



inform **contact**

NEWS FROM THE GENERAL CONFEDERATION OF TRADE UNIONS

No.83

January-March 2014

GCTU ALARMED AT UKRAINIAN DEVELOPMENTS

“The General Confederation of Trade Unions and its affiliates, says a GCTU statement of 5 March 2014, express their utmost concern over the critical developments in Ukraine that threaten the country’s people and workers with unpredictable calamities.

“The current political situation in Ukraine has had a most negative impact on its economy. The country is on the brink of a financial and economic collapse that will entail further deterioration of the social situation of workers. If continued, the crisis may have disastrous effects.

“Particularly alarming are the actions by extremist forces, destabilising the situation, imposing confrontation among citizens of different regions of the country, and whipping up hatred and xenophobia in Ukrainian society.

“For nearly three months now, the work of the GCTU-affiliated Federation of Trade Unions of Ukraine has been severely frustrated, especially as it has lost its headquarters in Kiev.

“The GCTU and its affiliates voice their strong support for workers and trade unions in Ukraine, and urge all political forces to take the necessary steps to restore the country to democratic order and ensure normal working conditions and decent living standards for the people. The GCTU is confident that all crucial social issues must be addressed with due regard for the views, and involvement, of trade unions as organisations representing broad masses of workers.”

GCTU COMMISSION DEBATES UNION DEVELOPMENT

The GCTU Commission for Organising and International Cooperation met in Moscow 25 March 2014.

Addressing the meeting, GCTU Deputy General Secretary Albert Potapov presented the assessment of the situation in the region's trade union movement by the GCTU Executive Committee, spoke about ways to improve and develop it, and outlined the guidelines for the activities of the Commission in the forthcoming period.

Participants informed the Commission about trade union developments in their respective countries and industries, their work experiences, and the most pressing issues now facing them. Practically all speakers stressed the urgent need to reform and modernize the trade union movement and encouraged the Commission to get more actively involved in this process.

Summing up the discussion, Albert Potapov mentioned several topical issues that the Commission could deal with. They include the situation of migrant workers, youth employment, incentives for organising, financial policy of trade unions, upgrading and optimisation of the trade union structure, social partnership, personnel policies, training union staff, relationships with multinational companies, etc.

President of the International Association of Fishing Industry Workers' Union Vladimir Kruglov was elected Chair of the Commission

AZERBAIJAN: AHIK SCRUTINISES SOCIO-ECONOMIC SITUATION

The Executive Committee of the Azerbaijan Trade Unions Confederation (AHIK) gathered in Baku 24 February 2014 for a regular meeting to discuss the socio-economic situation in the country in the light of the outcome of the previous year. The meeting also considered the plan of work to be carried out by the Confederation in the first half of the current year.

Following the discussion, the Executive Committee recommended that the affiliated organisations intensify their work to implement the sectoral collective agreements and wage accords. Participants also agreed they would continue their efforts to get wages and salaries increased, bring the minimum wage up to the subsistence minimum level, and do their utmost to get the informal sector of the economy formalised.

The training and retraining of union staff should become a priority task for the unions.

ARMENIA: UNIONS NEED SOLIDER LEGAL BASE

The Standing Committee on Human Rights and Public Affairs of the Armenian Parliament conducted a workshop on "Guarantees of Trade Union Activity" 28 February 2014. The organisers' aim was to discuss

the activities of the country's trade unions and the prospects for their development.

Attending the meeting were President of the Confederation of Trade Unions of Armenia Eduard Tumasian, other leaders of the trade union centre and its affiliates, leaders of the Republican Union of Employers, and representatives of human rights organisations.

On the eve of the event, the Commission held consultations with the stakeholders, who expressed concern about a number of legislative issues. They were primarily critical of some provisions of the Law on Trade Unions and the Labour Code, which they believe to impede effective trade union performance.

In the course of the meeting, trade unionists and human rights activists put forward their views and proposals concerning the collision between the Law on Trade Unions and the Labour Code. They pointed to the lack of legal mechanisms for trade unions to influence the employer and settle labour disputes, the problems of securing trade union rights and guarantees, the difficulties of independent financial administration of trade unions, and other problems.

BELARUS: UNION LEADER MEETS WITH PREMIER

President of the Federation of Trade Unions of Belarus (FPB) Leonid

Kozik and the country's Prime Minister Mikhail Myasnikov held a regular working meeting to discuss the economic situation, wages and occupational injuries.

The Prime Minister said the state of the national economy was a far cry from perfect, but recently there appeared some positive dynamics. He regards this as a sign of economic revival and awakening of enterprises from "winter dormancy".

The union leader expressed concern over the fact that the employers at newly opened private companies often hinder the creation and activities of trade union organisations. Both sides believe the problem can be solved by combined efforts of the Government and the national trade union centre. "To obstruct the establishment of trade union organisations in enterprises of any form of ownership is impermissible, said the FPB President. If employees choose to organise, nobody has the right to interfere with their intention."

The FPB President said he was against the proposal made by some employers to move the payday to the end of the month. FPB rejects flatly the possibility of such an innovation, believing that it could worsen workers' conditions.

Mikhail Myasnikov assured the union leader that his Government would not do the employers' bidding and change the established paydays. He also said he was con-

cerned with the outstanding wage arrears of some employers, including those in the private sector, to their employees. "Our local committees, said the FPB President, are going to act more actively in this respect, and interact with their social partners, while the Government has pledged to establish stricter control and punish executives who do not pay their employees in time".

GEORGIAN MINERS VICTORIOUS

On the 14th of February 2014, over 3,000 Georgian employees of the gold and copper mining companies RMG Copper and RMG Gold LLC called a strike. They demanded reinstatement of more than 180 laid-off workers, a significant increase in the insurance package, higher wages, and better working conditions.

Despite the opposition of the companies' management, the strike, supported by the international trade union movement, ended in victory for the miners on the 23rd of March. The dismissed workers were reinstated, the social security scheme improved, and the wages increased by 15-20 per cent.

KAZAKHSTAN PRESIDENT MEETS WITH HEAD OF FPRK

President Nursultan Nazarbayev met with the head of the Federation of Trade Unions of the Republic

of Kazakhstan (FPRK) Abulgazi Kusainov 19 February 2014 in Astana.

The union leader informed the country's President about the current trade union activities, the ongoing modernisation of FPRK, and the prospects for its development. He spoke, in particular, about the public discussion of the draft law "On Trade Unions" whose aim it is to enhance the role of the trade union movement in social partnership for the protection of workers' labour rights and interests, and prevent social and labour conflicts.

"The main task of trade unions is the timely solution of issues that may arise between the employer and the employee, said President Nazarbayev. To fulfil this task, trade union organisations in enterprises should closely cooperate with all parties concerned. It is important to develop new forms of social dialogue aimed at efficient protection of workers' rights."

Today the Federation of Trade Unions of the Republic of Kazakhstan is the largest public organisation in the country, with 2,164,240 members in 14 territorial associations, 24 national industry-based associations, and 18,728 primary trade union organisations.

"The Head of State asked us about FPRK activities to build and strengthen social partnerships, and

about specific steps our Federation has taken to improve the protection of labour rights and interests of rank-and-file members,” said Abelgazi Kusainov commenting on the outcome of the meeting with the President.

KAZAKHSTAN: TRADE UNIONS MERGING

The official ceremony of signing a merger agreement between the Union of Workers in the Mining and Metallurgical Industry of Kazakhstan and the Autonomous Coalminers’ Union “Korgau” took place 3 March 2014 in the FPRK headquarters.

It was for the first time in the history of the country’s trade union movement that a major union, with a 13-year old record of successful independent activity, declared it was willing to become part of a national sectoral trade union organisation.

The Coalminers’ Union “Korgau” was built in 2001 and currently organises 17,830 workers of the coal department of JSC “ArcelorMittal-Temirtau” (eight mines, five plants, and 7 auxiliary production units).

“For 13 years we have existed as an independent organisation, but the present-day situation in the world and the industry calls for unification, if we are to protect the interests of our workers effectively. Joining efforts with the national

Union of Workers in the Mining and Metallurgical Industry gives us the opportunity to engage in dialogue with the employers, and solve the employees’ problems on a different, higher level,” the “Korgau” leader Marat Mirgayazov commented on the event.

“The signing of the agreement is for us no less significant event either. The increased membership adds weight to our sectoral union representing workers within the tripartite social dialogue,” said, in his turn, the Chairman of the Trade Union of Workers in the Mining and Metallurgical Industry Asylbek Nuralin.

KYRGYZSTAN: UNIONS AGAINST CHILD LABOUR

“The fact of exploiting child labour in Kyrgyzstan has long been established, but the kids can’t be held responsible for their parents’ problems,” said President of the Kyrgyzstan Federation of Trade Unions (KFTU) Asylbek Toktogulov. “Teenagers have the right to education and leisure, however some families live below the poverty line, and children help them survive. The problem should be dealt with not only by the unions, but also by the Government.”

Last year 3,940 Kyrgyzstan children aged 6 to 18 years were banned from work on tobacco plantations. The limitation affected 968 families. These data were cited at the

meeting of the National Advisory Committee on the Elimination of Child Labour in the Tobacco Industry.

Today, the country is in the fourth phase of implementing a project aimed at eradicating child labour in tobacco production, and it will continue till 2015. As part of this project, training seminars were held for regional heads, financial assistance was rendered to schools, summer camp holidays were organised for children, and professional clubs were opened for teenagers. All this was done to explain that tobacco growing is harmful to the child's health.

The Labour Code of the Kyrgyz Republic says that citizens under 18 are prohibited from working in the production of alcohol and tobacco. Besides, children miss their school classes and have no time for leisure.

MOLDOVA: UNIONS WORRIED ABOUT GROWING WAGE ARREARS

The National Trade Union Confederation of Moldova (CNSM) is worried about the growing wage arrears in several sectors of the national economy. In 2013, the total sum of the debt exceeded 108 million lei (over US\$ 8 million).

According to the National Bureau of Statistics, the highest wage arrears were recorded in agriculture

and forestry, the industrial sector, construction, services, health and vocational training. Whereas the lowest rates were in banking, public administration, and hotel and restaurant businesses.

"This is an alarming situation, and it will be considered at the next meeting of the National Commission with the participation of representatives of companies and institutions that have pay arrears to their employees," said a CNSM Vice President Petru Chiriac.

RUSSIA: FNPR BOARD MEETS IN MOSCOW

A meeting of the Executive Committee of the Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Russia (FNPR) was held at the Palace of Labour in Moscow 19 February 2014. Participants discussed several topical issues relating to the fulfilment of the General Agreement between Trade Unions, Employers and the Government for 2011-13, and a FNPR action plan on realisation of the General Agreement for 2014-16. Besides, the Executive Committee specified the dates of activities to be carried out by the affiliates as follow-up to the decisions of the FNPR 8th (Extraordinary) Congress.

The Committee decided that trade unions would mark this year's May Day by organising marches and rallies. To strengthen and develop the trade union youth policy, it was

decided to hold a National Trade Union Youth Forum “Strategy-2014” and the 6th All-Russia Competition of Trade Union Propaganda Teams “Unions for Decent Work!”.

The Executive Committee decided to convene the FNPR General Council in Moscow on the 9th of April 2014.

RUSSIA: PRESIDENT MEETS WITH FNPR LEADER

A regular working meeting between Russian President Vladimir Putin and the leader of the Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Russia (FNPR) Mikhail Shmakov took place in Sochi 14 March 2014.

The head of FNPR yet again raised the issue of returning the country to a progressive system of taxation on physical persons, with the exemption from the tax of people who receive wages below the subsistence minimum level.

Simultaneously, he suggested that a number of fundamental economic decisions be taken on the minimum work remuneration, with a view to raising the minimum wages to the subsistence minimum level within the next three years, i.e. before 2016. The unions also believe there is a need to upgrade the methods for calculating the minimum wage.

The current minimum wage in Russia is 5,554 rubles per month,

while the average wage is 30 thousand rubles, and the rational consumer basket amounts to 16-18 thousand rubles.

Mikhail Shmakov told President of the negotiations on the development of sectoral collective agreements being conducted in the framework of social partnership.

“I do not know what should be the final outcome of the negotiation process”, said President Putin in conclusion, “for it is always the result of a compromise between the social partners, but what I know for certain is that all of them must be involved in this work.”

TAJIKISTAN: COUNCIL DISCUSSES FITUT ACTIVITIES

An enlarged session of the General Council of the Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Tajikistan (FITUT) was held in Dushanbe 8 February 2014. Representatives of the Government, political parties and movements, and the ILO National Coordinator in Tajikistan were invited to attend.

A report on the performance of the trade union centre in 2013 and its tasks for 2014 was presented by FITUT President Murodali Salikhov. He said several Government programmes had been successfully launched in the country to raise the welfare of the population, including the Poverty Reduction Strategy

for 2013-15, and the Strategy of Improving the Living Standards for 2013-15. As part of these programs, the budget sector employees had got pay increases, while the pension amount had risen from 15 per cent to 35 per cent of the salary.

Over the past period, the industry-based trade unions had paid serious attention to the problems of collective bargaining in enterprises and institutions. As a result, 24,769 collective agreements and wage accords had been signed by 1 September 2013.

The performance of labour inspections had improved in 2013. They inspected the work conditions in 319 enterprises and organisations, and revealed quite a few law violations that had caused occupational accidents. Following the intervention by trade unions, 1,635 cases of violations of safety and health rules and regulations had been removed in due time.

UKRAINE: FPU IDENTIFIES CHALLENGES

The Council of the Federation of Trade Unions of Ukraine (FPU) held a meeting 27 February 2014 to discuss the current situation in the country and the priorities for trade union action. As the day before Yuri Kulyk was at his request dismissed as President of the Federation, the Council elected Grygory Osovy First Vice

President of FPU and simultaneously bestowed on him the duties of acting President.

The Council instructed the FPU Presidium to develop a strategy for activities in the present-day situation, and decided to apply to the ITUC, the PERC, and other international organisations for technical and other sorts of assistance in the efforts to upgrade Ukrainian trade unions and enhance their protection potential.

The Presidium is also expected to promptly build working relationships with the newly formed Government, and help achieve stability in enterprises and the social and labour sphere, based on the provisions of the General Agreement. Similar links should also be established with the Euromaidan Coordinating Council to maintain cooperation in the field of public control and civil society development.

The Council supported the initiative by trade union organisations to render financial assistance to the families of the dead and injured Maidan participants, and provide them with free medical treatment and rehabilitation facilities. The FPU leadership was requested to initiate, in March, consultations and negotiations with the Government and employers to ensure enterprise revival, and solve the issue of youth unemployment and other painful problems in the social and labour spheres.

Participants agreed that, within the framework of drafting a new Constitution for Ukraine, FPU would make a proposal that trade unions and other public organisations be given the right of legislative initiative and control over the actions of the authorities.

High on the meeting agenda was the problem of restoring FPU to full-fledged activity, which was seriously damaged by the great fire in the House of Unions. The fire destroyed furniture and equipment, leaving a thousand people without jobs, and dozens of trade union organisations without property and documentation.

In today's challenging environment, the FPU Council called on union organisations at all levels to take the implementation of collective agreements under stricter control, and prevent further downsizing, transfer to reduced work schedules, wage delays, or attempts to save on occupational safety and health.

The Council voiced support for Ukraine's territorial integrity and condemned all kinds of separatist activities. The final resolution of the meeting specifies objectives and actions to be taken by FPU and its affiliates in the immediate period.

UKRAINE: UNIONS REJECT IMF ENSLAVING TERMS

FPU is extremely concerned with the peremptory conduct of the new

Government officials, with their willingness to comply with all the IMF terms to get a loan for Ukraine, with their reluctance to bring these vital issues to public discussion. One condition set forth by the IMF is raising the rates and gas prices for the population, alongside other unpopular measures.

Citizens cannot understand why they will have to pay more for gas of Ukrainian extraction in order to get help from the IMF. This looks particularly unacceptable and immoral in the conditions when the majority of Ukrainians draw extremely low wages and pensions.

Trade unions believe that in the context of restoring socio-political stability any decisions that may affect adversely the living standards of the population should be as transparent as possible, well-grounded, and accompanied by preventive measures of social protection. The adoption of such decisions should be preceded by a wide public discussion.

FPU invited the Cabinet of Ministers and the IMF to an open dialogue with the public, including trade unions and independent experts, and warned the new Government against erroneous application of old approaches and cliches, especially in what concerns the living standards. "In the long run, a FPU statement says, it will not be the government, but the population that will have to pay for the loans".

PUBLISHED BY
**GCTU INTERNATIONAL DEPARTMENT AND
GCTU PUBLIC RELATIONS CENTRE**
42 LENINSKY PROSPEKT
119119 MOSCOW, RUSSIA
TELEFAX +7(495) 938-2155
PHONE +7(495) 938-0112
Web site: www.vkp.ru;
E-mail: inter@vkp.ru

THE GENERAL CONFEDERATION OF TRADE UNIONS, GCTU, IS AN INTERNATIONAL TRADE UNION ORGANISATION THAT WAS FOUNDED AT ITS FIRST CONGRESS ON 16 APRIL 1992.

ITS CONSTITUTION, WHICH WAS APPROVED BY THE FIRST CONGRESS, WAS AMENDED AND SUPPLEMENTED BY THE SECOND CONGRESS OF THE GCTU 22 SEPTEMBER 1993, THE THIRD CONGRESS OF THE GCTU 18 SEPTEMBER 1997, AND THE FIFTH (EXTRAORDINARY) CONGRESS OF THE GCTU 26 MARCH 2004.

THE BASIC OBJECTIVES OF THE GCTU ARE:

- CO-ORDINATION OF ITS AFFILIATES' ACTIVITIES ON THE PROTECTION OF SOCIAL RIGHTS OF WORKERS, STUDENTS AND PENSIONERS;
 - ASSISTANCE IN THEIR PROTECTION OF TRADE UNION RIGHTS AND GUARANTEES;
- AND
- ORGANISING TRADE UNION SOLIDARITY AND CO-ORDINATION OF ITS AFFILIATES' INTERNATIONAL POLICIES.

THE GCTU BUILDS ITS ACTIVITIES IN CONFORMITY WITH THE UNIVERSALLY RECOGNISED STANDARDS OF INTERNATIONAL LAW, WITH FULL RESPECT FOR ITS AFFILIATES' COMPLETE INDEPENDENCE AND THE EQUALITY OF THEIR RIGHTS AND DUTIES.
THE GCTU AFFILIATES NATIONAL TRADE UNION CENTRES OF ARMENIA, AZERBAIJAN, BELARUS, GEORGIA, KAZAKHSTAN, KYRGYZSTAN, MOLDOVA, RUSSIA, TAJIKISTAN AND UKRAINE, AND ALSO 28 INDUSTRIAL TRADE UNION INTERNATIONALS.

THE GCTU IS READY TO CO-OPERATE WITH ANY OTHER NATIONAL TRADE UNION FEDERATIONS, IRRESPECTIVE OF THEIR AFFILIATION WITH OTHER INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS.

THE CONFEDERATION ENJOYS OBSERVER STATUS WITH THE CIS AND EURASEC INTER-PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLIES, THE CIS COUNCIL OF HEADS OF STATE, THE CIS COUNCIL OF HEADS OF GOVERNMENT, THE CIS INTERSTATE ECONOMIC COMMITTEE, ETC.

INTERNATIONALLY, IT IS IN CONSULTATIVE RELATIONS WITH THE ILO , THE UN DPI AND THE ECOSOC.

THE GCTU SUPREME BODIES ARE THE CONGRESS, CONVENED EVERY FIVE YEARS, AND, IN THE INTERVALS BETWEEN THE CONGRESSES, THE COUNCIL AND THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE.

CONTROL OVER FINANCIAL ACTIVITIES IS EXERCISED BY THE GCTU AUDITING COMMISSION.

PRESIDENT OF THE GCTU IS MIKHAIL SHMAKOV,
GENERAL SECRETARY OF THE GCTU IS VLADIMIR SCHERBAKOV

DEAR READERS

The GCTU information bulletin "Inform-Contact" is also distributed by E-mail. Apart from that, the English and French versions of our publication are available on our web site: www.vkp.ru