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NEWS FROM THE GENERAL CONFEDERATION OF TRADE UNIONS

No.79

January-March 2013

GCTU IN SOLIDARITY WITH ETUC

In connection with the 40th Anniversary of the European Trade Union Confederation marked 7 February 2013, the leader of the General Confederation of Trade Unions (GCTU) Vladimir Scherbakov sent ETUC General Secretary Bernadette Segol a message of solidarity that reads as follows.

"Dear Sister Bernadette Segol,

"Speaking for the General Confederation of Trade Unions (GCTU) numbering almost 50 million members, may I warmly and heartily congratulate the European Trade Union Confederation on its 40th Anniversary.

"Over the years, the ETUC has managed to unite the absolute majority of trade unions in Western, Central and South-Eastern Europe to become a most important actor in the world trade union movement,

recognised as an integral part of the European political landscape. This was possible due to the principled position it had always been taking on issues of concern to Europe's workers, and the ability to respond promptly to new developments in the Continent.

"The struggle the ETUC has been waging to add an effective social dimension to the European construction in a new political context deserves special respect. To achieve this goal, it has been making efforts to promote a social Europe, enhance social dialogue, implement the idea of a Social Contract for Europe, and protect human and labour rights. These activities are largely consonant with the challenges that the GCTU is facing in its own region. It is noteworthy that, while celebrating its 40th Anniversary, the ETUC not only reviews proudly its attainments, but also sets new tasks for the future, including the decision of the most crucial problem of eliminating unemployment.

"We express our fraternal solidarity with the struggle of the European Trade Union Confederation for a socially just Europe, in defence of the worker's dignity. We sincerely wish you and your colleagues further success, and express our confidence in the future positive development of friendly links between our two Confederations and their affiliates".

GCTU COMMISSION WANTS FAIR TAXES

The GCTU Commission for the Protection of Workers' Social and Economic Interests and for Legal Issues met in Moscow 27 February 2013 to discuss the problem of fair taxation in the CIS states, as proposed by the Federation of Trade Unions of Ukraine (FPU). The background reports were presented by GCTU Deputy General Secretary Natalia Podshibyakina and Head of the FPU Department of Budget Policy and Social Protection Lyudmyla Ostapenko.

There is the unanimous consent among the unions that the wealthy segments of the population have to pay higher taxes and in this way assume their share of social responsibility for the plight of low-income citizens.

The Commission decided that the analytical paper on fair taxation would be sent out to the GCTU-affiliated national trade union centres for them to update it.

Participants also heard and approved the information on the draft recommendations for harmonising the work remuneration legislations in the member states of the Eurasian Economic Community, and decided to submit the document to the forthcoming session of the GCTU Executive Committee.

Commission reviewed the preliminary results of socio-economic development in the Commonwealth countries in 2012. The GCTU Department for the Protection of Workers' Socio-Economic Interests was asked to prepare an analytical report on the matter, with due regard for the exchange of views, and present it to the session of the GCTU Council in April 2013.

GCTU DELEGATION ATTENDS CIS ECONOMIC COUNCIL

A delegation comprising GCTU Vice-President and Chair of the Federation of CIS Timber and Forest Workers' Unions Viktor Karnyushin, GCTU Deputy General Secretary Natalia Podshibyakina, and Deputy Head of the GCTU Department for the Protection of Workers' Socio-Economic Interests Eugene Novozhilov attended the 57th session of the Economic Council of the Commonwealth of Independent States that took place in Moscow 15 March 2013.

The meeting discussed a wide range of draft documents relating to the cooperation of CIS countries in the field of economy, in

particular, the draft agreement on the prevention and suppression of wildfires in the border areas, developed with the active involvement of the Federation of CIS Timber and Forest Workers' Unions.

The delegation also participated in the International Economic Forum on "Challenges of our times and the prospects for the development of integration in the Commonwealth of Independent States" held in Moscow's World Trade Centre.

As she spoke at one of the Forum's workshops, Natalia Podshibyakina stressed that the slogan of modernisation and innovative development of the economy highlighted the development and efficient use of labour potential.

"The formation of an innovative economy must be based on issues related to improving the quality of human capital. And this basis should be built by joint efforts of government, business and, of course, trade unions. What concerns the unions, they are ready for such work", she said in conclusion.

AZERBAIJAN: AHIK HOLDS 4TH CONGRESS

A Deputy General Secretary of the General Confederation of Trade Unions, Valery Yuryev, took part in the 4th Congress of the Azerbaijan Trade Unions Confederation (AHIK) held in the country's capital Baku 5 February 2013.

The Congress was attended by almost 1,300 delegates of the AHIK member organisations, and also by foreign delegations from more than 40 countries, the International Labour Organisation (ILO), and the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC).

The activity report for the period under review was presented by President of the Confederation Sattar Mohbaliyev, a Member of Parliament (Milli Majlis).

He said that over the past period recruiting new members and increasing the motivation for organising had been a pressing task for AHIK. As a result of the measures taken, the membership had risen to sixteen hundred thousand.

The fight for decent wages was another priority for AHIK and its affiliates, and the Confederation should continue its efforts to improve the quality of life for its members. A guaranteed minimum wage had a leading role to play in the struggle for higher pay. "Over the past five years, the minimum wage in Azerbaijan has increased from 60 to 93.5 manats (1 manat = 1.29 U.S. dollars). But it is still below the subsistence minimum. The Trade Union Confederation keeps recalculating the subsistence minimum four times a year, based on approved methods and government statistics. If necessary, we send this information to state authorities. Our estimates show that as of 1 October 2012 this figure should have been 182 manats for work-

ers, 96.6 manats for pensioners, and 115.2 manats for children", said Sattar Mohbaliyev.

The AHIK President told Congress that the Council of the Azerbaijan Trade Unions Confederation had decided to support the candidacy of the acting President Ilham Aliyev in the upcoming presidential election.

As a result of the vote, Sattar Mohbaliyev was re-elected President of AHIK for another five years.

BELARUS PRESIDENT MEETS UNION LEADER

During the meeting held 25 February 2013, the leader of the Federation of Trade Unions of Belarus (FPB) Leonid Kozik informed the country's President of the activities of the national trade union centre, and its current priorities and plans for the future.

President Lukashenko expressed support for the work being done by FPB to protect the interests of employees and bring their working and living conditions in line with modern requirements. Of special importance was, in particular, the problem of providing workers with hot meals, and observance of temperature regime in production facilities, both in winter and in summer.

Much attention was devoted to the establishment of trade union or-

ganisations in enterprises of private ownership. The Head of State said this work should be more energetic, while any attempts by owners and employers to create obstacles in this regard were simply unacceptable.

GEORGIA: NEW GOVERNMENT LAUNCHES AMENDMENTS TO LABOUR CODE

A presentation of draft amendments to the current labour legislation was held in Tbilisi 25 January 2013. Attending the event were representatives of the legislature, the government, the employers' organisations, the Georgian Trade Union Confederation, international organizations, and the diplomatic corps.

Before the presentation was launched, the Minister of Justice of Georgia, Thea Tsulukiani, told reporters that the employers should not expect the amended Labour Code to be focused solely on their interests.

According to her, most criticism, both inside and outside the country, has been directed against the provision of the current Labour Code allowing the employer to dismiss employees without giving any reason or argumentation. The new draft changes the provision completely.

"Indeed, today there is no text in Georgia that deserves to be called a Labour Code. So we have had

meetings with the trade unions, the employers, and international organisations, and have developed a new draft. Its main idea adds up to the following: in the future, no employer will have the right to fire an employee just on a whim, without explaining the reason. Oral forms of labour relations will be replaced by written ones, and more detailed at that", said Thea Tsulukiani.

KAZAKHSTAN: FPRK ELECTS NEW LEADER

At its session in Astana 28 January 2013, the General Council of the Federation of Trade Unions of the Republic of Kazakhstan (FPRK) relieved Siyazbek Mukashev of his responsibilities as FPRK President at his own request. The General Council expressed their thanks to Bro Mukashev for his long-term and fruitful service on this post.

The General Council consisting of leading representatives of the FPRK regional affiliates and industrial trade unions, elected Abalgazi Kusainov, former Akim (Head) of the Karaganda region, a new leader of the Federation.

Kazakhstan's President Nursultan Nazarbayev, who was present at the event, approved of the choice made, and congratulated Abalgazi Kusainov on his election. He also thanked Siyazbek Mukashev for his contribution to the social development of the country, and said the newly elected FPRK President had

extensive experience in a great deal of areas.

The Head of State reminded that the country was facing the challenges of modernisation in line with the so-called Strategy "Kazakhstan-2050", which imposes a serious responsibility on the Federation of Trade Unions.

"I am convinced the Federation and all its affiliates will find their own specific ways to get strongly involved in the implementation of the Strategy "Kazakhstan-2050". I have given instructions to draft a new Law "On Trade Unions", and the Federation should take a most proactive part in this legislative work. The new law must be regarded as part of our labour legislation, specifically in conjunction with the mechanisms of interaction between trade unions, employers and the government. The new law is called upon to significantly strengthen the constructive role of trade unions in our society", he said.

In his message to Abalgazi Kusainov, GCTU General Secretary Vladimir Scherbakov congratulated him on his election and expressed good wishes for success in his work.

KYRGYZSTAN: KFTU STANDS FOR REFORMS

Modernisation of trade unions, and the revitalisation and re-shaping of their bodies were the main items on the agenda of the Council of

the Kyrgyzstan Federation of Trade Unions (KFTU) which met 28 February 2013. A number of decisions were taken to this effect to help radically enhance the efficiency of the country's trade unions.

Speaking to the Council session, KFTU President Asylbek Toktogulov identified several priorities for future activity and outlined the ways to speedily achieve the goals set. He said that the current need for a radical change in the trade union movement of Kyrgyzstan was clear to all, from sectoral trade union leaders to rank and file members.

The session approved a near-term plan, in line with the strategic objective of trade union modernization, which in particular aims to:

- ensure further social dialogue between workers, employers and the government;
- increase the impact of trade unions on decisions taken by the legislative and the executive authorities to achieve a higher level of protection of workers' rights and interests; and
- choose the best options for the organisational structure, improve the work with personnel, and promote a stronger involvement of youth in trade union activities.

MOLDOVA: CNSM REJECTS AMENDMENT PROPOSALS

The National Trade Union Confederation of Moldova (CNSM) spoke out against the proposed

amendment of several articles of the Labour Code and the Law on Trade Unions, submitted to the Parliament of Moldova jointly by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, the National Confederation of Employers of Moldova, and the European Business Association.

The amendments apply to dismissals of unionised workers, and guarantees for persons elected to trade union bodies.

CNSM described the arguments put forward as unfounded, and pointed out that some of the provisions would come into collision with the requirements of a market economy, the principle of free competition, and international law, which Moldova must adhere to.

The Confederation drew the attention of competent authorities to the Tripartite Declaration of Principles concerning Multinational Enterprises and Social Policy, adopted by the ILO Governing Body in November 1977, which says that "where governments of host countries offer special incentives to attract foreign investment, these incentives should not include any limitation of the workers' freedom of association or the right to organise and bargain collectively".

CNSM will rebuff any attempts to amend the Labour Code and the Law on Trade Unions aiming to undermine labour rights and the interests of union members and their representatives.

RUSSIA: FNPR REVIEWS FULFILMENT OF GENERAL AGREEMENT

At its session 27 January 2013, the Executive Committee of the Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Russia (FNPR) reviewed the implementation of the current General Agreement in 2012, and discussed the concept of the agreement for a new period, and the ways to develop the personnel potential of trade unions.

The discussion showed that both the national trade union centres, the national associations of employers, and the Government had made significant and successful contributions towards the realisation of the General Agreement signed for 2011–2013. Particularly, the work intensity of the Russian Tripartite Commission (RTC) had increased, and the control over the execution of decisions taken had been made stricter.

"For the first time ever, consultations with trade unions on the federal budget for the next fiscal period began in the interval between submitting proposals to the Government and making decisions on them, in strict accordance with the General Agreement", said FNPR Vice-President Nina Kuzmina.

RUSSIA'S PRESIDENT WELCOMES UNION INVOLVEMENT

At a regular working meeting held in Moscow 5 March 2013,

Russia's President Vladimir Putin and the leader of the Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Russia (FNPR) Mikhail Shmakov discussed the work of the Russian Tripartite Commission (RTC) for Regulating Social and Labour Relations.

President Putin noted with satisfaction the active involvement of FNPR in RTC activity both at federal and regional levels: "This task is not easy, in fact, it is very difficult, for it often implies coming to difficult compromises. But it is this work that helps us create a situation of stability between employers, employees, and official government agencies. This is a kind of systems work that we have been building for the past few years, and I believe it to be extremely important".

According to Mikhail Shmakov, this is a fairly efficient system that allows to solve most issues through negotiations ... "Of course, there are examples when some employers or employers' organisations try to find themselves comfortable partners and conclude sort of separate branch agreements with some small groups of employees. We don't believe this right, and we fight against this within the RTC frameworks", he said.

Russian President and the union leader agreed on the necessity to adopt a law encouraging employers to become members of sectoral employers' organisations.

RUSSIA: FNPR TO IMPROVE ITS STRUCTURE?

The FNPR Executive Committee met in Moscow 6 March 2013 to approve the proposed date and agenda of the upcoming session of the FNPR General Council to be held on May 22.

Participants also considered the tasks of trade unions in upgrading the national qualifications system, May Day actions, participation of FNPR affiliates in organising sports activities, etc.

Speaking to the meeting, a FNPR Vice President Galina Kelekhsayeva suggested that May Day-2013 should be observed by trade unions with marches and rallies under the common slogan "Decent Work, Decent Wage!"

The Executive Committee decided that participants in the action should put forward demands highlighting the protection of workers' socio-economic and labour rights, such as decent wages, productive employment, work safety, and respect for the right to organise.

The need to improve the structure of the Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Russia was emphasised in the address by FNPR President Mikhail Shmakov. For this purpose, a working group was set up to prepare proposals for relevant system changes to be introduced into the FNPR Charter.

RUSSIA: MOSCOW ELECTS NEW UNION LEADER

The Council of the Moscow Federation of Trade Unions (MFP), the largest member organisation of FNPR, met 28 March 2013. Following the recommendation of the MFP Presidium, participants elected Sergey Chernov President of MFP. Prior to the election, he was the First Vice President of the Russian Trade Union of Railway Workers and Transport Builders.

The Council had earlier granted the application of Mikhail Nagaitsev who had asked to be released from the post of MFP President.

UKRAINE: FPU APPEALS TO PREMIER

Based on the operational data from affiliates about wage arrears in individual enterprises, President of the Federation of Trade Unions of Ukraine (FPU) Yury Kulyk appealed to Ukraine's Prime Minister Mykola Azarov urging him to help settle the problem.

The appeal warns that the wage debts to employees of state-owned enterprises, together with their unacceptably poor repayment, may provoke the spread of wage arrears to enterprises in other forms of ownership.

The letter is accompanied by information on the dynamics of repayment of wage debts in the most problematic debtor companies as

of 01.01.2013, and on the reasons preventing the elimination of such a shameful phenomenon as delays in wage payment.

UKRAINE: TIME TO ACT

Topical issues related to the development of a more constructive social dialogue and a safer protection of workers' socio-economic rights and interests were discussed at the meeting of the Presidium of the Federation of Trade Unions of Ukraine (FPU) 28 February 2013.

A sizeable part of debate focused on the solution of social and economic problems, and on stronger trade union involvement in the process. To ensure direct participation of trade unions in shaping the fiscal policy for 2014, Presidium decided to approve FPU's proposals for the draft Guidelines of the Budgetary Policy, and send them to the Ministry of Finance, for them to be taken into account when preparing the above document.

Participants approved the union proposals concerning the determination of the minimum wage amount for 2014, and further steps to be taken by FPU to help implement industry-specific standards of work remuneration. They also considered collective bargaining practices, based on the experiences gained by several FPU affiliates.

The package of issues discussed by Presidium included illegal em-

ployment, the informal economy, and training labour inspectors. The session reviewed the events organised by FPU as part of the Year of Trade Union Struggle against illegal, precarious and atypical employment, shadow payrolls, agency contract labour, and other violations of labour and trade union rights

The Presidium discussed a whole number of other current events in trade union life.

TUI OF STATE & PUBLIC EMPLOYEES GETS NEW AFFILIATE

The International Trade Union Federation of State and Public Service Employees (MFP) decided to affiliate the Union of Public Employees of Israel.

The Board of the Israeli organisation had made the decision to join MFP in October 2012, and, thereupon, the chairperson of the union, Ariel Jacobi, sent an application for admission in a letter to the Council of the Federation.

Based on this application and in accordance with the MFP Charter, the Council decided to accept the Union of Public Employees of Israel as a member of the International Trade Union Federation of State and Public Service Employees as from 1 January 2013.

The Chair of the new member organisation was elected to the Council of the Federation.

PUBLISHED BY
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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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