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NEWS FROM THE GENERAL CONFEDERATION OF TRADE UNIONS

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GCTU EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETS IN MOSCOW

The Executive Committee of the General Confederation of Trade Union (GCTU) held a regular meeting 21 April 2016 in Moscow's Palace of Labour. High on the agenda was the issue of ratification and compliance with ILO Conventions by the states where the Confederation has its affiliates. The keynote information was presented by a GCTU Deputy General Secretary, Albert Potapov. Contributions to the discussion were made by the leaders of the National Confederation of Trade Unions of Moldova (Oleg Budza), the Federation of Trade Unions of the Republic of Kazakhstan (Abelgazi Kusainov), and the Azerbaijan Trade Unions Confederation (Sattar Mehbaliyev).

Speakers noted that the GCTU affiliates had done quite a lot to speed up the process of ratification. However, despite all their ef-

forts, the progress has been slow. Over the past period, only Ukraine has ratified Convention No. 117 concerning basic aims and standards of social policy.

The Executive Committee called on the members-organisations to continue working towards an early ratification by their countries of the 11 conventions as recommended by the GCTU, and other major international labour standards. Particular attention should be devoted to Conventions No. 102 on Minimum Standards of Social Security, and No. 168 on the Employment Promotion and Protection against Unemployment, so far not ratified by any of the region's countries

Participants heard reports on the working practices of the trade union newspapers "Belaruski Chas" (Belarus) and "Vocea Poporului" (Moldova). Executive Committee observed that the trade union centres of Moldova and Belarus had

successfully managed to build constructive partnership relations with the journalist teams. Newspaper articles have often prompted the unions to take measures to assist work collectives and individual workers, or send appeals and inquiries to state authorities.

The meeting also reviewed the findings of the Executive Committee Commission that had studied the proposals for amending the GCTU Constitution presented by the Confederation's affiliates. The Commission got the instruction to proceed with the work, and report on its results to the next session of the Executive Committee later in 2016.

The Executive Committee approved the plan of preparations for the 25th Anniversary of the General Confederation of Trade Unions that will be celebrated in April 2017, and adopted a statement on the World Safety and Health Day 28 April 2016.

GCTU COUNCIL: SOCIAL STATE PRINCIPLES MUST BE RESPECTED

The Council of the General Confederation of Trade Unions (GCTU) met in Moscow 22 April 2016 to discuss the activities of the Confederation and its affiliates over the period from April 2015 to April 2016.

Upon hearing the information by GCTU General Secretary Vladimir Scherbakov, Council confirmed that the line for the practical realisation of the slogan "Reliable Guarantees to Decent Work and Social Justice!" approved by the GCTU 7th Congress remained relevant, and called on the affiliates to carry it out consistently.

GCTU Deputy General Secretary Natalia Podshibyakina reported on the socio-economic situation in the region's countries and challenges facing the unions. Following her information, leaders of eight national trade union centres and two sectoral Trade Union Internationals took the floor to inform participants about the state of affairs in their respective countries or industries.

The speakers were concerned that the countries of the region were moving farther and farther away from the proclaimed principles of welfare state. This is evidenced by a marked decline in the living standards and social protection. The governments' economic policies have more often focused on ultra-liberal orientations that imply a weaker regulatory role of the state, restraint of increases in wages and pensions, and abandonment of social security commitments. In fact, the burden of economic difficulties has increasingly often been shifted onto workers' shoulders.

Council noted that the current problems of socio-economic development posed a serious challenge to the region's trade unions, which means they must respond more vigorously and move on to a more militant offensive policy in their fight for the legitimate rights of workers.

Representatives of the International Confederation of Railway Workers' and Transport Builders' Unions and the International Confederation of Health Workers' Unions shared with participants their experience of working with young people. The Council approved of their reports, while stressing that youth problems had aggravated in a whole number of countries. This manifests itself in the hardships of finding a job, especially a first job, and the shrinking possibilities of building a family and arranging a household, organising cultural and leisure activities, and realising the creative ambitions of the youth. To improve the conditions for young workers and students, and protect their social and labour rights is to be regarded as a major task of trade unions today.

The Council adopted the GCTU May Day Appeal (see text below), and the GCTU financial report for 2015.

MAY DAY APPEAL BY CGTU

On the 1st of May, the GCTU and its affiliates, together with all trade un-

ionists around the world, will mark the Day of International Workers' Solidarity.

Millions of organised workers will rally around trade union banners to once again remind the governments and employers of labour rights and the need to respect them, show their determination to strengthen the unity of action and fraternal solidarity of working people, and demand a safe working environment and tangible improvements in their living conditions.

This year's May Day will be observed in a climate of a further slowdown in the economic growth amidst the aggravating geopolitical climate. Unfortunate consequences of this development are the almost universally rising inflation and unemployment, the falling purchasing power of wages and social benefits, and a sharp decline in living standards.

Today, the main task of GCTU member organisations is to thwart attempts by the governments and employers to shift a sizeable slice of economic recovery costs onto the working people, which, in some countries, gives rise to social tensions and discontent, and, subsequently, calls for broader mobilisation by trade unions.

In this situation, the Council of the General Confederation of Trade Unions, which has gathered for

a regular session in Moscow, expresses its support for the struggles being waged by trade unions of the region in defence of labour rights, and calls on the affiliates to widely mark this May Day by organising marches, demonstrations, rallies and other mass activities under slogans most relevant to their countries or industries, in the spirit of unity and solidarity.

Together, let us demand that the governments and employers:

- bear in mind the principles of social justice while developing the budgetary policies as part of crisis planning;
- ensure preferential investment in the real economy;
- abandon the ill-conceived intentions to privatise state enterprises and property;
- do their best to save the existing jobs and create new ones;
- prevent further drops in work remuneration, pensions and social benefits, and stop the populations of the region's countries, especially people who have jobs, from slipping into poverty;
- stop the cut-downs in public spending on social needs;
- put an end to the growth of consumer prices;
- provide conditions for maintaining proper social dialogue and realising the right to decent work;
- strictly observe labour rights enshrined in conventions and rec-

ommendations of the International Labour Organisation, and in the ILO's Decent Work Agenda!

Let us do our utmost to make the voice of trade unions as the mouthpiece of organised workers be heeded and taken into account by those who design and implement any socio-economic measures that affect the situation of wage and salary earners!

Long live May Day!

Long live the international solidarity of workers and trade unions!

GCTU STRESSES IMPORTANCE OF SAFETY & HEALTH AT WORK

The session of the General Confederation of Trade Unions held in April 2016 adopted a statement that, in particular, reads as follows:

“On the 28th of April 2016, over a hundred countries will mark the World Day of Safety and Health at Work annually observed on the initiative of the ILO around the globe.

“Both the event and preparations it involves have long become part and parcel of the global occupational health and safety strategy whose principal purpose is to raise

public awareness of the workplace injuries and diseases causing death to workers all over the world, and spotlight the unsolved health and safety problems”.

Supported by the public, the GCTU and its affiliates – national trade union centres and the industry-based Trade Union Internationals in the Newly Independent States – together with the authorities and employers’ associations use this campaign as an open forum for discussing the latest trends and developments aimed at securing safe working conditions.

In recent years, the countries of the region have witnessed a decline in total workplace accidents, although the injury rates remain high. There is a trend towards deterioration of work conditions, with a growing number of those employed in environments that do not meet health and safety standards and labour protection regulations.

Meanwhile, the provision of employees’ right to occupational stress prevention, a friendly climate in the work collective, and special care for the health of vulnerable workers is an essential component of joint activity by the unions, employers and authorities.

Experts believe the reduction of deaths at the workplace to be a pressing problem, both at national

and global levels. Trade unions, in conjunction with public authorities and employers, must do their best to cut down the number of work-related injuries, lethal accidents, and occupational diseases. To achieve the aim, it is necessary to upgrade the production facilities, replace the outdated equipment, introduce advanced technologies, attract investment, and guarantee economic incentives to the employers.

In the course of social dialogue, the unions must insist that business invest their profit in production development and in green job creation. They must demand that occupational safety and health become a priority for managers at all levels, and press for the implementation of the Occupational Safety and Health Management System (SHMS) as part of their corporate culture.

“The General Confederation of Trade Unions, the Statement says in conclusion, endorses the motto “Workplace Stress: a Collective Challenge” proposed by the ILO for the World Day for Safety and Health at Work in 2016”.

VLADIMIR SCHERBAKOV GETS IPA AWARD

A GCTU delegation headed by General Secretary Vladimir Scherbakov attended the 44th plenary session

of the Inter-Parliamentary Assembly (IPA) of the Commonwealth of Independent States held in St. Petersburg 20 May 2016.

Speaking at the opening ceremony, Chair of the IPA Council Valentina Matvienko made particular mention of the GCTU's contribution to the development of topical IPA documents, particularly those dealing with socio-economic issues.

The session, which was held in a businesslike and constructive atmosphere, considered several important papers, including the draft framework laws «On the Foundations for Bio-energy Development» and «On the Ecological Expert Evaluation»

At a special ceremony held in conclusion, Vladimir Scherbakov was awarded the IPA Certificate of Honour for his “efficient contribution to the activities of the CIS Inter-Parliamentary Assembly and its bodies, and for the strengthening of friendship among the peoples of the Commonwealth countries”.

GCTU COMMISSION CALLS FOR ENHANCED PROTECTION OF CHERNOBYL VICTIMS

From 6-8 April 2016, the city of Gomel (Belarus) hosted a field session of the GCTU Commission on Occupational Health and Safety,

Environmental Protection and Social Security, devoted to the 30th anniversary of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster.

The session was attended by GCTU leaders, representatives of the region's national trade union centres and industrial Trade Union Internationals, officials of the CIS Executive Committee, the Standing Committee of the Russia-Belarus Union State, and the public organisations The Chernobyl Union of Russia and The Chernobyl Union of Belarus, and journalists.

Addressing the gathering, GCTU General Secretary Vladimir Scherbakov dwelled mainly on the role of trade unions in providing social, legal and labour guarantees for Chernobyl victims. He said in particular that “despite the extensive social and economic measures taken to remove the consequences of the disaster, the problems of Chernobyl are still acute”.

The session concluded its work with adopting a joint statement expressing concern that “some CIS countries have unreasonably made changes to their current legislations infringing on the rights of Chernobyl victims and liquidators; their interests are not always taken into account when reforming the systems of health and social care, the pension provision schemes, and the housing and public utility services.

Resettlement of people from contaminated areas is still an issue to be solved; the sickness rates among the populations exposed to radiation, including children, remain high, while the number of cancer cases has been steadily growing.

Full implementation of the state and regional programmes, involving the active support of trade unions and other public organisations, remains the top-priority task in overcoming the aftermath of the Chernobyl disaster. In this connection, the GCTU calls on its affiliates to enhance their control over the observance of social, legal and labour guarantees for Chernobyl victims and liquidators. Additional opportunities must be sought to provide them with health resort treatment at the expense of companies and industrial enterprises. The social partners should include their obligations to this effect in the sectoral and regional accords and collective agreements.

ARMENIA: CTUA AGAINST ATTEMPTS TO IMPAIR LABOUR CODE

In his report to the session of the Council of the Confederation of Trade Unions of Armenia (CTUA) held 30 March 2016 in Yerevan, CTUA President Eduard Tumasian stressed that the current social and economic situation had expectedly

made the position of the country's unions stronger.

All social problems in Armenia had aggravated, the inflation rate and the prices of basic consumer goods had gone up; the housing and public utilities had become more expensive, and the unemployment had been growing, whereas the wages and pensions were not sufficient to meet even the minimum human needs.

Summing up the results of the session, the Council pointed out that the Confederation would continue its efforts to solve pressing problems, strengthen the credibility and influence of the unions in society, and insist on introducing the appropriate amendments to the Labour Code.

In the meantime, the regular session of the Republican Tripartite Commission held 24 May 2016 discussed the draft law «On Changes and Amendments to the Labour Code of Armenia». The trade union representatives strongly opposed the proposals to consider null and void the provision on the maximum number of overtime hours (currently 180 per year), and cancel the right to annual additional leave for employees with irregular workday.

The CTUA believes this will run contrary to the country's Constitution

and only aggravate the economic plight of workers.

BELARUS: FPB PROMOTING ENLARGEMENT OF SECTORAL TRADE UNIONS

The Presidium of the Federation of Trade Unions of Belarus (FPB) held its regular meeting 6 May 2016 in Minsk. FPB President Mikhail Orda told participants he was concerned over the deteriorating economic situation in the country that had led to a drop in the real incomes of the population in a context of rising prices and rates.

The resolution adopted by the meeting stresses that the country's population needs comprehensive social support. For this reason trade unions at all levels must do their utmost to prevent any reduction of social guarantees for workers and students, as well as untimely or incomplete payment of wages, scholarships and allowances.

Presidium voiced support for the steps taken to consolidate and enlarge sectoral trade unions in line with the decisions of the FPB 7th Congress. The Federation believes the mergers of trade unions aiming to form larger structures will create better conditions for their effective collaboration with the social partners, and facilitate the development of a common policy.

As part of this process, the Union of Transport and Communication Workers "Belproftrans" was created 18 May 2015 on the basis of three trade unions existing in the transport sector, and the Trade Union of Energy, Fuel and Gas Workers "Belenergotopgaz" emerged 30 May 2016 as a result of a merger between two unions in the energy, oil and gas industries.

KYRGYZSTAN: UNIFIED BARGAINING CAMPAIGN LAUNCHED

The Kyrgyzstan Federation of Trade Unions (KFTU) sent an appeal to the Federal Government, regional authorities, and employers' associations urging them to support the trade union idea to hold a collective bargaining campaign based on uniform rules.

The appeal reminded that the General Agreement Between the Government, the Federation of Trade Unions and the Employers' Associations stipulates that sectoral and territorial wage agreements be annually signed by the unions and employers; however, in reality many employers refuse to do so.

Given this situation, the KFTU decided to launch a nation-wide unified collective bargaining campaign under the common motto «Clear the Way for Collective Agreement»

with a view to highlighting the interests of workers and employers in the sphere of labour relations, and promoting social dialogue. The decision was unanimously endorsed by its member organisations.

The Kyrgyzstan Federation of Trade Unions called on the Government to support the trade union initiative.

MOLDOVA: CNSM INSISTS ON STRICTER HEALTH & SAFETY

The National Confederation of Trade Unions of Moldova (CNSM) held a session of its General Council 14 April 2016 to discuss the implementation of the CNSM strategy for 2012-2017.

CNSM President Oleg Budza told participants that the unions and the Government had to join efforts in a search of solutions to the most pressing social problems caused by the rapid price rises of 2015, the devaluation of the national currency, and the reduction of the population's real incomes.

The Council members approved the Confederation's Plan of Action in 2016 with a focus on the need to raise the minimum wages, and allowances and social benefits.

In 2016, the CNSM will also press for enhanced measures to be taken to prevent occupational acci-

dents. According to State Labour Inspectorate statistics, 411 accidents were officially registered in the previous year, with 87 out of them qualified as occupational accidents involving 54 heavy and 33 lethal injuries.

MOLDOVA: CNSM PROVIDES ILO WITH ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

A whole number of social, economic and organisational issues were discussed at a regular session of the CNSM Confederal Committee 24 May 2016.

The Committee decided to send the ILO additional information to support the "Complaint against the Government of the Republic of Moldova for its failure to observe the provisions of several articles of ILO Convention 81 concerning labour inspectorates in industry and trade" lodged in June 2013.

Faced with the government's rejection of the CNSM proposal to bring national legislation in line with Convention 81, the unions urged the ILO to demand that the Moldovan authorities implement the recommendations developed by the ILO Tripartite Committee 24 March 2015.

The CNSM Committee also approved the trade union amend-

ments to the draft laws “On the State Budget” and “On the State Social Insurance Fund” for 2016.

RUSSIA OBSERVES MAY DAY

On the Day of International Workers’ Solidarity, the 1st of May, blue and white collar workers throughout the country took to the streets to participate in rallies and marches organized by the unions under the slogan: “No to Higher Prices and Taxes, yes to Higher Wages and Pensions!”.

More than 3.1 million participants in the massive nation-wide action demanded better protection of workers’ social and labour rights and economic interests, carrying banners “For peace and stability!”, “First wages, then taxes!”, “Minimum wage not lower than subsistence minimum!”, “Housing and utilities rates under Government control!”, “Working person must not be poor!”, “Revenues from Russia’s natural resource wealth must benefit all Russians!”.

The largest demonstration was held in Moscow where over 100 thousand representatives of the capital’s work collectives marched through the Red Square.

Large-scale events were also organised in Grozny (100 thousand participants), St.-Petersburg

(90 thousand), Yakutsk (80 thousand), Krasnodar (54 thousand), Khabarovsk (42 thousand), Izhevsk (46 thousand), Perm (37 thousand), Vladivostok (35 thousand), Samara (30 thousand) and other cities and towns.

RUSSIA: FNPR EXECUTIVE SUMS UP RESULTS

The results of this year’s May Day action were summed up by the Executive Committee of the Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Russia (FNPR) that met 18 May 2016 in Moscow.

The Executive Committee members endorsed the decision of the International Trade Union Confederation to organise the next World Day for Decent Work in this October.

Participants noted that the 2015 Collective Bargaining Campaign in Russia had been conducted by FNPR affiliates in a complicated social and economic environment. However, the total number of workers covered by the collective agreements signed amounted to 16.8 million workers.

The Committee suggested that in the upcoming collective bargaining campaign the leaders of the Federation and its member organisations should follow the guid-

ance of the FNPR Programme “Decent Work as the Basis for Human Welfare and National Development”.

TAJIKISTAN UNIONS MARK VICTORY DAY

On the eve of the 71st Anniversary of the Victory of the Soviet People in the Great Patriotic War, the Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Tajikistan (FNPT) held a ceremonial meeting in the Large Assembly Hall of the House of Trade Unions 6 May 2016.

Apart from the trade union leaders and activists, the meeting was attended by Great Patriotic War veterans, soldiers-internationalists, Chernobyl disaster liquidators, and representatives of the state and government bodies.

Speakers at the event placed particular emphasis on the contribution made by Tajik people to the victory over fascism. Their deeds were highly acclaimed and appreciated by the Motherland: 57 Tajik soldiers became the Heroes of the Soviet Union, 15 Full Cavaliers of the Order of Glory, and over 55 thousand were awarded different combat orders and medals.

On the 9th of May 2016, about 400 people marched through central Dushanbe at 8 o'clock in the

morning as part of the public action “Immortal Regiment”.

UKRAINE: FPU ASKS GOVERNMENT NOT TO DODGE SOCIAL DIALOGUE

The Presidium of the Federation of Trade Unions of Ukraine (FPU) met in Kyiv 21 April 2016 (for the first time since the FPU 7th Congress) to consider a number of socio-economic, organisational and property issues.

After the debate on the progress of the collective bargaining campaign aiming to sign a new General Agreement, participants adopted an appeal to Prime Minister of Ukraine Volodymyr Groisman, urging the newly appointed Ukrainian Government not to evade dialogue with the social partners.

The Presidium also approved:

- the appeal to Ukrainian trade union members on the occasion of the Day of International Workers’ Solidarity, the 1st of May; and
- the appeal to the employers’ associations with the proposal to raise wages following the reduction of the Unified Social Tax.

The Presidium decided to convene a session of the FPU Council 23 June 2016.

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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

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