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NEWS FROM THE GENERAL CONFEDERATION OF TRADE UNIONS

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GCTU HAILS CGTP-IN 13TH CONGRESS

The General Confederation of Trade Unions (GCTU) sent a message of solidarity to all participants in the 13th Congress of the General Confederation of Portuguese Workers-National Intersindical (CGTP-IN) held in Almada from 25-27 February 2016.

“Forty-six years have passed since the historical moment, – the message says, – when Portuguese workers set up their own independent trade union centre, the National Intersindical, that has played a crucial role in mobilising the masses for the fight against the fascist dictatorship, and actively contributed towards the success of the April 1974 Revolution.

“The history of the National Intersindical is a history of struggle by working people of Portugal for their political and socio-economic rights, trade union freedoms, peace and democracy, and against colonialism,

racial discrimination, xenophobia, inequality and social exclusion.

“At all stages of this struggle, the CGTP-IN has remained true to its traditions, democratic ideals, and the principles of international workers’ solidarity.

“In this troubled world, the international trade union movement needs, as never before, solidarity to put an end to the growing dominance of transnational corporations and international financial institutions. Only by acting as a united front, will we be able to rebuff the attacks on workers’ rights, and stop the spreading poverty and inequality.

“The current surge of terrorism in the Middle East, instigated by ISIL, threatens to become a global disaster. The resultant massive influx of refugees into Europe has created new social tensions in the receiving states, and provoked the revival of hatred, intolerance and xenophobia. All this has aggravated the already tense, complicated atmosphere

lately prevailing on this continent and elsewhere in the world.

“In this situation, the struggle for peace, security, and alleviation of political and military tensions becomes particularly urgent for workers. We are positive that trade unions of our countries will be making a significant contribution towards an early achievement of these objectives.

“Let us assure you, dear Brothers and Sisters, that the GCTU and its affiliates are willing to continue and strengthen the links of friendship and fraternal cooperation with CGTP-IN and its sectoral federations in the name of peace and security, decent work and the triumph of social justice.”

GCTU HORRIFIED AT TERRORIST ATTACKS IN BRUSSELS

The GCTU issued a statement 22 March 2016 in connection with the terrorist attacks in Brussels, which reads as follows:

“The General Confederation of Trade Unions bitterly condemns the horrific acts of mass terror committed 22 March 2016 at Brussels’ airport and metro claiming a large number of human lives, and causing injuries, pain and suffering to dozens of people.

“We express our sincere condolences to the families, relatives and friends of those killed and injured by the barbaric attacks on innocent

civilians, and wish the wounded a speedy recovery. We hope Belgian law enforcement agencies will take comprehensive measures for rapid identification and punishment of the perpetrators of these crimes and their paymasters.

“Such inhuman acts cannot have any ideological, political or moral justification. Terrorists have once again clearly showed the world their bloodthirsty nature.

“The increasingly cruel and recurring acts of violence require urgent, resolute and coordinated response on the part of state and public figures, and the broad masses

“A reliable barrier must be set up to stop those who are inspiring, financing, arming and directing the criminals and murderers.

“A unified trade union movement together with millions of workers is expected to make their crucial contribution to the fight against this global scourge.

“The General Confederation of Trade Unions urges all people of goodwill to stand together and face up to the sprawling threat that jeopardises the very existence of human civilization.”

ARMENIA: MANAGERS, NOT WORKERS MUST DEAL WITH EMPLOYMENT AGENCIES

Deputy Chairman of the Confederation of Trade Unions of Arme-

nia (CTUA) Boris Kharatyan took part in the Conference “A favourable environment for sustainable business in Armenia” held by the ILO in Yerevan 18 February 2016.

“It is Armenian employers who should turn to employment agencies”, he said reminding that the agencies continued to charge job-seekers for their services. Meanwhile, trade unions believe that, according to ILO principles, the demand for jobs should be moving in the opposite direction, not from the employee, but from the employer. The latter should place his/her order for workforce with an employment agency, which, in its turn, should select required workers or train them. And the agency services must be paid for by the employer.

Trade unions do not consider it right for the employer to put forward requirements that have nothing to do with the applicant’s work skills, and they will insist on the abolition of paid services rendered by employment agencies, in full conformity with the principles of the International Labour Organisation.

ARMENIA: TRIPARTITE COMMISSION DISCUSSES COLLECTIVE AGREEMENT

A regular meeting of the country’s Tripartite Commission held 19 January 2016 addressed the progress of implementing the

Republican Collective Agreement for 2015-2018 signed last August.

The Confederation of Trade Unions of Armenia was represented at the meeting by CTUA Deputy Chairman Boris Kharatyan and a number of industry-based trade unions.

Following the detailed reports by experts and a thorough discussion, Commission approved the earlier agreed mutual recommendations for further actions to meet the commitments taken under the agreement.

GEORGIA: TKIBULI MINERS HALT STRIKE

On the night of 1 March 2016, over a thousand coalminers of the *Gruzugol-GIG Company* in the town of Tkibuli ended the strike for higher wages and better working conditions that lasted for 16 days.

The agreement between the strike committee and the company managers was reached after seven-hour negotiations involving Georgia’ Business Ombudsman Giorgi Gakharia and President of the Georgian Trade Unions Confederation Irakli Petriashvili.

“The negotiating parties agreed that the total payroll of *Gruzugol-GIG* would be increased by five per cent. However, the wages of miners and workers on high-risk jobs would be raised by more than

five per cent,” Giorgi Gakharia told journalists.

The Business Ombudsman added that, as agreed, the production in Tkibuli mines must be completely restarted no later than 1 March 2016.

KAZAKHSTAN: FTURK IN PROCESS OF CHANGE

The leaders of the Federation of Trade Unions of the Republic of Kazakhstan (FTURK) and sectoral trade unions gave a press briefing in Astana 11 February 2016 to present the union view on social modernisation and the new Labour Code.

FTURK President Abulgazi Kusainov told journalists the new labour legislation had opened up wide vistas both for employers and employees, as the collective bargaining was now the legal basis of labour relationships.

“The country has already started building these relationships, as a number of large enterprises and companies have entered into collective agreements in accordance with the requirements of the new Labour Code”, he said.

Among the priority tasks to be accomplished by the Trade Union Federation, Bro Kusainov mentioned the explanation of Labour Code regulations to union members, the training of trade union activists, and rendering them methodologi-

cal assistance in the development of framework documents regulating the labour relations.

In the meantime, the Republican Tripartite Commission on Social Partnership and Regulation of Social and Labour Relations met in Astana 16 March 2016 to consider the state of labour relations in the regions.

According to local executive bodies, the arrears of wages have decreased by 112.8 million tenge as against the beginning of the year (when it was 275.7 million) and today amounted to 162.9 million tenge.

KAZAKHSTAN: FTURK SUMMARISES UNION INVOLVEMENT IN ELECTIONS

The FTURK Executive Committee held an enlarged meeting 28 March 2016 to sum up the involvement of trade unions in the elections of the Lower House of Parliament and representative local authorities.

Addressing the session, FTURK President Abulgazi Kusainov said: “Over the last few years this country has undergone several important legal reforms; we have got the Law on Trade Unions, the new Labour Code, and the Law on Public Councils. These acts have enhanced the role and responsibility of trade unions as a major actor in social partnership, and given them ample opportuni-

ties for exercising their rights and powers.”

The elections were a most significant national event; and the Federation of Trade Unions made a remarkable contribution towards their success, while fully implementing the provisions of its Statutes adopted by FTURK 24th Congress.

According to the Central Election Commission, the country has elected a total of 3,335 members of legislative authorities at all levels, including 742 union representatives, or 22 per cent of all deputies elected. Of these, 550 people were elected to regional parliaments, with 105 of them being trade unionists, including three leaders of territorial trade union organisations.

MOLDOVA: CNSM INSISTENT ON SCALING DOWN PRICES & RATES

The National Confederation of Trade Unions of Moldova (CNSM) issued a statement 26 January 2016 insisting on an urgent session of the National Commission for Collective Bargaining and Consultation to be called to discuss the current socio-economic situation in the country.

In a letter to Prime Minister Pavel Filip, the unions demanded that the Government intervene immediately in checking up the correctness of consumer prices and oil and electricity rates, and stop the unjustified growth in the prices of

essential and socially important goods.

“According to official statistics, – the letter says, – the average nominal monthly wage was 4,613.4 lei in November 2015 and showed an increase by 5.9 per cent as against November 2014, whereas the consumer price index over the same period reached 113.5 per cent. A more difficult situation prevails among the socially vulnerable groups of the population, in particular retired people whose average old-age pension amounts to 1,191.83 lei a month, which is not enough to cover even the subsistence minimum “

The Moldovan Government has heeded to the opinion of trade unions, and CNSM issued a new statement 4 March 2016 welcoming the intention of the Government to revise the electricity rates with a view to reducing them.

CNSM has also considered the draft law on the state social insurance budget for 2016, and made a number of proposals to improve the social protection of workers and the population as a whole. They primarily relate to increasing the size of social payments and allowances, such as: the funeral benefit from 1,100 to 2,200 lei for insured persons and from 1,100 to 1,200 lei for non-insured; the lump-sum childbirth allowance from 3,100 to 6,000, etc. To reimburse the population's expenses on public utilities, CNSM insists that the cold-season allowance for 2016 should be raised to 350 lei.

MOLDOVA: AMENDMENTS TO LABOUR CODE APPROVED

On the 9th of February 2016, the Cabinet of Ministers approved the draft law on the amendments to the Moldovan Labour Code. The aim of the document, agreed with the social partners, is to bring national legislation in conformity with European standards of labour relations, and it is viewed as part of the National Plan of Actions for 2014-2016 to implement the agreement on Moldova's association with the European Union.

The proposed innovations establish a number of additional obligations for employers. Thus, before hiring new workers the employer will have to inform them about their normal working hours and days off, and the terms of dismissal notice to be observed by both parties in case of employment termination, and the commitment to respect the principle of non-discrimination against workers on a fixed-term contract.

The new amendments to the Labour Code will enter into force after their adoption by Parliament.

RUSSIA: UNION PRESENCE AT BRICS MINISTERIAL MEETING IN UFA

Representatives of trade unions and employers were invited to attend the regular meeting of the Ministers of Labour and Employment of the BRICS countries held in Ufa

(Russia) from 25-26 January 2016. The fact was regarded as further evidence of significant progress in the maintenance of social dialogue on a tripartite basis within the BRICS.

The Trade Union Forum organised during the meeting brought together delegates of seven trade union centres in the five BRICS countries. The Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Russia was represented by its President Mikhail Shmakov.

Addressing participants, Mikhail Shmakov said that 20 per cent of the economically active population in Russia were employed illegally, which had had a negative impact on the country's economic advance.

On behalf of the Trade Union Forum, the FNPR leader made a proposal that a special working group be established to deal with issues relating to the development of tripartite social dialogue within the BRICS.

As he spoke at the opening of the ministerial meeting, ILO Director-General Guy Ryder said the Organisation was ready to render technical assistance to the states of the "Five" in the development of their economic policies.

The ministerial meeting ended with the signing of a Declaration proclaiming the formalisation of the labour markets to be a priority for the BRICS countries.

RUSSIA: PRESIDENT PUTIN MEETS WITH FNPR LEADER

Russian President Vladimir Putin met with the leader of the Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Russia (FNPR) Mikhail Shmakov 9 February 2016. They discussed, among other things, the trade union view on what factors must be taken into account in the Government's Plan of Economic Actions to support the country's social and economic development in 2016.

Mikhail Shmakov proposed, in particular, that the anti-crisis plan should make provision for:

- raising the minimum work remuneration to the subsistence minimum level currently calculated for the able-bodied population;
- raising the maximum size of unemployment benefit to the subsistence minimum level of the able-bodied population as a measure of partial compensation for lost wages of temporarily jobless skilled workers;
- imposing a moratorium on all decisions and initiatives of the executive power bodies in 2016 that may lead to charging increased direct and indirect duties on the population.

Vladimir Putin concluded that all issues raised were important, be it the amount of work remuneration, including the minimum wages; the maintenance of the purchasing power of the population, or the protection of workers' interests.

At a press-conference held two days later in the International News Agency "Russia Today" Mikhail Shmakov told journalists about the outcome of his meeting with the President. He said the President understood the importance of the FNPR proposals and had instructed the relevant departments of his Administration to go into details together with the unions.

RUSSIA: FNPR AUTHORITIES IN SESSION

The Executive Committee of the Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Russia (FNPR) held a regular meeting 17 February 2016.

Committee members reviewed the progress of the ongoing election campaign in the sectoral trade unions and territorial trade union associations, discussed the candidates for chairpersons of member organisations, and took the decision to convene the FNPR General Council.

The FNPR General Council met in Moscow 2 March 2016 to discuss trade union actions in the current situation, the FNPR proposals for the Concept of the General Agreement to be signed by the central organisations of employers and trade unions and the Russian Government for a new period, and the implementation of decisions taken by the FNPR 9th Congress.

The report by FNPR President Mikhail Shmakov said that in 2015 the Russian economy had shown a record drop for the past seven years. In particular, the real wages fell by 9.5 per cent, and the cash incomes of the population by 4.0 per cent, while the arrears of wages jumped up by 61 per cent

General Council believe that trade union organisations should concentrate on the situation. Any attempt to freeze wages, leave them without indexation or review the collective agreement should be regarded as a cause for a painstaking investigation.

TAJKISTAN: FNPT SUMS UP

At its enlarged plenary session 15 January 2016, the General Council of the Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Tajikistan (FNPT) summed up the results of its activity in 2015 and drew up the guidelines for 2016.

Speaking to the session, FNPT President Sherkhon Salimzoda said the Federation had made a considerable effort to boost its activity and strengthen its financial situation.

The budget approved for 2016 is four times as high as in 2014. Greater assistance had been given to the students' unions, with more than 200 students receiving trade unions grants.

In 2015, over four thousand recreation camps for children were built in the countryside providing rest facilities for more than 350 thousand Tajikistan children and teenagers.

General Council approved the Guidelines for FNPT Activity in 2016 aiming to protect the labour, economic, social, and cultural rights and interests of workers and their families.

Soon after the session, Sherkhon Salimzoda had been given a government assignment as Director of the Drug Control Agency under the President of Tajikistan, and left the trade union movement.

UKRAINE: FPU REJECTS TRAINING REFORMS

On the 5th of February 2016, the Federation of Trade Unions of Ukraine (FPU) launched a public appeal to President Petro Poroshenko, Chair of the Supreme Rada Vasyl Groysman and Prime Minister Arseny Yatsenyuk.

The appeal came as a result of the catastrophic situation that had evolved in Ukraine's system of vocational training after the adoption of the Law "On the State Budget of Ukraine for 2016".

Article 27 of the Law stipulates that, by 1 January 2016, the Cabinet of Ministers should delegate the funding of workforce training in vocational schools and

other educational establishments down to local budgets. However, the mechanisms for transferring vocational schools from central to local financing had not yet been developed.

The FPU believes all this will have irreversible consequences that may ruin the system of vocational training in Ukraine, something that will impact negatively on the national economy and defence capabilities.

The Federation suggests that:

- in 2016 financing of vocational training by the Government should be continued in the form of educational subventions from the central budget to local ones; and
- a three-year transition period (2016-2018) be established to optimise the vocational training network.

Meanwhile, the Joint Representative Body (JRB) of All-Ukraine Trade Unions met 4 February 2016 in Kyiv to discuss the above issue among many others.

Participants in the session had a heated and principled debate about the eventual changes in the procedure of setting the fare rates for municipal electric transport (the metro). Speakers made different proposals in an attempt to find a solution to this problem that is of concern for a great many of Ukrainians.

JRB Chairperson Hryhory Osovy informed the session about the

grim situation in the sphere of compulsory state social insurance. The Session decided to delegate representatives of all-national trade unions to the Commission dealing with the restructuring of the social insurance funds.

UKRAINE: FPU CONGRESS MEETS IN KYIV

The Federation of Trade Unions of Ukraine (FPU) held its 7th Congress 24 March 2016 in Kyiv involving over a thousand participants, including delegates from 43 national industry-based unions and all regional trade union organisations.

Congress set the priorities of the Federation for the nearest future, and mapped out a strategy for upgrading and developing the FPU and its affiliates.

FPU President Hryhory Osovy in his activity report, and other delegates in their contributions to the debate, highlighted the fact that the Federation had managed to rally around itself the entire trade union movement in Ukraine. The result was that the country's five most representative trade union centres had developed a common platform and spoken in one voice.

The Congress accepted as satisfactory the work done by the FPU Council over the reporting period, adopted the Strategy for FPU Activity in 2016-21 entitled "The

European Choice”, and elected Hryhory Osovy FPU President for another five-year term in office.

The GCTU sent a solidarity message to Congress participants, that reads as follows:

“The General Confederation of Trade Unions greets cordially the delegates to the FPU 7th Congress and wishes them fruitful deliberations.

“FPU is carrying out its activity in full solidarity with trade unions in our region and elsewhere in the world. The Federation has been making a considerable contribution to GCTU activities, and participating actively in the development of friendship and cooperation among our affiliates.

“We express our many thanks to the wonderful and highly skilled trade union officers and activists at all levels of the Ukrainian trade union movement for the devotion to their duty, and their sincere care for workers’ needs, for the future of the country’s trade unions.”

HOUSING AND UTILITY UNIONS DISCUSS PRIVATISATION

Natalia Podshibyakina, a GCTU Deputy General Secretary, attended and addressed an international seminar on “The challenges facing public-private partnership (PPP) in the sphere of housing, utility and public services” joint-

ly organised 8 February 2016 in Moscow by the Russian Trade Union of Life Support Workers and the Norwegian Union of Municipal and Service Employees “Fagforbundet”.

After the welcoming speech by Chairman of the Russian union Alexander Vasilevsky, participants held debates on the development of public-private partnership (PPP). In particular, the Fagforbundet representative Hallvard Bakke made a report on how PPP impacts on the finance, and why trade unions and authorities at all levels should be made aware of this.

The seminar also discussed the problem of privatising public service enterprises. Participants made attempts to find the answers to questions like: “Are there winners and losers in the course of privatisation?” or “Will it be possible to reverse the process later?”

When the discussion was over, participants summed up the results and closed the seminar.

MK NGSP HOLDS CONGRESS IN BAKU

On the 21st of February 2016, Azerbaijan’s capital Baku hosted a Congress of the International Confederation of Trade Unions of Workers in the Oil and Gas Industries and Construction Workers in the Oil and Gas Complex (MK NGSP) attended by 24 delegates, representing the MK NGSP af-

filiates from Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Moldova, and Russia.

Delegates reviewed and adopted additions and amendments to the Confederation's Statutes, and specified the name of the organisation, its institutional and legal status, and the composition, formation procedure and functions of its governing bodies.

Lev Mironov of Russia was elected President of the Confederation and Melik Mirzoyev, General Secretary.

The Congress showed that all member-organisations were unanimous in their desire to further strengthen the unity of the industry's trade unions, and fight jointly for the rights and vital interests of workers.

GCTU General Secretary Vladimir Scherbakov sent participants a message of solidarity saying:

"The General Confederation of Trade Unions hails warmly the delegates of the 2nd Congress of the International Confederation of Trade Unions of Workers in the Oil and Gas Industries and Construction Workers in the Oil and Gas Complex and wishes them a successful congress.

"The International Confederation "MK NGSP" is actively present on the international arena. while making a remarkable contribution to GCTU activity.

"We are positive that this Congress of yours will bring constructive and fruitful results that will help the Confederation to continue efficiently its multifaceted activity to protect workers' social and economic interests".

RUSSIA: RAILWAY WORKERS' CONGRESS

The 32nd Congress of the Railway Workers and Transport Builders Union of Russia (ROSPROFZHEL) was held in Moscow 24 March 2016 attended by 257 delegates and 275 invitees. The latter included representatives of FNPR, other Russian industry-based trade unions and numerous public sector organisations, as well as the Open Joint Stock Company "Russian Railways", the Ministry of Transport, and fraternal delegates from abroad.

After listening to and discussing the activity report for the five-year period under review, Congress approved of the work done as satisfactory, and unanimously elected Nicolai Nikiforov Chairperson of ROSPROFZHEL for another term in office.

The General Confederation of Trade Unions (GCTU) sent a message of solidarity to Congress participants describing ROSPROFZHEL as "one of the strongest and most well-knit militant trade unions in Russia. Having celebrated its 110th Anniversary, it is looking ahead with confidence."

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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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