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NEWS FROM THE GENERAL CONFEDERATION OF TRADE UNIONS

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GCTU ATTENDS ECONOMIC COUNCIL SESSION

The GCTU's Deputy General Secretary Albert Potapov and Head of the Department for the Protection of Workers' Socio-Economic Interests Valentin Karasev attended the 77th Session of the CIS Economic Council held 2 March 2018 in Moscow.

Among other things, the session agenda included the issue "On the Development of a Draft Agreement on Free Trade in Services".

The session decided to set up a high-level working group composed of the Ministers of Economy of CIS countries to proceed with the work on a draft Agreement on Free Trade in Services, and approved the schedule of the Council's sessions in 2018.

AZERBAIJAN: AHIK ACTIVITY RECOGNISED AS SATISFACTORY

The 5th Congress of the Azerbaijan Trade Unions Confederation (AHIK)

took place 5 February 2018 in Baku's Congress Centre.

The Congress gathered together about 1,300 delegates representing industrial trade unions, state officials, and 85 trade union leaders and activists from 30 countries, including GCTU President Mikhail Shmakov and GCTU General Secretary Vladimir Scherbakov.

Prior to the opening session, President of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev, received a group of international trade unionists participating in the Congress.

In the activity report, AHIK President Sattar Mohbaliyev said the measures so far taken to develop social partnership in the country had yielded positive results. The national trade union centre had been both an advocate of and a party to social dialogue, standing on guard of social justice principles.

The Congress passed a resolution proposing to nominate Ilham Aliyev as a presidential candidate

in the early elections to be held in Azerbaijan in April 2018.

Following the debate on the activity report, Congress recognised the work done by the AHİK in 2013-2018 as satisfactory.

As a result of voting by show of hands Sattar Mohbaliyev was re-elected AHİK President for a new term in office.

ARMENIA: CTUA SUMS UP RESULTS

The Executive Committee of the Confederation of Trade Unions of Armenia (CTUA) met 16 March 2018 in Yerevan.

There were a number of issues on the agenda, including the CTUA budget performance in 2017. The report on the latter was presented by a CTUA Vice President, Hachik Arakelyan. He also informed the Committee members of the implementation of collective agreements, briefed them on collective labour disputes that took place in 2017, and outlined the safety and health situation at workplaces.

The Committee decided to establish standing commissions to deal with the following problems:

- social, economic and legal issues, labour safety, and environment protection;
- gender equality;
- working youth.

The session adopted the decision «On the organisation of a May Day march in 2018».

The meeting of the CTUA Council that took place 26 March 2018 considered and approved the decisions taken by the CTUA Executive Committee. The Council also adopted the budget of the Confederation and approved the compositions of the CTUA Standing Commissions.

BELARUS: UNIONS, MINISTRY DISCUSS LABOUR CODE

A working meeting between trade union representatives and officials of the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection took place 22 January 2018 at the Headquarters of the Federation of Trade Unions of Belarus (FPB).

The social partners devoted special attention to the necessity for continued teamwork on the amendment of the Labour Code. The unions had earlier come up with more than 40 proposals aiming to change 30 articles of the Labour Code.

Participants discussed the planned change in the pay remuneration system of the budgetary sector. The FPB had more than once pointed to the need for salary increases in that sphere. “Today we must step up our efforts to improve the wage remuneration system as a whole”, said FPB President Mikhail Orda.

The social partners also focused on the problem of employment.

The Federation of Trade Unions has repeatedly stressed that the

ongoing restructuring and upgrading of large industrial enterprises should be carried out with due regard for the workers' interests. This includes personal job placement and social support of each redundant worker.

BELARUS: TRADE UNIONS FOR FULL EMPLOYMENT

A republican conference involving more than 150 trade unionists from all over the country took place 30 January 2018 at the FPB central office in Minsk. The meeting was mainly devoted to the revitalization of trade unions' and the Government's activities to promote the job placement of citizens and ensure full employment guarantees.

Trade unions suggest that additional job security guarantees should be provided for conscientious workers. They believe a special legislative provision must be established stipulating the prolongation of the employment contracts for those who have been working without reprimands for a certain period of time.

«The most important thing about this document is that it will promote job creation and guarantee an individual approach to each job-seeker», said FPB President Mikhail Orda.

GEORGIA: UNIONS DEMAND SAFE WORK ENVIRONMENT

“Protect the lives of workers”, “Provide work safety”, “I am a work-

er who is still alive”, these were the slogans carried by participants in the mass protest action organised by the Georgian Trade Union Confederation (GTUC) 27 February 2018 in Tbilisi.

Protesters warned the authorities against approving the Government's draft law on occupational safety and health currently under review in Parliament. Instead, they demanded that MPs pass the bill developed by the GTUA which is really aimed at the efficient protection of workers' rights, and at enhancing the functions of supervisory bodies.

“The unions believe that the bill proposed by the Governments fails to meet international labour standards, nor does it offer any effective mechanism for labour inspectorate activity”, explained Raisa Lepartaliani, Head of GTUC Legal Department.

According to GTUC President Irakli Petriashvili, 1,330 workers have died over the 12 years that have passed since the state labour inspectorate was dissolved in Georgia.

“This one is a warning action, but if the Government does not hear our demands and change the current legislation, our actions will be held on a permanent basis”, he said.

KYRGYZSTAN: OSH TOP PRIORITY FOR UNIONS

A round-table on “Priorities for inclusion in the National OSH Programme of the Kyrgyz Republic for the years

2018-2022, and other issues related to the Programme” was held in Bishkek by the Sub-regional ILO Office from 8-9 February 2018. Attending the event were representatives of the country’s Government, trade unions and employers.

In her opening address to the session, a Vice President of the Kyrgyzstan Federation of Trade Unions (KFTU), Rysgul Babayeva stressed that problems of occupational safety and health were among the priorities of the Kyrgyzstan trade unions.

The key report was delivered by Valentin Mocanu, senior specialist in labour administration, labour inspection and occupational safety and health of the ILO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia (Moscow). He familiarised participants with the ILO’s strategic approach to the issue of occupational safety and health, and with experience of other countries in this field.

Participants discussed the role of the trade unions, Government, and employers of Kyrgyzstan in the development and implementation of the occupational safety and health policy. Simultaneously, participants examined the ILO Strategic Approach towards the issue of occupational safety and health.

MOLDOVA: UNION DEMANDS HEADED

Starting with 1 January 2017, Moldovan workers employed in

especially harmful and hazardous environments, such as mining, glass manufacturing or other industries with workplace hazards, were stripped of their right to early retirement.

Given the injustice against this category of workers, the National Trade Union Confederation of Moldova (CNSM) repeatedly appealed to the country’s Parliament, Government and Ministry of Labour urging them to restore the right to an early pension for employees in harmful work conditions.

The voice of the trade unions was heeded, and Parliament passed a new law 22 December 2017 that makes it possible to amend and supplement the Law on the State Pension System.

In this way the injustice committed against workers in harmful and hazardous conditions was removed, and the right to early retirement for several categories of workers was restored.

MOLDOVA: UNION LEADERS MEET WITH PREMIER

Prime Minister of Moldova Pavel Filip met with members of the CNSM Confederal Committee at the Government’s Headquarters in Chisinau 16 January 2018.

CNSM President Oleg Budza said at the meeting that the trade unions of Moldova had always been a steady advocate of a European vector for

the country's development, as they considered that to be the only way of achieving higher living standards for the population. They believe that the most important task for them, as well as for the Government, should be preserving the existent jobs and creating new ones, providing workers with new incentives, and maintaining a high qualification of workforce.

The CNSM underpins the Government's decision to subsidize new job creation from the state budget. The union leader also voiced the initiative to raise the national minimum wage level which had not been increased since October 2014 and currently amounted to 1000 lei a month. He suggested that the minimum pay should be at least equal to the subsistence minimum, which currently amounts to 1980, 9 lei.

CSNM President asked the Prime Minister to take measures to improve safety and health at work, and step up the fight with informal under-the-counter wage payment.

Prime Minister Pavel Filip said the meeting with trade union leaders at the beginning of the year was extremely important to him, as it help him better understand their opinions on the problems that are of equal concern both to the Government and the unions. He added that the executive authorities were open and easy of access where it comes to looking for solutions to the problems raised by the CNSM, and they, as well as the unions, were willing to

make lives of the people more prosperous.

RUSSIA: FNPR STANDS UP FOR UNION RIGHTS

On the 18th of January 2018, the Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Russia (FNPR) issued a statement "Banning of the MPRA under a flimsy pretext deals a blow on all trade unions in Russia", which reads as follows:

"The St. Petersburg City Court ruled 10 January 2018 that the Interregional Trade Union "Workers' Association" (MPRA) be disbanded for its refusal to register as a foreign agent engaged in politics and financed from abroad.

"Although the MPRA is not a trade union affiliated with the FNPR, we would like to disagree with the court's position that trade unions allegedly engage themselves in politics when they express their opinions on actual social and economic problems. Moreover, elsewhere in the world a trade union is entitled to voice its position on the prospects for national development or support a particular candidate or party in the elections

"It is our hope that the Supreme Court of Russia will restore workers and trade unions as their representatives to their right to conduct full-fledged, independent and effective activity. The right, which we believe to have been violated by the City Court of St. Petersburg "

RUSSIA: NEW GENERAL AGREEMENT SIGNED

In the presence of President Vladimir Putin, the national trade union centres, the employers' association and the Government of Russia signed a new General Agreement in the Kremlin 27 January 2018, establishing the principles of regulating socio-economic and labour relations for the years 2018-2020.

Speaking at the ceremony, the President of Russia stressed that the document signed would directly affect more than 70 million citizens employed in various sectors of the economy.

The Head of State added that the new General Agreement, if duly implemented by all its stakeholders – the employers, the unions, and the government, would provide an example of a reliable social partnership.

The leader of the Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Russia (FNPR), Mikhail Shmakov, said “the signing of this trilateral agreement for the next three years is an important contribution to the great efforts being made by civil society institutions together with the government to develop social partnership in this country.”

RUSSIA: FNPR EXECUTIVE BOARD HOLDS SESSION

A meeting of the FNPR Executive Committee held 21 February 2018 decided to convene the Federation's

General Council in Moscow 18 April 2018.

Participants also discussed other issues such as “On the trade union action to mark May Day in 2018”, “On the FNPR plan of activities to implement the General Agreement concluded by the national Trade Union Centres, the Employers' Association and the Government for 2018-2020”, etc.

Committee members noted that, despite the signs of stabilisation in a number of economic activities, the slowdown in inflation, and the raising of the official minimum wage level, the quality of life and the purchasing power of most citizens, and the indexation of salaries in the budgetary sector remained low. The unemployment benefits did not increase, and there were problems with the calculation and indexation of pensions.

Given these conditions, it was decided that trade unions would hold an All-Russia May Day action in the form of marches and rallies to defend workers' legitimate rights and interests.

TAJKISTAN: FNPT PROCLAIMS YEAR OF PRIMARY TU ORGANISATIONS

The General Council of the Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Tajikistan (FNPT) met in Dushanbe 26 January 2018.

The meeting considered 12 issues, including one “On the Annual Message

of the President of the Republic of Tajikistan to the Parliament of the Republic” and “The Report on the Work Done by the Unions in 2017 and on the Tasks for 2018”.

Participants approved a plan of social protection measures to be taken by the Republic’s trade unions as follow-up to the Presidential Message. In his address the President set out tasks for the state agencies aiming to raise salaries in the public sector, pensions and scholarships by 15 per cent as from September 2018, revise the rates of the minimum wages and social benefits, improve the quality of life of the population, and create new jobs.

Based on the President’s message, the unions specified their tasks and outlined the steps to be taken to implement them.

The Meeting heard a report on the activities of the Federation and its affiliates in 2017. In conclusion, the General Council took the decision to proclaim 2018 a Year of the Primary Trade Union Organisation.

TAJIKISTAN-GCTU: FRUITFUL COOPERATION BENEFITTING WORKERS

As part of preparations for the upcoming April sessions of the Executive Committee and the Council of the General Confederation of Trade Unions (GCTU), President of the FNPT Kodir Kosim paid a working visit to Moscow 27 February 2018.

The GCTU and FNPT considered in detail the implementation of joint projects for protecting the social and economic interests of workers, including labour migrants, noted considerable progress in accomplishing the planned objectives, and set new ones for the future.

Upon returning home from the visit, Kodiri Kosim sent a letter to GCTU General Secretary Vladimir Scherbakov, that reads as follows:

“Dear Brother Scherbakov,

The Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Tajikistan expresses high appreciation to you and assures you of our wish to continue our fruitful cooperation.

We note with satisfaction that the GCTU is making a significant contribution to the consolidation of the international trade union movement, supporting the efforts of national trade union centres in Commonwealth countries to protect workers’ interests.

We regard you as a strategic partner and a good friend of ours. May I express to you our profound gratitude and appreciation for your support and understanding during our stay in Moscow.”

UKRAINE: UNIONS PREPARING TO REBUFF ATTACKS

The Presidium of the Federation of Trade Unions of Ukraine (FPU) held an emergency meeting 28 February

2018 to take stock of the situation that had emerged as a result of the mounting attacks on trade union rights, in particular, the attempts by local authorities to appropriate houses belonging to trade unions.

Thus, in Poltava the Prosecutor's Office has confiscated the House of Trade Unions for its own needs, while the Union House in Uzhgorod is to be given over to the local Judicial Administration. Similar unlawful actions are being taken against trade union health resorts, sports facilities, and training centres in Chernigov, Khmelnytsky and other places.

All this causes legitimate indignation among union members and makes them increasingly aware of the need to act in solidarity to give a resolute rebuff to the total offensive on the rights of trade unions. Meanwhile, attempts are being made to evict trade unionists from the Houses of Unions amidst winter, cut off their electricity, and block their activities, supporting these unlawful actions by court decisions.

"Why should such inhuman treatment be possible in a rule-of-law state?" asked FPU President Grigory Osovy. On behalf of the FPU Presidium, he reported the situation to Prime Minister Vladimir Groisman as a social partner of trade unions.

The FPU Presidium demanded that the Government cancel its directive on the transfer of trade union facilities, primarily the district Houses of Trade Unions in the Transcarpathian and Poltava Regions, and return

them to the unions as their rightful owners.

The Cabinet of Ministers responded to the Presidium's decision by setting up a working group comprising representatives of the State Property Fund and trade unions whose task it is to promptly investigate the situation and settle it down.

"We agreed with the Government officials to complete the job within a month," said Gregory Osovy, "and if the situation does not change, we'll have to be ready to launch solidarity protest actions to defend our rights."

"The officials and business who will feel temptation to lay hands on any union facility will meet strong resistance and resolute rebuff," added the trade union leader.

Should the union demands be ignored and violations of trade union rights continue, the FPU may appeal for protection to international institutions, such as the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), the ILO, the International Trade Union Confederation and its Pan-European Regional Council.

UKRAINE: WANTON ATTACK ON TRADE UNIONS

On the 23rd of March 2018, the Presidium of the FPU made a public appeal to Ukraine's President Petro Poroshenko and Prime Minister Vladimir Groisman condemning unlawful actions against trade unionists.

The appeal says that, 22 March 2018 a group of about 60 unknown persons attacked participants of the meeting held by Ukraine's Union of Workers in Housing and Communal Services, Local Industry and Consumer Services in Kyiv's *Hotel "Tourist"*

Police were informed of the attack immediately, but arrived at the scene with a delay and were not able to promptly stop the illegal actions.

It is to be regretted that such assaults on trade unions and their leaders have become all too frequent. Suffice it to recall how similar criminal groups, armed with tear gas grenades, tried to disrupt a meeting of the FPU Council, crashing the lobby of the same *Hotel "Tourist"*. Such incidents happen regularly not only in Kyiv, but also in other regions of Ukraine.

Given the public danger of the neglect of laws, the impunity of attacks by bandit formations on trade union leaders, and the obstruction of legitimate trade union activity, the Presidium of the Federation of Trade Unions of Ukraine demands that the investigation into this crime be carried out without delay and that the perpetrators be held accountable.

INTERNATIONAL TRADE UNION FORUM OF YOUNG COMMUNICATIONS WORKERS

From 12-16 February 2018, an International Trade Union Forum of Young Communications Workers "The Future of Youth and Labour"

took place in the Tavrichesky Palace of St. Petersburg.

It was held by the International Organisation of CIS Communications Workers' Unions (IOCWU) and the Swedish Service and Communications Workers' Union (SECO), with the involvement of the UNI Global Union. Attending the event were the chairpersons of industrial trade unions of communications workers from Azerbaijan, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Russia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan

At the opening ceremony, participants were welcomed by President of the IOCWU Anatoly Nazeikin and acting General Secretary of the CIS Inter-Parliamentary Assembly Sergei Antufiev who stressed that "the issues of protecting the working person know of no boundaries. When activists of the trade union movement meet, they will always find a common language, because the problems people solve by organising in trade unions are very similar."

The International Secretary of the Swedish Trade Union of Service and Communications Workers (SECO) Jens Saverstam delivered a lecture on "Trade unions should think of a future where people will have jobs."

For four days, young trade unionists from the CIS and Northern Europe worked in plenary sessions, seminars and round-tables. Within the Forum framework, the TUI of Telecommunication Workers held a Council meeting to consider some topical issues of its activity.

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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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