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NEWS FROM THE GENERAL CONFEDERATION OF TRADE UNIONS

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GCTU CONDEMNS PROSECUTION OF GREEK UNION ACTIVISTS

In connection with the harassment of trade unionists in Greece, GCTU General Secretary Vladimir Scherbakov sent a message of protest to the Greek Prime Minister Loukas Papademos 17 January 2012.

The General Confederation of Trade Unions condemned strongly the prosecution of members of the Federation of Energy Workers of Greece for hosting last November a sit-in protest against the sharp increase in electricity tariffs for the population.

«From the standpoint of international law, – the message says, – the action organised by the union is a legitimate expression of public dissatisfaction with the government's social policy, a legal form of protecting the rights and interests of workers and their families, and, therefore, cannot serve as the basis for the trial of trade unionists.»

The GCTU expressed its support for the position of the Greek General Confederation of Labour, joining its

voice to the protests of the international trade union movement, and urged the Prime Minister to take measures for an immediate end to the prosecution of the energy workers' union and its leader.

Copies of the letter were sent to the Minister of Labour and Social Affairs and the Minister of Justice, Transparency and Human Rights in Greece.

GCTU CRITICAL OF KYRGYZSTAN DRAFT CODE

In a special statement addressed to Kyrgyzstan's President, Prime Minister and Speaker of Parliament, the GCTU expressed its deep concern over the consideration by the national Government of the draft Labour Code strongly and resolutely rejected by the GCTU affiliate, the Kyrgyzstan Federation of Trade Unions (KFTU), as an anti-popular legal act.

The Labour Code now in force, based on ILO conventions and the concept of a framework labour code approved by

the CIS Inter-Parliamentary Assembly, is perfectly adapted to the realities of a market economy, with an optimal balance of the rights and obligations of workers and employers.

The proposed draft new Code shows a clear bias in favour of employers, significantly worsens the situation of employees, and reduces greatly their labour rights and social guarantees.

Suggestions and comments submitted by the KFTU have been utterly ignored, and the unions believe the current consideration of the document to be in clear violation of national legislation.

The GCTU supported the position of the KFTU, which is protesting against violations of workers' rights, insists on the removal of the draft new Labour Code from discussion, and urges the Kyrgyzstan state authorities to ensure strict compliance with the provisions of the current Labour Code, in force since 2004.

AZERBAIJAN: NEW GENERAL AGREEMENT TAKES EFFECT

On the 13th of March 2012, the Cabinet of Ministers endorsed the tripartite General Collective Agreement for 2012-13 concluded by the Azerbaijan Trade Union Confederation (AHIK), the National Confederation of Entrepreneurs (Employers), and the government.

The General Agreement entered into force 6 February 2012 upon its signature by the leaders of trade unions, employers and government. According to its parties, the socio-economic policies must in the near future be aimed

at ensuring a sustainable economy, modernising the production and enhancing its competitiveness, stimulating innovation activities, promoting investment in human capital, strengthening social protection, creating new jobs, reducing poverty, and improving the welfare of the population.

BELARUS: GOVERNMENT TAKES RELIEF MEASURES

With the sharp drop in the real incomes in 2011, the Federation of Trade Unions of Belarus (FPB) urged the government to enhance the social protection of low-paid workers. To support the most vulnerable sections of population, the country's President signed a decree raising a number of allowances, including benefits for low-income families with children over 3 years, allowances for disabled children under the age of 18, and care allowances for the handicapped or persons aged 80 years and over.

The unions have also submitted a draft decree to the Presidential Administration on improving the targeted state social assistance. The document proposes that families where twins (triplets and more) were born should be provided with free baby foods during the first two years, irrespective of their income level. There are plans to increase the lump-sum social benefit, and recalculate it monthly, based on the subsistence minimum dynamics.

Salaries in the public sector have also risen. As from 1 January 2012, the tariff rate of the first level has been raised to 200 thousand local roubles (\$24), or by 32.5 per cent. This

will help keep the wages of low-paid workers at least at the level of the minimum wages.

BELARUS: EU SANCTIONS HIT TOILERS HARDEST

This opinion was voiced by FPB President Leonid Kozik, as he commented on the extension of European Union sanctions against business and industry in Belarus.

«Our Federation of Trade Unions has repeatedly stated that such absurd and short-sighted actions will lead the EU nowhere», – he said. – More than that, those who make such decisions strip business and ordinary citizens in European countries of goods and services they get from our country... I wonder what the European ministers want to achieve through their actions? Hardly can they expect that Belarusians will support these sanctions.»

The union leader also suggested that the Foreign Ministry of Belarus «publish the names of those European politicians who voted for the extension of sanctions against this country. Let their names go down in history. And someday there will be a time when they and their descendants will be ashamed of such actions.»

GEORGIA: UNIONS COMBATTING LABOR CODE

The Georgian Trade Union Confederation (GTUC) held a protest action outside the House of Parliament. Participants protested against the current Labour Code and the lack of social justice in the country.

GTUC leaders said the trade union action had been organised in response to the ETUC call to make the 29th of February a Pan-European Day of Action against the austerity policies and the draft treaty on budget discipline now being developed by the European Union. The European trade unions appealed to European Council members who will held their session from 1–2 March 2012 urging them to solve the problem of unemployment, and adhere to the principles of social justice.

Participants in the Georgian protest action said their country's trade unions were part and parcel of the European trade union movement and fully shared their demands.

Union activists defiantly burnt a brochure with the text of the Labour Code in front of the Parliament, as they believe it does not hold water, nor does it protect workers' rights, and, in fact, legitimises slavery.

KAZAKHSTAN: FTURK SUPPORTS PRESIDENTIAL MESSAGE

On the 30th of January 2012, the Executive Committee of the Federation of Trade Unions of the Republic of Kazakhstan (FTURK) issued an appeal to trade unions members, trade unions organisations, and the social partners in connection with President Nazarbayev's message to the nation entitled «Socio-economic modernisation is the main development vector for Kazakhstan.»

The appeal notes that the FTURK, as the largest element of the country's civil society, is strongly involved in the building of a welfare state in

Kazakhstan, and for this reason supports the President's message. The unions will take an active part in the implementation of the presidential address, particularly in what concerns the new job-creation programmes, the provision of citizens with affordable housing, the improvement of education and health care, economic modernization, and the development of the national industrial potential.

The primary objective of trade unions at all levels is to participate in improving labour force mobility, and building an efficient system of professional training and employment, along with creating new jobs in cooperation with employers. Trade unions consider it necessary to increase the minimum wage up to the size of the minimum consumer budget, reform the system of work remuneration in the public sector, prevent job losses and a fall in wages and salaries, and insist on strict compliance with the General Agreement for 2012-14, regional and sectoral accords, and collective agreements.

KAZAKHSTAN: UNION ACTIVISTS APPROVE GCTU ACTIVITY

Speaking to a gathering of trade union activists in Astana 28 February 2012, Vladimir Scherbakov, General Secretary of the General Confederation of Trade Unions, delivered a report on the activities of the GCTU Executive Committee and Council in 2007-12.

Participants endorsed the work done by the Confederation in the period after the GCTU 6th Congress in September 2007, stressing that it had contributed to further consolidation of the GCTU affiliates and to the unification of their

efforts in protecting workers' social and labour rights and interests.

KYRGYZSTAN UNIONS GET NEW LEADER

The Council of the Kyrgyzstan Federation of Trade Unions (KFTU) elected Asylbek Toktogulov as the new President of the KFTU, on a competitive basis.

Born in 1954, Asylbek Toktogulov, an ethnic Kyrgyz, has a higher education, PhD, majoring in physics/ He has been Chairman of the Central Committee of the Education and Science Workers' Union of Kyrgyzstan since September 2000.

Brother Toktogulov has made a great contribution to the development of the trade union movement in the industry and the improvement of the education in his country. He has also invested much effort in the protection of labour rights and social interests of education workers, established close links with fraternal trade unions in former Soviet republics and with international trade union organisations of education workers.

MOLDOVA: WORKERS SHOULD NOT PAY THEIR OWN SICK LEAVE

«Workers in Moldova do not have to pay for their sick leave from their pockets, as the new changes in the legislation would have it,» said Oleg Budza, President of the National Trade Union Confederation of Moldova (CNSM).

He recalled that CNSM had filed a lawsuit with the Constitutional Court

demanding cancellation of the governmental decision pledging workers to pay the first day of their own sick leave.

According to him, «people often get sick because of improper working conditions resulting from the insufficient heating, malfunction of equipment, air pollution in the workplace, etc.»

CNSM Vice President Mihai Hincu believes the situation has emerged as a result of the agreement reached by the Moldovan government and the International Monetary Fund that the number of sick leave days paid by the employee must be increased with every passing year, which is fundamentally inconsistent with human rights

RUSSIA: FNPR TO SUPPORT PUTIN FOR PRESIDENT

The General Council of the Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Russia (FNPR) held its meeting in Moscow 25 January 2012 to discuss whether trade unions should give support to Vladimir Putin's candidacy in the forthcoming presidential election campaign.

FNPR President Mikhail Shmakov made a report on the Federation's position in the election. He explained the unions should be involved in the political process and, in particular, in the presidential election campaign.

«Unions have never been indifferent to who will make decisions in the legislature – he said. – For trade unions it is crucial to know what rules will govern the Russian economy and in

which direction country's social policies will move. All these parameters depend on who and in what way influences those in power, and who and how will form the elected authorities. If what I've said is policy, the unions have no right to cast it at the mercy of street protest passion or political demagogues.»

The General Council decided that FNPR would support Vladimir Putin as the candidate for President of the Russian Federation.

The affiliated organisations were requested to reach out to their members and make them aware of the decision to vote for Vladimir Putin in the presidential election 4 March 2012.

Within the framework of the All-Russia National Front, the unions will take part in collective actions, rallies, and the collection of mandates and signatures and mandates in support of Putin.

General Council instructed the FNPR Executive Committee to analyse and summarise the mandates and wishes collected at workers' rallies and meetings, and communicate them to the candidate.

UKRAINE: PREMIER MEETS WITH UNION ACTIVISTS

The most urgent problems pertaining to socio-economic development, enhancing the welfare and safety of citizens, regulating labour relations, and strengthening the interaction between trade unions and the government in the context of large-scale reforms were discussed at a meeting of Ukraine's Prime Minister Mykola

Azarov with representatives of national trade unions held 27 January 2012 in Kyiv .

The discussion centred on the ways of strengthening social dialogue between state authorities and trade unions in the process of implementing reforms in the economic and social sphere.

The meeting took place as a follow-up to an earlier working meeting of the Prime Minister with Yury Kulyk, President of the Federation of Trade Unions of Ukraine (FPU) and Head of the Joint Representative Body of Trade Unions, who in his opening remark pointed to the positive developments in the cooperation with the central executive power bodies, in particular, with the Cabinet of Ministers.

Mr Azarov said he was confident that the cooperation of the Government with employers and trade unions would speed up the pace of socio-economic reforms, and help improve the lives of working people and provide them with decent living conditions.

The Prime Minister drew the attention of those present to the fact that «six million Ukrainian workers lack trade union, legal or state protection. It is not clear if they have any employment contracts or safety at work, how they will get social protection in the event of disability, in what way their pensions will be calculated, and so on.» Now, he said, the task of the Government and the unions was to find a solution to this problem.

In conclusion, Yury Kulyk handed the Prime Minister a summary list of trade union proposals. Appropriate instructions will be given to look into them,

and a wide range of trade unionists will be informed of the results.

UKRAINE: PRESIDENT TALKS WITH FPU LEADER

President of Ukraine Viktor Yanukovich met with the FPU leader Yury Kulyk 10 February 2012. During the meeting the President said it was important to expand social dialogue between the Government, the trade unions and the employers to help implement the socio-economic reforms aiming to improve people's lives.

He stressed that the government were aware of the significant role of trade unions as representatives of civil society, especially in what concerns the realisation and protection of workers' labour and socio-economic rights.

The FPU President raised some topical issues, such as improving the social component of Ukraine's state budget of for 2012, the legalization of employment, the settlement of wage arrears, occupational health and safety, and the need for an effective combination of state and public control over observance of labour legislation, poverty reduction etc.

Yuriy Kulyk said the meeting had also touched on wage raises, employment, rehabilitation of enterprises. «And, of course, we discussed the development of civil society, and, in this context, the ways to enhance the role of trade unions », he added.

TUI «BUILDER» FILLS TWENTY

The International Confederation of Construction and Building Materials

Workers' Unions (TUI «Builder») held a scientific and action-oriented conference in Moscow 19 January 2012 to celebrate its 20th anniversary.

In his keynote report, President of the TUI «Builder» Guennady Arzhanov described in detail the history of the Confederation, analysed past experiences, highlighted achievements and successful joint actions, dwelt on the difficulties and unresolved problems, and formulated the main tasks for the future.

The speaker praised the role of the General Confederation of Trade Unions (GCTU), as a regional trade union centre, in the organisation and development of the trade union movement in the Newly Independent States. A great deal of TUI «Builder» activities were held as part of solidarity actions under organised by the GCTU.

GCTU General Secretary Vladimir Scherbakov addressed the conference with a GCTU activity report for the period since its 6th Congress in September 2007.

Speaking in the debate, participants, and, above all, the leaders of industrial trade unions of Newly Independent States commended unanimously the decision taken 20 years before to set up the TUI «Builder». Since then the Confederation has proven its undeniable usefulness as a solidarity centre, as an indispensable platform for business meetings and friendly gatherings, exchange of experience, and coordination of joint actions.

In conclusion, the conference approved a resolution containing a summarised list of long-term objectives and activities for the Confederation.

Attending the event were also Viktor Karnyushin, Vice President of the GCTU and President of the Federation of Timber and Related Industries Workers' Unions of the CIS, Natalia Podshibyakina, a GCTU deputy General Secretary, and leaders of several industrial Trade Union Internationals.

20 YEARS OF EXPERIENCE OF DEVELOPING TRADE UNIONS IN OIL AND GAS INDUSTRIES

On the 16th of March 2012, Azerbaijan's capital Baku hosted a session of the Council of the International Confederation of Trade Unions of Workers in the Oil and Gas Industries, and Construction Workers in the Oil and Gas Complex, dedicated to the 20th anniversary of this trade union international.

After they heard a report by General Secretary of the Confederation, Melik Mirzoyev, Participants reviewed the progress achieved over the two decades. They also discussed preparations for a seminar for trade union leaders and activists in oil and gas enterprises to be held from 16 May to 2 June 2012, and considered the financial activities of the Confederation.

The Council elected delegates to the VII Congress of the General Confederation of Trade Unions.

The Council members heard a report by Natalia Podshibyakina, a GCTU Deputy General Secretary, «On the economic and social situation in Newly Independent States and actions of trade unions at the current stage of social development.»

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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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