Chapter 6
Iberian trade unions and the ETUC: from the periphery to the centre

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The first central question in the relationship between the ETUC and Iberian trade unions is related to the impact provided for European trade unions on the different transitions to democracy of the two countries, which coincided with the first steps of the ETUC. How were the relations between the new European confederation and the clandestine trade unions in exile or born under dictatorship? How did they contribute to their consolidation during the democratisation process? These are the questions discussed in Section 1, which also briefly introduces the future members of the ETUC. It will be demonstrated that if in 1973 they were marginal in ETUC decision-making, in less than a decade Iberian trade unions became one of its major concerns, to such an extent that they brought the ETUC into an identity crisis on the question of accepting the membership of major Iberian trade unions. This chapter also reveals the high politicisation and Europeanisation of trade unions during a period of social and economic turmoil and geopolitical transformation, which made possible in the course of a decade a fundamental political shift in the southern European countries from dictatorship to democracy before acceding to the European Communities.

1.1. UGT and ELA-STV: pioneers marked by exile and the Cold War

When the ETUC was constituted in Brussels on 8 February 1973, the historical Spanish trade union, the Unión General de Trabajadores (General Union of Workers – UGT),
was not originally included among its constituent parties. However, the day after, it was officially considered a founding member during the celebration of its First General Assembly. The reason for this ad hoc procedure was that the founders of the ETUC were from the EEC and EFTA countries, whereas Spain was a member of neither. On 24 January, the clandestine UGT had already bitterly complained that it had not even been invited as observer despite the tough fight it was having not only against the dictatorship, but also, they wrote, against the influence of the Communist Party of Spain among workers at home and Spanish migrants in Europe. Despite these complaints, UGT had reluctantly agreed to send just one representative as member of the ICFTU delegation. But once in Brussels, its delegate, organisational secretary Antonio García Duarte, managed to obtain an exception to the general rule and UGT was effectively included as a constituent organisation of the ETUC by unanimous acclamation of the organisations present.1 In brief, the leader of the UGT had to gently force the doors of the ETUC, showing that the question of the limits of the ETUC and its vocation to reach over the institutional borders of Europe-wide political organisations was, and has remained, a central element in its identity. This precocious integration of trade unions from non-democratic countries and, later, those dominated by communist-led organisations, illustrates the political anticipation, and ambitions, of the new confederation.2

As the ETUC was constituted, it quickly asked to designate two representatives to the executive committee.3 Antonio García Duarte answered that he was just a substitute member of the main representative appointed by the UGT executive committee, Nicolas Redondo, whose clandestine name, ‘Juan Urbieta’, had to be used in any official document (Redondo 2002; García Santesmases 2007). The letter deserves to be quoted because it synthesises in a few lines the situation of the Spanish trade union movement during the last years of Franco’s dictatorship:

Nicolas Redondo lives in Bilbao. But he is currently in prison, condemned for having been the main leader of the strike movements which since mid-January have taken place in the Basque Country (Vizcay). He has been fined 200,000 Spanish pesetas but he refused that our organisation paid for his liberation. Otherwise he is on trial at the Court of Public Order which has requested that he be sentenced to eight years in prison.4

This was the precarious situation of the new leader of the historical Spanish trade union. UGT, created in 1888 had been the most important in the country and its trajectory was closely linked with the Spanish Socialist Workers’ Party (PSOE), to such an extent that the destinies of the two socialist organisations were interdependent. Just three years earlier, in 1970, the President and Secretary General of both organisations in exile for nearly 30 years had been the same person: the historical leader of the teachers’ trade union (FETE-UGT), Rodolfo Llopis, whose personal assistant had been García Duarte. Llopis, who was a

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1. For García Duarte materials of the constitutive ETUC meeting see FFLC, UGT in exile, 000461-009, Invitation from T. Rasschaert and K. Sandegren to García Duarte, 22 January 1973. I thank Manuel Simón, in charge of International Relations at UGT, for having brought this source to my attention.
2. Juan Moreno (2001: 145) quotes a letter from 24 January from Antonio García Duarte to Georges Debunne (President of the meeting) and Théo Rasschaert (ECFTU secretary).
3. IISH, ETUC, 1306, Letter from Théo Rasschaert to Antonio García Duarte, UGT secretary general at Toulouse, 14-02-1973.
freemason, faithful during the Spanish Republic to UGT leader Francisco Largo Caballero, had just been removed from the presidency during the 11th UGT Congress in 1971. At that point, the control of UGT shifted from the Republican exile to the ‘young turks’ of the interior. Duarte, based in Toulouse, became the organisation’s number two, whereas Redondo was designated as the new leader. Llopis had maintained his position as secretary general of the PSOE until its XIIth Congress in August 1972, but his influence had since waned, as most of the funding which kept the PSOE alive in exile actually came from the solidarity funds that the UGT received from the international trade unions adhering to the ICFTU, of which UGT had also been a founding member (Mateos 2008).

This institutional advantage of being already member of ICFTU provided the new UGT – and indirectly the PSOE – with decisive leverage for a process of accelerated catch-up with the hegemonic Communist Party of Spain and its Workers’ Commissions (Comisiones Obreras – CCOO), created as a clandestine socio-political movement but also with direct participation in the official trade unions of the dictatorship. Until 1971, UGT prioritised its international action and did not act within the legal framework of the official Francoist trade unions, not participating in its elections for workers’ representatives. It also preferred to achieve alliances, in agreement with ICFTU, with Spain’s other historical trade union, the anarchist National Confederation of Labour (Confederación Nacional del Trabajo – CNT) (Herrérín López 2004). This was requested on the basis that both shared a clear anti-communist position and met regularly at their main head offices in southern France. The two historical trade unions had long waited the return of democracy to regain their dominant positions among Spanish workers.

A similar strategy of international institutional activism without much influence within the labour movement in Spain was also adopted by the third, relatively minor, historical trade union, the regionalist Trade Union of Basque Workers (Eusko Langileen Alkartasuna-Solidaridad de los Trabajadores Vascos, ELA-STV). ELA-STV, like UGT, was intimately linked to a political party faithful to the restoration of a democratic Republic in Spain: the Christian Democrat Nationalist Party of the Basque Country (PNV) (Letamendia Belzunce 2004). However ELA-STV was a unique case because it was not only a member of ICFTU but also of the World Confederation of Labour (WCL). Despite this exceptional double international affiliation, it became clear that it was more active in the WCL than in ICFTU, if we believe the reply that the ETUC gave to ELA when the Basque trade union expressed its surprise at not having been invited, on the same footing as UGT, as a founding member of this new confederation, which was a direct inheritor of the ECFTU, of which ELA was also a member. ELA-STV, therefore, was not among the founding members of the ETUC, and had to formally apply for membership as part of the agreement that the ETUC and the European Organisation of the WCL had reached during the second half of 1973 for the automatic adhesion of the members of this regional branch of the Christian confederation to the ETUC. ELA-STV formulated its formal request on 4 March 1974 and was accepted by the ETUC executive committee three days later.

UGT and ELA-STV had already fought together against the dictatorship by establishing international cooperation supported by ICFTU and the WCL. By the end of the 1950s

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this included contacts with the CNT, which coagulated into a formal agreement between the three on May 1961 to constitute the Spanish Trade Union Alliance (Alianza Sindical Española). It quickly expanded in Catalonia by including the Catholic Solidarity of Workers of Catalunya (Solidaridad Católica de Obreros de Cataluña- SOCC), linked to the regionalist Christian Democrats of Unió Democràtica de Catalunya. However, in this case, UGT and CNT representatives went much further than the line taken by their international directorates with the creation in 1962 of the Alianza Sindical Obrera de Cataluña, which culminated later that year at the national level with the creation of the Trade Union Alliance of Workers (Alianza Sindical Obrera), supported by the International Metalworkers’ Federation. Such activism, supported by international funding, was in response to the fact that all these historical trade unions were losing touch with the rebirth of the trade union movement in Spain, which was mainly being carried out by two new clandestine organisations which had their own international connections: the Social Christian-led Workers’ Trade Union (Union Sindical Obrera (USO) and the communist-led Workers’ Commissions (Comisiones Obreras – CCOO).

Whereas USO originated in 1961 from the convergence of clandestine socialist militants who had quit the UGT, mainly in Catalonia, and members of various legal Christian associations,7 the Workers’ Commissions movement (Comisiones Obreras) was born around 1957 out of the increasing convergence of a majority of clandestine communist leaders and a minority of social Catholic militants. What both new structures had in common was that they participated in the elections of workers’ representatives of the official Spanish Trade Union Organisation (Organización Sindical Española – OSE) in order to articulate the requests of the ‘new labour movement’. This was the term used to refer to the new generation of workers coming from rural areas and who found jobs in the new services and industrial sectors in cities and towns as a result of the industrialisation thrust of the 1950s. They often held clandestine meetings in churches, convents and Catholic private schools, as a clear sign of the central role that apostolic movements played against the Falange, the fascist-like party of the regime, which controlled the OSE. For UGT, ELA-STV and CNT, this was seen as a form of collaborationism and indirectly legitimised the regime and its supporters. However, due to the brutal repression of the 1940s and the later generational shift, their importance in working class memory declined and risked becoming marginalised in this new labour movement. This worried the ICFTU very much, which unsuccessfully sought to put pressure on the historical trade unions to acquire roots in the working class, instead of leaving the field open to the new labour movement, which it systematically refused to acknowledge as potential interlocutors.

It is important not to forget that despite the existence of the workers’ internationals, the relations with organised workers in Spain from the part of European trade unions were developed largely independently by its members. The most symptomatic example was the case of USO, which made use from the very beginning of the international connections of the JOC network, as its founder, the Basque Eugenio Royo Errazkin, had been member of its international board. Its main ally abroad from the very beginning was the French CFDT. USO followed a similar evolution in the early 1960s, with an original blend of socialist and Christian principles, which led it to argue in favour of a socialist democracy, based

7. Christian Workers’s Youth (Juventud Obrera Cristiana (JOC), Working Fraternities of Catholic Action (Hermandades Obreras de Acción Católica- HOAC), and the Jesuit Youth Workers Avant-garde (Vanguardias Obreras Juveniles).
on self-management and autonomy from political parties and religion. This principle of independence made it difficult to achieve an alliance with the UGT despite the strong pressure of the ICFTU. For the USO, the WTFU and the ICFTU were ‘politically aligned with the hegemonic blocs with strong dependence on Moscow and Washington in the context of the Cold War’. Adhering to the WCL was discarded as it was based on confessional lines and therefore it chose to apply to join international industry federations. Thus, despite the opposition of UGT and the French FO, USO joined the International Metalworkers’ Federation in 1969, counting on the increasing support of the Italian CISL – and the Italian unitary branch of the metal sector (FLM) – but also IG Metall. This opened the door from the end of 1974 to the executive committee of the European Federation of the Metallurgy, created in 1971.8

But the major political question for the new ETUC was also whether it would be possible for the two trade unions to merge into a single and strong social democratic federation capable of countering the dominant CCOO. On the establishment of the ETUC, USO’s official responsible for international affairs, Francisco Leon (alias Raimon Castillo) applied to join, to which the ETUC secretary general did not reply, preferring to wait and see whether the events in Spain could led to a change in the total opposition of UGT, supported in its veto by the DGB, Scandinavian, Belgian and Dutch organisations. Particularly revealing is Leon’s internal evaluation of the new ETUC’s political meaning for international trade unionism and for Spain. At first, it marked the irreversible emancipation of European trade unionism from US influence as understood by the complaint of the AFL-CIO to Vic Feather, Secretary General of the UK TUC and President of the ETUC, for having removed the term ‘free’ from its official name. This emancipation, welcomed by USO, also constituted a bet on a process of unification of the various traditions of trade unionism in the ‘strategic project of a new industrial, social and economic Europe’, which would also ‘defreeze’ relations with Communist-led trade unions in western and eastern Europe. This ‘open and positive project’ was also a means to efficiently confront a Europe based on monopolies and in particular for USO the most fundamental task was coming to terms with a new reality: ‘common and coordinated action of trade unions towards multinational corporations’. For Spain, USO saw the ETUC as a possible instrument of international solidarity with the European working class, in particular against multinationals and solid support against ‘fascist trade unions’.9

This request for ETUC membership was reiterated on 14 May 1974, but the official reply requested that USO met UGT’s conditions, which amounted to its merger with UGT. This was something that USO was obviously not ready to accept, having been publicly accepted, together with UGT, CCOO and ELA, as a member of the ILO’s workers’ group at the ILO’s 59th International Conference in June 1974. It had even participated in a joint press conference boycotting the presence in this delegation of the OSE’s representatives. In the previous European regional conference of 14 January 1974 it had not managed this, despite the fact that its allies from CISL (Gloria Baduel) and CFDT (Pierre Salanne) had already invited it to join the workers’ group in response to the invitation made by the Soviet trade

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8. FLC (Fundación Largo Caballero), José-María Zufiaur’s Papers, 000797 (3) Informe sobre la política internacional de la USO en la década del 60, undated, most likely second half 1970; Informe de la Delegación exterior al Comité Ejecutivo sobre las relaciones internacionales, 20-07-1978.
unions to invite CCOO. Even when the UGT’s representative rejected any intervention on their part, UGT exercised a strong influence over the ILO workers’ group as from 1974 the secretary general of this group and on the ILO’s Administrative Tribunal was UGT’s very own José Antonio Aguiriano. He had been appointed by ICFTU secretary general, the German Otto Kersten as its representative in this international organisation, after having worked in the ICFTU’s offices in Brussels for many years. In this context of open rejection from UGT and the ETUC, USO chose instead to cooperate with CCOO with common candidates for the 1975 elections of workers’ representatives, giving some weight to CCOO’s ambitions of creating a unitary Spanish trade union similar to what was happening in neighbouring Portugal at that time.

1.2. Comisiones Obreras and the CGTP: similarities and differences between two communist-led trade unions

The exact nature of CCOO is a complex matter and has been the object of considerable controversy. At the beginning of 1975, this communist-led workers’ movement had not yet decided about its definitive organisational form as a new trade union. Moreover, the central role that the Spanish Communist Party (PCE) played did not mean that this was the typical ‘Communist totalitarian’ movement – as it was termed by UGT and CNT – but rather, as CCOO defined itself at the moment of its formal creation, an independent, democratic and unitary socio-political movement in which converged various political traditions and most of the new working class of the country in order to bring democracy to Spain. Indeed, CCOO was from the very beginning the first and most important instrument of the Spanish Communist Party’s opposition to the dictatorship. Nevertheless, it genuinely aimed to facilitate the convergence of all existing trade unions. For this reason, UGT tried for many years to demonstrate to the ETUC secretariat and its members that in reality CCOO was a convinced communist trade union closer to the French CGT – with dependent relations with the communist WTFU and the Soviet Union – than to the Italian CGIL, which had been admitted on 9 July 1974 to the ETUC, despite having been a member of the WFTU and retaining the status of associate member even after its adhesion to the ETUC (Moreno 2011).

CCOO’s first request to discuss the conditions for eventual ETUC membership took place on 20 February 1973, less than two weeks after its creation. This letter was addressed to President Feather, together with another sent to the man responsible for the international committee of the TUC, Jack Jones, a former volunteer in the International Brigades in the Spanish Civil War, who supported CCOO’s case for membership. This request for an interview was, however, not a pressing demand, because CCOO was still attached to its original strategy of shifting from a clandestine social movement with a decentralised organisation provided by the Spanish Communist Party, to become the broad basis for a unitary trade union in which existing organisations could integrate, while preserving their identity. This strategy implied the political will of building a single confederation and therefore it would have been premature to request adhesion to the ETUC without knowing

10. *Idem*, 000797(7), letter from Miguel Sánchez Mazas (UGT representative to international organisations) to Raimon (USO representative at the ILO), 21-05-1975.
whether UGT would give up its opposition. If we believe the confidences of an unidentified UGT leader to the US Embassy in Madrid, CCOO was also waiting for CGIL to be admitted first, in order to request adhesion and, together with the French CGT, create a communist current within the ETUC. UGT had stated that it would accept CCOO on condition that it publicly declared its communist identity, even when CCOO was not a candidate for WFTU membership. This was an impossible condition because it implied renouncing the unitary trade union strategy.\(^{12}\)

This was not an isolated case because in Portugal another communist-led workers’ commission was pursuing the same objective as CCOO, namely the creation of a unitary trade union with various ideological strands co-existing under the hegemony of the Portuguese Communist Party (PCP). Favourable to this endeavour was the fact that in Portugal there was no historical trade union in exile with international connections and the PCP was to become part of the government after the Carnation Revolution of 25 April 1974. The latest research has demonstrated that, in contrast to the PCE, the PCP lagged well behind in relation to its status in the labour movement. This was not just because the workers’ commissions appeared only from 1969 when the new Prime Minister Marcelo Caetano had made some legal changes allowing the election of independent workers’ representatives in an attempt to legitimise the regime after a wave of strikes in 1968. Indeed the PCP was present at the 19 October 1970 meeting of the members of some of these local and branch workers’ commissions, although at the initiative of the Movimento d’Esquerda Socialista (Socialist Left-MES), which was active in the Movimento Democrático Portugues (MDE). The PCP was no longer really hegemonic at that point because these workers’ commissions included also Catholic, socialist and radical-left workers’ representatives.

It was only after this coordination of workers’ commissions, the so-called Intersindical, had been declared illegal on 26 July 1971 that the PCP started changing its strategy in the trade unions and passed from being an anti-fascist alliance with works councils seeking socialism to calling for the more active construction of a unitary trade union confederation to defend the new regime from its opponents, left and right. Thus, the Revolution marked a decisive acceleration, going from common action to the struggle for ‘integration’ (‘unici-
dade’) and hegemony. The new government, in the new law on trade unions, under the direction of a PCP Minister of Labour, declared the continuity of the single trade union policy. The main objective was to stabilise the new state in the face of the series of strikes, which disorganised a seriously weakened economy under pressure from the extreme left to take the path towards self-management by works councils. The main argument put forward by the PCP was that ‘integration’ was equivalent to a single union, which could also guarantee democracy and influence the Revolution.

The fact that the PCP, to provide international backing for this position, brought to Portugal trade union representatives from the Soviet bloc – in particular from East Germany – and the French union leader Georges Marchais, seriously worried western international observers, particularly the United States and the Federal Republic of Germany, but also all members of the ETUC and the ICFTU (Valente 2001; Varela 2010, 2011). After an official ICFTU mission to Lisbon to make contact with the different trade union strands, Otto Kersten sent a new two-week mission to Lisbon, involving one of the new young leaders of

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UGT, Manuel Simón, and Dieter Wagner from the DGB. Wagner, who represented the DGB in Chile before the Pinochet coup, returned to set up an ICFTU office in Lisbon. Simón was a member of the leadership-in-exile of PSOE and UGT and later was made responsible for international relations at UGT from 1976 until 1985. The mission was clear. They were to provide support for the weak socialist strands within the workers’ movement to prevent a decree from the Revolutionary Council making compulsory the integration of trade unions and maintaining the prohibition on their international affiliation. However, this took place on 30 April 1975.

This was, however, an ephemeral victory for the PCP as very quickly the new Constitution of 1976 removed both legal constraints. With pluralism again an option the Socialist Party of Mario Soares brought together the socialist members within the Intersindical in the so-called Carta Aberta platform. From 27 to 30 January 1977 the Intersindical finally organised its first national congress, becoming the Confederaçao Geral dos Trabalhadores Portugueses (CGTP)-Intersindical Nacional (IN). This was boycotted by the Carta Aberta and other members close to the Socialist Party, despite the fact that the CGTP demonstrated that even when controlled by the communists, other ideological minorities were also represented (extreme left, left socialists, and even the social Catholics of BASE-FUT) (Nunes et al. 2011; Cartaxo et al. 2011).

With the joint international support of the DGB and the AFL-CIO, the Socialist Party and the Social Democratic Party encouraged the creation of a new trade union, which on 25–26 January 1979 gave birth to a new confederation, whose name and logo was similar to that of the Spanish UGT: the União Geral de Trabalhadores-Portugal (UGT-P). Led by José Manuel Torres Couto, UGT-P was very strong among white-collar workers, but weak in industry. For the ETUC secretariat, who attended the meeting, the challenge was to demonstrate that allowing this organisation to join the ETUC was not just a political operation opposed to the Intersindical. UGT-P’s strategy for joining the ETUC was to take the long road, first becoming a member of ICFTU.

In conclusion, it was the rejection of the Iberian Socialists of integration within the communist-led workers’ commissions in both countries that explains the fragmentation of Iberian trade unions after the dictatorships. The still-clandestine UGT took a decisive step when it held its first public Congress in Spain during 15–18 April 1976, with the ambiguous support of the Spanish government and the backing of all the most prominent members of the international trade union movement. A few months earlier, Simón had been preparing the last Congress in exile to be held in Brussels in order to thank the ICFTU and ETUC for their support to the Socialist Trade Union, but Redondo decided at the last minute to hold it in Madrid, instead. Such a public congress marked a clear position against any kind of unitary confederation, as suggested by CCOO. Simultaneously, UGT tried to increase its weight as much as possible by merging with USO, on the basis that it had international political and trade union support, whereas USO had an ‘infantry’ of delegates which the UGT lacked and which would enable it to challenge CCOO in the first legal elections of trade union delegates.

USO resisted until its first Congress on 7–10 April 1977, at which it elected José Maria Zufiaur as its secretary general. After the political elections in June at which USO had

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15. IISH, ETUC; 1321, Confidential note from Manuel Simón to Mathias Hinterscheid, 13-08-1977.
bet on the triumph of the Socialist Popular Party of Enrique Tierno Galván, the victory of the PSOE led to a serious reflection about what the future might hold for USO. Zufiaur was now in favour of the merger of USO with UGT. One of the main elements in the discussion was the impossibility of joining the ETUC, which was a clear mandate of the Congress. But his deputy, responsible for political relations, Manuel Zaguirre, was entirely opposed to what he saw as clear pressure on USO from the Socialists to renounce to its independence, which had motivated USO to prefer joining the ETUC and its industry federations, such as the European Metalworkers Federation, instead of one of the existing international federations. The international pressure on USO was extremely strong, not just from European unions, which had always supported it, but also from the almighty AFL-CIO’s delegate in Europe, Irving Brown, who urged Zaguirre to merge in order to stop CCOO’s possible election triumph. But Zaguirre managed to resist a split in October 1977 and kept the organisation afloat even when it became clear that joining the ETUC in such circumstances would be impossible. Having lost the support of the French CFDT, which Simon had convinced to support the merger, from 1977 USO followed the advice of Emilio Gabaglio, the international affairs director of CISL. He recommended knocking on the door of the WCL, which by 1980 had accepted the new USO as a full member, which subsequently left the branches associated with ICFTU to join those of the WCL.16

1.3. The first failed applications (CCOO, USO, CGTP, UGT-P) to join the ETUC: 1979–1982

On 30 May 1975, CCOO took a supplementary step towards joining the ETUC with a letter sent to the President, Heinz-Oskar Vetter (DGB), in which it requested a meeting, which received a positive answer, delegating responsibility to Jan Kulalowski. On 9 September in Brussels the confederal secretary met the CCOO delegation headed by the man in charge of international affairs, Carlos Elvira, together with two members of CCOO Catalonia (José Luis López Bulla and Antonio Luchetti), which temporarily held the national coordination after the imprisonment of the CCOO leadership. This meeting was followed on 13 January 1976 by a direct request for membership sent to Vetter by the founder of CCOO, Marcelino Camacho, in which the Spanish leader thanked him for the solidarity showed by the ETUC with the CCOO leadership after their judgment in the famous 1,001 Process of 1973 (Camacho 1990). So far, there had not been an official request for membership because such a fundamental question had to be settled at the first CCOO General Assembly, which took place in July 1976 in Barcelona, still under clandestine conditions.

The stakes of seeking membership were very high because this would amount to a renunciation of the unitary trade union strategy. However, the question of deepening this strategy or constituting itself as an autonomous trade union, as UGT was urging them to do, was at the centre of the debate. According to the latest research, Julián Ariza and Nicolás Sartorius, who with Camacho constituted the core of the secretariat of CCOO, received an ambiguous mandate to take a final decision, which they took at the end of September after having consulted with Luciano Lama, Secretary General of CGIL. This connection, including

16. FLC, Interview, Manuela Aroca to Manuel Zaguirre Cano, 16 April and 10 May 2010, p. 118. I would like to thank Manuela Aroca for making this interview available.
substantial financial support from Italian trade unions, was crucial because the dominant political tendency within CCOO was the Euro-communist tendency represented by Sartorius, which was also the dominant political line of the PCE led by Santiago Carrillo in the footsteps of Enrico Berlinguer and his ‘historical compromise’ strategy (Molinero 2012).

Such a decision to abandon the path towards a single trade union created a split from two Maoist trends (Revolutionary Organisation of Workers [ORT] and the Party of Spanish Workers [PTE]), which gave birth to two ephemeral trade unions – CSUT and SU – which incorporated the word ‘unitary’ in their name to express their fundamental dissent. The confirmation of this fundamental decision took place in October but it also opened the door to the exit of many militants from CCOO to UGT, particularly after the political elections, as a result of which the PCE found itself in a minority in relationship to the PSOE, contrary to what had been expected by CCOO. The challenge for CCOO became to constitute itself as a trade union without changing its nature as a ‘socio-political movement’ based on local and regional assemblies, more than on a strong organic centralisation. This was to a large extent achieved at its founding congress in June 1978, when it was officially created as the Confederated Trade Union of CCOO, which elected Marcelino Camacho as secretary general and gave him a formal mandate to request membership of the ETUC (Moreno 2011).

This ideological plurality and territorial bottom-up approach became a distinctive feature of CCOO in contrast to the highly centralised and top-down UGT, which in just two years successfully built trade union structures from a small central secretariat closely linked to a single political party, the PSOE. Such a miracle was possible due to its European connections at the ETUC and ICFTU. In 1976 the total amount of international solidarity funding amounted to 40 million Spanish pesetas, but it was far from the minimum that UGT had calculated as necessary to create a minimum infrastructure in the country as a whole. The decisive thrust came from the solidarity loan of 10 million DM (4 million US dollars or 300 million Spanish pesetas) that it received in spring 1977 from the Bank für Gemeinwirtschaft (BfG) at the request of Heinz-Oskar Vetter, DGB President, with a guarantee provided by the Spanish government that it would return UGT its assets confiscated during the Spanish Civil War.17

The firm commitment of German trade unions in Spain and Portugal to support social democratic trade unions against communist-led trade unions was without doubt an important, but not the sole reason for the failure of CCOO and CGT-IN to be accepted by the ETUC. On 4 July 1978 Camacho and the new secretary of international relations, Serafín Aliaga, sent a letter requesting adhesion to the ETUC, in which they emphasised the plurality of CCOO and its unitary strategy, which corresponded to the spirit of the ETUC. They were not alone in their request as USO – also SOC, CSUT and SU but without much chance of success – and the two Portuguese trade unions had also applied for membership. As USO had joined the WCL, it received support from its European partners from the Christian International, whereas the TUC and the FGTB expressed the view that if UGT-P was accepted, it would be impossible to reject CCOO, which counted on the support of the Italians.

In such a complex situation of southern European enlargement, the ETUC decided to work out some criteria for adhesion (democratic statutes, representativity, free, independent, inter-sectoral), which each of the total of 18 candidates, including the five Spaniards and the two Portuguese, had to fulfil. After receiving the applications, the ETUC Executive

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Committee discussed them with the aim of reaching a consensus on 12–13 June 1980. The new ETUC president, Wim Kok, concluded that whereas the small Spanish trade unions (CSUT, SOC and SU) were clearly to be rejected, the cases of USO and CCOO were to be postponed to the first half of 1981 following a report from the Secretariat and the Finance and General Purposes Committee. The decision on the Portuguese were also postponed considering that UGT-P was not very representative, whereas CGTP-IN was too influenced by the WFTU to be considered ‘democratic’ enough and took hostile positions towards European integration, bringing it closer to CGT, which was, in contrast to the others, a WFTU member.18

By April 1981, a broad consensus seemed to be emerging after an update of the positions of various trade unions, which required more time. Ultimately, however, all Kok’s conciliation efforts came to nothing, as his predecessor, Vetter, publicly declared during the summer in Lisbon and Madrid that if CCOO and CGTP-IN joined the ETUC, the DGB would quit. This clearly undermined the effectiveness and consensus-driven functioning of the ETUC.19

A provisional consensus now seems to have been reached on the historical controversy about the veto of CCOO and CGTP-IN. For most authors and former actors, if these two questions were justified to a large extent during the period of transition to democracy, the first veto of UGT, and its ally the DGB, in 1981 and the subsequent UGT veto until December 1990 were anachronistic and disproportionate. It was argued on the basis of the political prejudices of the Cold War, namely anti-communism, but in reality was guided by UGT’s instrumental use of its international affiliations to obtain clear advantages in its internal competition with CCOO for the adhesion of Spanish workers (Aroca Mohedano 2011).20 Indeed, the veto of CCOO was not something that UGT could have achieved on the basis of trade union reasons alone. It was in reality a German veto motivated by domestic and international political reasons, decided by the DGB (Vetter) and IG Metal (Hans Matthöffer) as part of the broader international policy defined from 1974 by the SPD (Willy Brandt) and the German government (Helmut Schmidt), and worked out to a large extent by the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, to defeat the instability created by the rise of Euro-communism and its possible consequences in Europe in the framework of the Cold War.

The latest scholarship about the role of these German actors in the transition to democracy in Spain and Portugal is conclusive in this direction: neither UGT nor the PSOE would have managed to become central actors of the transition without the decisive help of ‘German friends’. These agreements between the socialist trade unions with the Francoist elites were strongly mediated by German actors, in particular in the trade union field, even when their attempt to transpose German trade union relations, as suggested by Hans Matthöffer at the request of the King of Spain, were not successful because they implied, among other things, a unitary trade union (Muñoz Sánchez 2012: 139 ff).

The mutual interaction and comparison with the Portuguese case is decisive here. The same German actors were responsible for the creation of the Portuguese Socialist Party

19. IISH, ETUC, SUPPL 293, Letter from Wim Kok to Heinz-Oskar Vetter, 28-09-1981. The letter has been reproduced in extenso in Juan Moreno (2001).
20. This thesis is confirmed by Emilio Gabaglio in the preface to this book. It corresponds to a large extent to the arguments put forward in various writings by the historical representative of CCOO in the ETUC, Juan Moreno. See the most recent (Moreno 2013).
and later of UGT-Portugal. These were not historical organisations like UGT and the PSOE, and like them before 1973 did not have a central role in the effective opposition to the dictatorship within the country. However, they became the central pivot of the transition to democracy with their own political social democratic project between the heirs of the dictatorship and the historical internal opposition directed by the communist parties. In this respect, the DGB became allied with the AFL-CIO, which in 1981 was negotiating its return to the ICFTU.

But if the German role was crucial, US pressures were also at work in this veto. According to an internal CCOO memo a decisive meeting took place on 19 June 1981 in Geneva between the presidents of AFL-CIO, Lane Kirkland, and of ICFTU, Otto Kersten, who was seconded by Vetter and Murray from the TUC. At that meeting Kirkland made it a central condition to reject CCOO’s application for ETUC membership, as this could have changed the balance of forces within the ETUC in favour of communist-led trade unions. Kersten reported this to the ICFTU, but the Italian trade unions and the FGTB considered such a conditionality unacceptable as a matter of principle. In August the executive committee of AFL-CIO again insisted on this blockade and asked the DGB to quit the ETUC if CCOO was accepted by the majority of other trade unions. Vetter accepted such a request and made trips to Spain and Portugal where, apart from UGT and UGT-P, he met Mario Soares, Pinto Balsemao and Felipe González. It was in this context that he made public the opposition of the DGB to the admission of CCOO and CGT-P on the basis that it would only serve to divide the ETUC by creating a southern European faction composed of French, Italian, Spanish and Portuguese trade unions prone to cooperate with communist trade unions, putting in difficulty UGT, ELA and UGT-P. For Vetter, Euro-communism was just another tactical movement to find allies. For CCOO and its leader, Marcelino Camacho, this position was rather a political and ideological veto against the basic nature of the ETUC, which served to effectively divided and subordinate it to Cold War divisions. Camacho’s handwritten notes were clear on the ultimate reason for the veto: ‘strengthening US hegemony and pursuing its strategy of tension’ in the framework of the confrontation policy followed by the new Reagan administration. 21

The fact that in 1981 the DGB threatened to break up the ETUC if CCOO was accepted was a clear sign that it was more important for this trade union not just to comply with the AFL-CIO’s requests, but also with German foreign policy’s interest in stabilising southern Europe, as already defined by Willy Brandt and continued by Helmut Schmidt, than to lead the definition of the common European interest through the ETUC. With this veto the DGB decided not just the fate of CCOO and CGTP-IN, but also the subsequent capacity of these social democratic governments to stabilise these young democracies from conservative encroachment and the influence of competing trade unions in southern Europe. The hegemony of communist-led trade unions might create serious problems for the adaptation of the Spanish and Portuguese economies to the challenge of EEC enlargement, as both countries had applied for membership and were preparing their adhesion. In a nutshell Spain and Portugal represented a tough test for the ETUC, which opened up the question of its nature and limitations in terms of emancipating itself from the excessive influence of its largest organisations, which put the national interest and international considerations before those of the ETUC.

21. FIIM, Fondo Marcelino Camacho, SG 51/04, Nota informativa de la Secretaría de Relaciones Internacionales a los miembros del Secretariado Confederal. Handwritten notes by Camacho, unspecified date, most likely September 1981.
2. From transition to accession (1983–1991)


The long shadow of the Cold War also favoured the newly created UGT-P, which very quickly was accepted in the ICFTU (December 1979) and got the support of the DGB and UGT to obtain quick access to the ETUC on 10 February 1983. These same actors had already rejected CGTP on 29 January 1982, despite the fact that CGTP officially submitted its first application to join the ETUC on 15 January 1979, when UGT-P had just been constituted (October 1978). If the reasons put forward by the ETUC were directly related to CGTP’s political conception and practice of trade unionism, which diverged fundamentally from that of the ETUC, nothing was said about another important point: their antagonistic position vis-à-vis the European construction (Costa 2000).

CGTP’s position on this was surely the most euro-sceptical of all the Iberian trade unions. This was fully justified from the viewpoint of a trade union that regarded itself as a defender of the economic order based on nationalisation, which the Revolution had brought about. Even before the official request by Portugal to join the EEC on 28 March 1977, the Mario Soares government contacted the Intersindical to reassure them that the nationalised banking and insurance services would remain part of the public sector and that Portugal would use the veto in the Council of Ministers to block any regulation going against the national economic system. This was important as CGTP, contrary to the PCP, did not oppose Portugal joining the EEC, but took a critical view because of the possible structural consequences of this economic shock for a weak and backward economy dependent on IMF loans (Carvalho da Silva 2007: 339-340).

CCOO’s position towards Europe was straightforward, being favourable to the adhesion requested by Spain on 27 July 1977. This was very much in line with the favourable turn that the Spanish Communist Party has taken towards the EEC from its 1972 Congress, when Santiago Carrillo abandoned the Soviet position which considered the EEC as just as a monopolist and imperialist project with anti-Soviet purposes. Thus, from its first Congress in June 1978, CCOO supported the integration of Spain in the EEC and reiterated it three years later at its second Congress in the same resolution which asserted their request to join the ETUC. For Marcelino Camacho the reasoning was clear, notwithstanding misgivings about possible initial difficulties:

departing from the principle that trade union struggles are structured by the economy from the instruments of production and technology we conclude that the creation of multinational corporations and political-economic spaces call for a united Europe and a united, plural and autonomous ETUC, with wider relationships.\(^{22}\)

For UGT things were even easier because as a result of their double militancy with the PSOE, they had already been integrated in the various movements favourable to European integration, such as the Socialist Movement for the United States of Europe and the Spanish Federal Council, which constituted the Spanish section of the European Movement.

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\(^{22}\) FIM, Sg 51/04, Meeting of the CCOO with the Executive Committee of the ETUC, Brussels, 17-12-1981.
Nevertheless UGT was already conscious that if the European project benefited multinational firms and economic groups the creation of another Europe required that they be confronted and the rights of workers defended more effectively. As a full member of the ETUC, UGT organised the first Conference for the Study and Analysis of the EEC in 1979, soon after the start of the negotiations for enlargement early that year. The activation of the trade union in this question was crucial even when they were involved only in relation to partial and specific questions already discussed in Brussels. When the PSOE formed a government at the end of 1982, trade unions in general, and UGT in particular, were invited to a systematic and institutionalised consultation in the overall negotiation process (Aroca Mohedano 2011: 151–158).

The reluctance to accept southern enlargement did not come from the trade unions in Spain and Portugal, but from the Social and Economic Committee of the EEC, particularly the French members, who from 1978 had opposed enlargement on the basis of unfair competition for new member states with regard to agriculture, textiles and steel. By contrast, the ETUC had made an official declaration on 27 January 1976 in support of the accession of Spain and Portugal to the EEC because they saw it as a condition of democratisation, bringing about a democratic rupture with the previous regime. Therefore the ETUC closely followed all aspects of the accession of both countries and on 17–18 March 1980 it held its first conference on enlargement, which included UGT, CGT-Greece and UGT-P.

UGT demands concerning EEC accession were representative of the other trade unions from accession countries. At first the central issue was the free circulation of workers, for which there was to be an initial delay of seven years during the transition period of accession, but which was reduced ultimately to just five. A second demand was the use of the European Social Fund to benefit backward regions with sectors in decline, such as several industrial sectors for which all unions requested an impact analysis before they were exposed to the cold winds of competition with most developed industrial powers. On this particular question UGT articulated the development avant-la-lettre (1980) within the ETUC of Interregional Development Committees, with France in 1983 (Catalunya and southern France with Force Ouvrière and CFDT) and with Portugal in 1987 (Galicia and northern Portugal with UGT-P).

Summing up, Iberian trade unions were very positive about the EEC and had a clear understanding of why there was no alternative as a general political objective, even though they were seriously concerned about the likely direct impact on their economies. But this was also the main reason why they wished to become extremely active in the construction of the ETUC, although they were still only on the margins. Indeed the lack of acceptance of two important confederations such as CCOO and CGTP also limited the role that UGT, ELA and UGT-P could have played within the ETUC to promote their positions.

2.2. The accession of CCOO (1990) to the ETUC and the rejection of CGTP (1995): conditions and controversies

On 14 December 1990, the ETUC met in Rome in the context of a European summit, at which UGT and ELA recommended the accession of CCOO. This was approved with the sole abstentions of Force Ouvrière and CFTC. As soon as they were accepted CCOO issued a communiqué prepared by Juan Moreno, the new person responsible for international affairs, in which the new member put forward its support for the Stielenburg Report, but also
requested that this enlargement of the ETUC open the doors to CGTP and also to central and eastern European trade unions. If CCOO enjoyed strong links with CGTP for obvious reasons, it also enjoyed direct relations with trade unions that were members of the WFTU, in particular with the French CGT. Such a privileged relationship did not encourage CCOO to accept the demand for permanent structural work with both communist-led trade unions at the European level (Moreno 1999: 255–270).

In fact, the acceptance of the CCOO request ultimately came about because of the change in the position of the DGB and UGT in relation to the stabilisation of Spanish democracy. No doubt Ernest Breit did not share Vetter’s view and informally withdrew his veto, agreeing to meet the newly-appointed secretary general of CCOO, Antonio Gutierrez, in June 1988 during his European tour of trade unions. Within UGT the new person responsible for international relations, Manuel Bonmati, also took a more receptive position because the tense relations between the two trade unions relaxed after UGT had stabilised its domestic position at a similar level to that of CCOO. More importantly, UGT needed – and obtained – CCOO’s support in its increasing confrontation with the PSOE government, due to the neoliberal thrust that prime minister Felipe González had given to its economic policy. This confrontation reached a point of no return with the general strike of 14 December 1988 that UGT and CCOO called against the government’s labour market reforms aimed at tackling youth unemployment. This marked not only the end of the PSOE’s social democratic strategy based on building up the welfare state on a neo-corporatist basis in cooperation with UGT, but also – more structurally – the end of the long relationship between UGT and the PSOE. UGT started its emancipation from its partner political party, which was subordinated to the government, before taking its own road as a pillar of trade union opposition to government policies (Vega García 2011: 217, chap. 9).

For this reason it became strategically fundamental to have the support of Gutierrez who had already set the Spanish Communist Party at a distance in his quest for autonomy. This quest for autonomy is illustrated by CCOO’s decision at its 1991 Congress to remove the clause forbidding international affiliation, and the start, two years later, of exploratory efforts to join ICFTU. This indeed transpired in Brussels on 25–26 June 1996 at the XVIth ICFTU congress, also with the full support of UGT. Such a decision seemed obvious after the fall of the Berlin Wall and ETUC membership, as most of its allies in the ETUC were already members of ICFTU.

This was not the case with regard to CGTP, however, which maintained its neutrality and had not joined any international federation, even when it maintained its quest for ETUC membership at its Vth Congress in 1986. From that moment onwards CGTP received indirect support from President Delors, who several times between 1986 and 1990 even met its international relations official, José Luís Judas, on a private basis. Delors asserted that the ETUC had to achieve broader representation and overcome political barriers and for this reason he rejected monopoly of representation and put pressure on the Portuguese Prime Minister, Aníbal Cavaco Silva, to make it possible for CGTP to appoint two of the four representatives to whom the trade unions were entitled in the European Economic and Social Committee. CGTP quickly appointed Vasco Cal, who represented it for nearly 14 years in this EC institution (Carvalho da Silva 2007: 352). Such participation in Community institutions was included in the application submitted to Gabaglio 23.

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by Manuel Carvalho da Silva on 28 November 1992, when CGTP made its second official application. Between 1978 and 1995, UGT-P Secretary General José Manuel Torres Couto had succeeded in blocking the adhesion of its competitor to the ETUC. He even used the exclusion of Judas from his position in CGTP due to pressure from PCP hardliners to make his case, managing to delay the final talks until 28 October 1994, when Gabaglio ultimately pushed Torres Couto to publically sponsor the adhesion of CGTP to the ETUC, which took place in January 1995 (Costa 2000: 21–24). The only piece of the Iberian jigsaw still missing was USO, which joined in 2005, as a result of the international agreement to merge ITUC with WCL. In this way, the European affiliates of WCL joined the ETUC, overcoming the enduring opposition of UGT.

2.3. From the SEA to the Treaty of Maastricht: the input of Iberian trade unions

This convergence of UGT with CCOO was also translated into a common thrust towards European integration in various fields in which the socialist trade union had been active until the adhesion of CCOO. Thus in 1991 a new interregional trade union committee was developed in the south of Spain and Portugal (Alentejo and Extremadura) and a year later in the north with France (the Basque Country, Navarra and Aragon with Aquitaine), both of which also included CCOO.

The fundamental issue for both trade unions after the adhesion of CCOO was the Treaty of Maastricht, which UGT supported. UGT’s analysis was extremely well informed and considered that Maastricht was not just about monetary union, but also other political and socio-economic objectives. For UGT, responsibility for the crisis of trust and obstruction of treaty ratification was the result of the European decision-making process and was the ‘exclusive responsibility of national governments’, which had not launched a broad debate or informed their citizens about the real stakes behind the European construction. Manuel Bonmati, new head of UGT’s international department, took the view that a few people were holding the European project hostage behind technical explanations of what Maastricht was about. In this way they generated more rejection than support in relationship of this decisive step toward European unity, as demonstrated by the Danish Referendum. Such rejection came from an exclusive focus on convergence programmes towards the nominal criteria established by the Monetary Union, which in the Spanish case went further than what was requested by European authorities. Workers were told that they were imposed from Brussels, when for the ETUC it was clear that this was a merely instrumental use of Europe in order to apply neoliberal policies which made workers pay for the economic adjustment, as was happening in Spain.

This paralysis in the ratification process prevented the application of the social action programmes devised at Maastricht, even when there were still elements in the social protocol that were protected by the unanimity vote that the Spanish government had also defended. The solution put forward by UGT was simply to make a more flexible interpretation of the Maastricht criteria, in order to achieve real economic convergence upon monetary convergence, and to make it public that national economic policies were not unavoidable technical decisions but political choices made exclusively by national governments. Aside from Economic and Monetary Union, UGT insisted on completing and developing more social (regional cohesion and coherent social policies) and political integration (more democratic control corresponding to an external and security policy with
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higher solidarity taxation) with the aim of eliminating inequalities and creating employment.  

The UGT position was extremely clear: the neoliberal application of the Maastricht Treaty was a contingent decision of Spain’s Social Democratic government, with which UGT was now in open war after a second general strike had been convoked by both trade unions in May 1992 on the government’s decision to reduce unemployment benefits despite Spain’s very high unemployment rate. This first stage of what became a sustained development of trade union unity was also reflected in the critical support that CCOO gave to the Maastricht Treaty, leading to a major break with its political ally, the United Left coalition created by, among others, the PCE and former PSOE leaders. Already at the first ETUC congress in which CCOO participated (February 1991 in Luxembourg) Antonio Gutierrez, still a member of the executive committee of the PCE, and Salce Elvira, later representative of the critical sector of the Communist Party within CCOO, publicly defended without reservation the view that European political unity was an integral part of a left-wing project to prevent the EEC from being turned into a Europe of businessmen. This clear bet on political union was paralysed by the resistance of nation-states to transfers of sovereignty to new institutions endowed with democratic representation and accountability.

When the Maastricht Treaty was discussed and negotiated at the end of 1991 CCOO followed the ETUC position of a critical approval without much dissent. The ratification of the Treaty by the Spanish Parliament, however, created a durable internal break within, and between, United Left and CCOO, with the resignation as IU whip of the man who represented the majority of CCOO in IU, CCOO leader Nicolas Sartorius. Together with Gutierrez, a few months earlier Sartorius had unsuccessfully advocated the dissolution of the Spanish Communist Party into the new United Left. Now, both leaders defended ratification of the Treaty in line with the Catalan correspondent of United Left (Iniciativa per Catalunya) which dissolved the Communist Party of Catalunya (PSUC) to become an eco-socialist party. On the contrary, the PCE majority that dominated IU took a euro-sceptic and sovereignist U-turn, pushing for its rejection and requesting a referendum. This debate was also taken up in CCOO but it was clearly defeated in the Confederal Council vote which approved the Treaty with a critical yes, related not so much to political-union aspects of the Treaty, which they favoured, but to the high risks of monetary convergence without budgetary resources for policies for further social and economic cohesion (Moreno 1999: 299–308). No doubt, this battle for the Maastricht Treaty marked a historical break for CCOO from its major political ally and pushed it in search for more autonomy from political parties and closer cooperation with UGT than in the past, in particular at the European level within the ETUC. This political break deepened during the second part of the 1990s, causing Juan Moreno to conclude that at the European level a convergence with the communist and post-communist left was impossible, leaving the European socialist parties as preferential strategic counterparts for trade unions.

The break by UGT and CCOO from their historical political allies contrasted with Portugal where UGT-P and CGTP maintained strong links with political parties on European issues. Thus, the secretary General of UGT-P, Torres Couto, became an MEP for the


25. See Moreno (1997). I would like to thank the director of the Historical Archives of CCOO, José Babiano, for providing me with a copy of this document.
Socialist Party in 1989. His number two and substitute from 1995 at the head of UGTP, Joao Proença, was not only a PS MP from 1987 but also a prominent member of its national directorate, accumulating European experience as a member of the EESC for a number of years. It is no surprise that on Maastricht the UGTP line was very similar to that agreed at the ETUC, contrary to CGTP, which opposed the Treaty and recommended its non-ratification by Portugal unless a referendum was organised. In this case, the opposition was not just linked to the Treaty itself but also to the attempt by the Cavaco government to use ratification as an excuse for a revision of the Portuguese Constitution. Nevertheless, this was not presented as an anti-European position, because CGTP reasserted its belief in a European institutional framework to regulate single-market dynamics, which deepened the social and economic imbalances in Europe. It was in this sense unambiguous when they declared that ‘the EEC should become the accelerating thrust of economic development’. This implied not just the abandonment of the ‘monetarist’ policies at the basis of austerity and mass unemployment; more decisively, it called for direct and unambiguous support for the Delors II package proposals for economic acceleration through an increase in the European funds for infrastructure, education, training and the environment, coupled with direct implementation of the Social Chapter. For the largest Portuguese trade union there was a need for cooperation and unity with the European trade union movement to carry on the struggle at the European level in order to protect not just Europe but also Portuguese national interests, which in their opinion were not well protected by the Maastricht Treaty.

Indeed, this was not an anti-EEC manifesto, even if CGTP concurred with the PCP in asking for a referendum. The argumentation and general reasons for rejection were obviously determined from the domestic debate and the need to find a balance between the different sensibilities within CGTP (communists, socialists and Christians). The specificity of this position was maintained even after the accession of CGTP to the ETUC. During the participation of the Portuguese trade union in its first ETUC congress in May 1995, the CGTP delegation headed by Carvalho and Lança also argued against the central document of the congress because it defended a federalist logic and the creation, as a consequence, of a multi-speed Europe. In coherence with their position, not all countries would be disposed to accept the consequences of asking that all decisions be taken by qualified majority and not by unanimity (Costa 2000: 25).

3. From the periphery of accession to the heart of European commitments (1995–2013)

The May 1995 resolution of the ETUC’s Brussels Congress was ultimately defeated in its federalist version, even when one of the closer allies of CGTP within the ETUC, CCOO, had voted on favour of the federalist logic as a way out of the European imbalance created by the implementation of Maastricht. Thus, the resolution ‘for a strong, democratic and open Europe based on solidarity’ was actually what the ETUC secretariat, led by Gabaglio, put forward in order to balance the political agreement signed in Maastricht with the creation of a Social Union. The Spaniards were very much behind Gabaglio, and they were reinforced when Antonio Gutierrez was appointed vice-president of the ETUC, after having agreed to a

rotation system with the new secretary general of UGT, Cándido Méndez, who had replaced Nicolás Redondo one year earlier. Both trade unions used that privileged position in order to play a predominant role in the functioning of the ETUC, which they have maintained until the present.\(^{27}\)

In the course of ten years, Iberian trade unions progressively came from the periphery to the centre of the organisation, symbolised by the nomination of Cándido Méndez as President of the ETUC in 2003. This was also confirmed by the fact that Helena André of UGTP was promoted to the position of deputy secretary general, the first time a woman had assumed such an important position. She ensured the continuity of the ETUC with the previous Gabaglio secretariat until 2009, when she was appointed Minister of Labour in the PS government formed by José Socrates. If this was not sufficient proof, when Méndez’s four-year term came to an end, the Seville Congress of 2007 created the post of first vice-president, which gave him the possibility to substitute the President when necessary, but more importantly to participate with full rights in the Management Committee until 2011.

That same year, during the Athens Congress, it was the turn of the Secretary General of CCOO, Ignacio Fernández Toxo, to be nominated as President of the ETUC, for a period of four years, maintaining a very long and stable presence of Spanish trade union leaders at the forefront of the ETUC. Such stability was helped by the fact that for nearly ten years CCOO maintained Javier Doz as person responsible for international affairs, after the exit of Juan Moreno from this position. Doz was a previous leader of CCOO as former secretary general in the education section, whereas Toxo had been secretary general of the metal section, thus giving them European experience.

It is no exaggeration to say that the majority of Spanish and Portuguese trade unions converged, in line with Gabaglio, on the kind of ETUC they wanted. They supported him very closely in his attempts from the Brussels congress onwards to build a supranational European trade union, which would become a true supranational European actor with competencies of representation and negotiation at the European level. In this, they opposed trade unions who held that the ETUC should remain a coordinator of European trade unions, playing the role of an efficient lobbyist of the European institutions. When Manuel Bonmati reviewed Gabaglio’s term of office, the only major failure he found was that the ETUC had not managed to define a common European trade union identity. Indeed such a challenge became even more complex for the new ETUC secretary general, John Monks due to the central and eastern European enlargement, even though the ETUC had opened its doors to central and eastern European trade unions as early as 1999. Moreover, managing to define a common trade union identity was already very difficult within Spain and Portugal, where the wounds of dictatorship and the Cold War were still felt, despite the increasing convergence and common actions of trade unions, which had durably weakened, but not completely severed, their links with rival political parties.

Reading the concluding speech of ETUC President Cándido Méndez at the ETUC Congress in Seville, one cannot avoid being surprised by his pro-integration faith in favour of supporting every measure for more Europe. Thus, the position of Spanish trade unionists was very much in line with the public support for the Constitutional Treaty approved by the ETUC. Such pro-European political integration from the standpoint of UGT and CCOO was

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\(^{27}\) Manuel Bonmati, ‘Presentación’, in UGT, Resoluciones aprobadas en el 10\(^{o}\) congreso de la CES (Praga del 26 al 29 de Mayo de 2003).
confirmed in their common position in favour of ratification of the Constitutional Treaty in Spain, which was the object of a positive referendum in February 2005. After the defeat of the Constitution in France and the Netherlands, the political line defended by Méndez was the preservation of the Charter of Fundamental Rights in order to make it binding on all parties, as actually happened in the Lisbon Treaty.

If there is an important issue that Spanish and Portuguese trade unions brought to the agenda of the ETUC it was its international development in various parts of the world. While for Spanish trade unions the natural projection of the ETUC was in Latin America and the Mediterranean, the Portuguese favoured support for trade unionists in Africa. In the speech accompanying the Seville Manifesto, ‘For an offensive on wages – towards equality’, Cándido Méndez also underlined a new task, which in the past was rather assigned to ICFTU, namely, the development of autonomous and direct relations between the ETUC and other parts of the world.28 This also led to firm support from most Iberian trade unions, except CGTP, to the merger of ICFTU with the WCL in November 2006 to create the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC). In this new step towards adapting the ETUC to the challenges of globalisation with an active policy on international relations, senior Iberian trade unionists also played a key role in ETUC contacts with the World Social Forum. This development of international relations was also logical because the EU was progressively developing not just a trade and cooperation agenda, but also a foreign and security policy agenda that Spanish trade unions were very keen to support as a form of institutional development. This was less straightforward from the standpoint of the Portuguese trade unions, and in particular CGTP, which remained one of the few trade unions in the ETUC that did not adhere to the new ITUC, preferring to maintain its cooperation with WFTU and preserve its non-affiliation to any worldwide trade union organisation.29

By 2013, the position of the Iberian trade unions towards the ETUC and European integration since the start of the economic crisis could be summed up by some of the public positions expressed by Ignacio Fernández Toxo as President of the ETUC and his special adviser for ETUC questions, Javier Doz. Considering the rejection of the budgetary Treaty by the ETUC, the bottom-line for the Spanish trade union movement was a refoundation of the EU, which is in crisis as a result of a lack of institutionalisation. Such institutionalisation is not just reflected in the social and democratic deficits, but also directly concerns the absence of supranational instruments of economic intervention, such a common tax policy at EU level. One example would be a financial transactions tax to feed a higher European budget, which would be implemented together with a new mandate for the European Central Bank. This deficit has a major cause, namely the hegemony of neoliberal precepts in EU policies, one terrible consequence of which is the continuing upsurge of nationalism. For the President of the ETUC the aborted Constitutional Treaty, supported by the ETUC, would have made possible a different treatment of the crisis. The central problem is the lack of institutionalisation of the European project and the EU political institutions play a deficient role in solving these problems.

It is this lack of effectiveness on the part of European institutions that has enabled German hegemony to prosper, with the collaboration of France, putting national interests and neoliberal ideas before the Union. This Franco-German axis has resulted in the approval

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29. On this debate see Lança (2007).
of economic governance tools whose common philosophy involves thwarting labour rights and social policies by weakening trade union power, with the explicit aim of competing in global markets with Asia, setting the EU on a downward spiral. In fact, this path will only damage the EU’s legitimacy because European citizens will see it as responsible for the destruction of the European Welfare State. The only alternative that the new President of the ETUC found was to draft a new Constitutional Charter on the basis of a new European Social Contract (Toxo 2012). This demand was publicly requested on 7 December 2011 by various trade union leaders in the ETUC (CCOO, UGT, DGB, CGIL, CGT, CFDT, FGTB, and CSC), but not by the ETUC as such, showing the lack of unanimity within the ETUC on this position for a new Treaty in a more federalist direction, as pointed out by the leader of CCOO. This position was discussed in February 2012 at the ETUC winter school in Copenhagen and approved by the ETUC executive in its communication on a ‘Social Compact for Europe’ in June 2012. This rather added a social protocol to the existing Economic and Monetary Union, even though for Toxo, the real solution would be a democratic Constitution for refounding Europe.

However, this depends, according to Javier Doz, on the balance of forces within the European Union, which implies the creation of a true left-wing alternative at the European level that cannot be guaranteed by social democrats alone. This is corroborated not just by the ‘sad role played by social democrats in Spain, Portugal and Greece before being expelled from power’, but also by the so-called ‘Third Way’, which was dominated ideologically by neoliberalism. Given that such an eventuality is not clear or imminent, European trade unions must count on their own strength and their capacity to mobilise other social forces, while striving to promote a European political alternative involving non-neoliberal political forces (Doz 2012). This requires a more decisive thrust in the direction of a European trade union movement, including the possibility of European actions such as the historic strike in southern European countries that are members of the ETUC on 14 November 2012. After tramping the European road through various stops for the past thirty years, the leaders of the Iberian trade unions managed to reach the driving seat of the ETUC. Looking back at their personal trajectories, including the cold prison cells that most of its leaders experienced in their fight for democracy and social rights, helps us to understand why they have been among the staunchest advocates of a federalist project pushed forward by a European social movement led by an ETUC in which they have vested the highest expectations.

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