palestinian trade unionist Yaser Karaeen was one of the most emotional moments of the 16th Congress.

A congress is a serious event, a moment when you take a good look at yourself. An event that takes place every four years, which is an essential instrument for understanding the trade union's actions. But the Congress also includes other things. It is also a moment to be with friends who come from all over Euskal Herria and from abroad. Many trade unions and agents accompanied us at the Congress. There were also trade union representatives from America, Asia, Africa and Europe.

The delegates dedicated applause to all the representatives who have accompanied us over these two days. But the attention became particularly

important due to the participation of the member of the Palestinian General Federation of Trade Unions (PGFTU), Yaser Karaeen. This is not surprising. Karaeen explained the cruel situation that his country is experiencing. “I come from Palestine. Palestine is still bleeding: in the Gaza Strip, in the West Bank – particularly in Jenin, in the camps of Nour Shams, Tukarem, Balata, Al-Fará.... And in all the occupied territories the cleansing and genocide against our people is never-ending. The Israeli occupation continues with its genocide and ethnic cleansing.”

Decades ago, Israel, along with the complicity of western countries,

started a genocide against Palestine. But in spite of the obstacles, Karaeen launched a clear message: “They will not relent in their determination.” “We will remain in our territory; no displacement or genocide will stop us. We are a people that knows that freedom is won, it is not given.”

It was an emotional speech, which Karaeen found difficult to finish. He was moved. Moved by the pain caused for explaining the situation that is being experienced in Palestine and touched by the repeated applause and shows of support he received. “Palestine will continue, the occupation will disappear,” he concluded. So be it. ■