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**NEWS FROM THE GENERAL CONFEDERATION OF TRADE UNIONS**

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## **GCTU SCRUTINISES TRADE UNION PROBLEMS IN THE CIS**

Over 250 delegates from 9 CIS countries and 31 industrial Trade Union Internationals (TUIs) took part in an International Scientific and Action-oriented Conference on the Current Situation and Problems of the Trade Union Movement in CIS Countries convened by the General Confederation of Trade Unions in Moscow from 14-15 April 2006.

The conference participants included the first leaders and other trade unionists delegated by national trade union centres, TUIs, industrial and territorial unions, and workplace organisations, and representatives of trade union schools and research institutions.

Addressing the opening session, GCTU President Mikhail Shmakov said the conference was held at a crucial moment for the Commonwealth of Independent States. Although they showed some positive trends in their economic and social development, the

CIS countries were still faced up with numerous serious challenges. In that context, the conference was expected to formulate a common strategy for coordinating trade union efforts within the bounds of the CIS, enhancing all aspects of organizing activity, and broadening the workers' and trade unions' solidarity.

“What we see almost everywhere, he said, is the mass unemployment, the growth of uncontrolled exploitation of workers, and the critical situation in education, health care, social protection, occupational safety and environmental protection. The problem of delayed wages is still there. A lot of troubles arise from the migration processes, particularly from illegal migration. By many social standards, our countries bring up the rear of the UN statistics. The recent slight decline in workers' strike involvement in a number of CIS countries cannot, unfortunately, be taken as a sign of diminishing social discontent. Labour legislations in our countries often collide with international labour standards”. GCTU

President referred to the numerous facts of official interference in the unions' internal affairs and infringement on the rights of workers and trade unions by employers and state authorities.

In his keynote speech, GCTU General Secretary Vladimir Scherbakov told participants that the conference must first of all identify the reasons preventing the unions from more efficient performance, and try to find mechanisms for solving problems that may be common to the region's trade unions. Special importance should be attached to the questions of strengthening the organisational unity and solidarity of workers and their unions.

The speaker dwelt on the need to consolidate the democratic basis of trade union activity, enhance the unions' presence and influence in transnational corporations, optimise the structures of industrial unions, and strengthen the financial base of trade unions.

Improvement of motivation for union membership should be the cornerstone of organising activity. "Further shrinkage of the mass character of trade unions in the specific economic and social situations prevailing in CIS countries will inevitably limit their ability to influence socially important processes in society", Vladimir Scherbakov said. "There are a lot of small, weak unions. Quite often, they are fighting with each other for affiliation and members. No need to say this is far from being conducive to trade union unity".

The issues of organisational development of trade unions have become particularly topical today, in a globalising economy, with the growing inflow of foreign capital into the countries of the region.

Although most Commonwealth countries have now formulated the legal frameworks for trade union activity, only four of them, namely Georgia, Moldova, Russia and Ukraine, can boast of meeting the ILO requirements to an acceptable extent. Therefore, the unions in other CIS countries should focus more effort on progressing towards this end.

Vladimir Scherbakov stressed that "consolidation of activities and solidarity underlie, in actual fact, the whole policy of the GCTU, being the very reason for its existence". A good example of cooperation in the spirit of solidarity was provided by the current GCTU campaign for raising the minimum wages at least to the level of subsistence minimum. Practically all GCTU affiliates are actively involved in the campaign, which has already produced tangible results.

"In 2005, the minimum wages rose by 15 per cent in Armenia, 50 per cent in Azerbaijan, 22 per cent in Belarus, 39 per cent in Kazakhstan, 100 per cent in Moldova, 33 per cent in Russia, 71 per cent in Tajikistan, and by 40 per cent in Ukraine. Most CIS countries have narrowed the gap between the minimum pay and the subsistence minimum. The campaign has shown that when we are together, shoulder to shoulder, willing to lend a helping hand, we can face up to any chal-

lenges in our struggle to achieve better conditions for workers”, he concluded.

The conference proceeded in three workshops on: 1) *The problems of organising and the strengthening of trade union solidarity*; 2) *Trade unions and the problems of social dialogue (social partnership)*; and 3) *Information support of trade union activity*. The summaries of debates in the three workshops were presented to closing plenary session by their respective rapporteurs”. All in all, over 70 participants contributed to the debates at the plenary sessions and workshops.

At the opening plenary session participants listened to Professor Alexei Shulus, Rector of the Academy of Labour and Social Relations; Grigory Osov, Vice-President of the Federation of Trade Unions of Ukraine; Rimm Papilov, President of the International Organisation of Trade Unions of Educational and Scientific Workers; Siyazbek Mukashev, President of the Federation of Trade Unions of the Republic of Kazakhstan; Leonid Kozik, President of the Federation of Trade Unions of Belarus; Georgy Stoliarenko, President of the International Confederation of Water Transport Workers’ Unions; and Tatiana Frolova, Vice-President of the Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Russia.

The conference wound up its proceedings with the adoption of a Final Document, or Recommendations (English version available on the GCTU website at [www.vkp.ru](http://www.vkp.ru)).

Only strong, well-organised and united trade unions, the Document reads, with optimal structures, headed by a combination of experienced and young leaders, and practicing energetic and powerful policies based on solidarity, can be attractive both to workers and social partners and able to protect efficiently workers’ rights and interests and defend trade union rights and freedoms.

“At this conference we have heard different opinions, various ideas have been proposed about the future of the trade union movement in CIS countries”, Mikhail Shmakov said in conclusion. “Which is good, for this has helped us learn more about one another and come to a better understanding of what we have in common and where we differ. I believe such an open and, what is important, frank exchange of opinions will help us decide which way our organisation should proceed, and what are its real prospects in the context of cardinal changes taking place on the global trade union map”.

### **GCTU EXECUTIVE MEETS IN MOSCOW**

A session of the GCTU Executive Committee held in Moscow 15 April 2006 called on the affiliated organisations to proceed with their solidarity-based campaign for minimum wages equal to the subsistence minimum. In particular, the Executive recommended them to include slogans such as “Decent Minimum Wage Is a Step to Poverty Eradication” and “Working Person Should not Be Poor”

among their May Day demands. The campaign has been conducted by trade unions in CIS countries over the last two years by a GCTU decision.

The Executive members were satisfied that the CIS states had ratified all the eight fundamental ILO conventions. Simultaneously, they decided that the national trade union centres should build up pressure on their national parliaments to make them ratify, as soon as possible, another set of 11 ILO conventions as advised by the CIS Inter-Parliamentary Assembly in December 2004 on the initiative of the GCTU. It must be noted that the Executive Committee session has actually established a permanent mechanism through which the GCTU and its affiliates will be able to monitor the process of ratification and observance by the CIS countries of vital international labour standards.

The session also considered the use of electronic means of communication in the information interchange within the GCTU framework, and the measures to be taken for their further development. The discussion revealed that the computer facilities available to some GCTU affiliates were hardly sufficient to meet the requirements of organising an up-to-date electronic data exchange. To raise the efficiency of the information flow between the main office of the GCTU and its member-organisations, the Executive Committee suggested that practical steps be taken to build an interlinked ring of Websites belonging to GCTU affiliates.

The Executive Committee approved the outcome of the International Sci-

entific and Action-oriented Conference on the Current Situation and Problems of the Trade Union Movement in CIS Countries held in Moscow from 14-15 April 2006 (*see above*). The materials of the Conference will be published as a separate book, and its conclusions will be used in the course of preparation for the ordinary 6<sup>th</sup> GCTU Congress.

The session adopted a special GCTU Statement in connection with the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Chernobyl disaster (*see below*).

The Executive Committee confirmed the credentials of Alexander Shurikov, President of the International Federation of Transport and Road Construction Workers' Unions, who had been delegated to the Executive Committee as a representative of the industry Trade Union Internationals affiliated with the GCTU affiliates.

## **20 YEARS AFTER CHERNOBYL: GCTU WORRIED OVER THE PLIGHT OF VICTIMS**

In connection with the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Chernobyl disaster the GCTU Executive Committee issued a statement appealing to the state authorities of the CIS member-countries, world trade unions, and international nongovernmental organisations.

"Despite the large-scale measures taken by the CIS countries over the period and the humanitarian relief rendered by the world community, - the Statement says, - people are still suffering from the effects of the tragedy.

“Many medical, socio-economic and environmental problems caused by the disaster have acquired a long-term character.

“Until now, the problem of providing citizens resettled from contaminated areas with a proper living environment has not been fully solved. The rates of constructing and commissioning new dwellings, and public health, social and recreational facilities keep falling down. Thousands of people are compelled to live in what is otherwise liable to be population-free zones.

“We are particularly alarmed with the health conditions of both the inhabitants of the affected territories and the liquidators, the growing numbers of children suffering from cancer diseases, and the rise in remote medical effects threatening not only the victims, but also the subsequent generations.

“Trade unions in the Commonwealth are deeply concerned with the recent tendencies towards curtailing the social protection of Chernobyl victims, and with the plans to revise current legislation, change the criteria for assessment of contaminated areas, and strip their population of the social guarantees. The unions will further defend the victims’ vital interests and seek to ensure adequate living and working conditions for them.

“The GCTU Executive Committee regards the problems of social protection of Chernobyl victims as remaining a top priority even today. Constant care of those people must be ranked as a state policy that should make

them enjoy being full-fledged members of society.

“The GCTU Executive Committee calls on the governments of the CIS countries to focus increased attention on the social protection of Chernobyl victims, refrain from attempts to dismantle or reduce the social guarantees provided for by current legislation, ensure unconditional implementation of the respective state programmes, statutory acts and the interstate agreement of 9 September 1994 on the above issues, and promote the activity of Chernobyl public organisations.

“Considering the complicated and long-term nature of the efforts to be taken to minimise the after-effects of the Chernobyl disaster, the Executive Committee of the General Confederation of Trade Unions calls on:

- trade union bodies in the CIS countries to keep paying attention to the social protection of Chernobyl disaster victims and giving them practical assistance at all levels of management and economic activity, and show continual concern for the living and working conditions and needs of trade unionists who participated in the emergency clean-up after the accident at the Chernobyl Atomic Power Station;

- world trade unions and nongovernmental and public organisations to continue humanitarian relief to the victims of radiation, with the emphasis primarily on the neediest categories of population living in contaminated areas, children suffering from the after-effects of the disaster, and liquidators”.



## **FRATERNAL SOLIDARITY WITH UKRAINIAN UNIONS**

GCTU President Mikhail Shmakov and General Secretary Vladimir Scherbakov sent a message of protest to Ukraine's President Viktor Yushchenko, Chairman of the Supreme Rada Vladimir Litvin and Prime-Minister Yury Yekhanurov on the 31<sup>st</sup> of January 2006.

"The General Confederation of Trade Unions, - says the message, - expresses its deep concern over the aggravated situation in the labour market of Ukraine caused by the stubborn reluctance of the country's government to pay heed to the legitimate demands put forward by trade unions seeking to secure workers' labour rights stipulated for in the Constitution.

"The disregard shown by the supreme state authorities for the repeated appeals by trade unions and for the demands made during the nationwide protest action has led to the all-Ukraine trade union federations coming into a protracted conflict with the Cabinet of Ministers that is fraught with further social and political destabilisation and economic degradation in the country.

"The General Confederation of Trade Unions, expressing fraternal solidarity with its affiliate, the Federation of Trade Unions of Ukraine, and with the other trade union federations involved in the conflict, pledges its full support to their just demands and considers their position and actions as justified and well-grounded.

"While expressing our disappointment with such an explicit attempt by Ukrainian authorities to depart from the principles of constructive social dialogue that are the backbone of labour relations in the entire developed world, we call on you to take measures for a speediest settlement of the conflict within the framework of the current legislation and practices established in Ukraine. We are confident that a prompt satisfaction of the union demands would serve the interests of the absolute majority of Ukrainian workers, promote democracy and stability in the country, and help enhance its international image".

## **AZERBAIJAN: NEW UNIONS TO BE BUILT**

A trade union will be set up in the *Azfen Company* employing over 2,800 people, according to Sattar Mehbaliyev, President of the Azerbaijan Trade Union Confederation (ATUC). The ATUC is currently negotiating establishment of trade unions in more than 30 local and foreign companies. However, Brother Mehbaliyev is convinced that the employees of the companies should have taken the initiative themselves, which is stipulated by law. "They don't know the law, and that explains why some of them are so passive", argued the union leader. He said his Confederation had launched a legal course that would help the unionists and workers feel more confident.

In the meantime, the managers of foreign enterprises operative in the country continue infringing on the rights of

Azerbaijani workers. The list of companies that hinder collective bargaining is headed by Austrian *PCH*, American *McDermott*, French *Boss Shelf*, Irish *Kentek*, and Chinese *Salyan Oil Ltd*. They have recently violated the rights of local workers on a massive scale.

However, efficient trade union organisations have been set up in several enterprises of large transnational companies.

The Azerbaijan Trade Union Confederation has prepared amendments to the national law on trade unions and submitted them to Parliament for consideration.

#### **BELARUS: ILO MISSION VISITS MINSK**

18 January 2006, a mission of the International Labour Organisation headed by Mr Kari Tapiola visited the headquarters of the Federation of Trade Unions of Belarus (FTUB) in Minsk where it met with the top leaders of the FTUB, Presidents of its industry trade unions, and union activists.

The aim of the mission was to hear about measures taken in Belarus to implement the recommendations earlier presented by the ILO Committee on Freedom of Association to the country's government.

FTUB President Leonid Kozik told the visitors of the legislative steps taken by the trade union centre in the previous year. The ILO recommendations, he said, were carried out at an in-

creasingly growing rate. Some of the conflict issues concerning the work of the National Council for Labour and Social Problems had already been settled. Leonid Kozik explained that his Federation had gone quite a long way to meet the demands of trade unions not affiliated with the FTUB. Their representatives were regularly invited to participate in the discussion of all burning problems in the sphere of protection of workers' socio-economic rights. All national trade unions are currently involved in the development of a new version of the law on trade unions.

#### **BELARUS: FTUB PLEASED WITH GENERAL ACCORD**

A session of the National Council for Labour and Social Problems held 9 March 2006 in Minsk was wound up with the signing of a General Agreement for 2006-08 among the government, the national employers' organisations, and the trade unions.

The union representatives said they were pleased with the growth of the population's wages, incomes and pensions. In December 2005, the average monthly pay rose by 29.2 per cent as compared with December 2004, and reached 565.2 thousand Belarusian roubles (or \$261.3). As from 1 January 2005, the minimum monthly pay was established at 128.9 thousand roubles to bring it up to the level of the subsistence minimum, and as from 1 January 2006 it was raised to 156.9 thousand roubles. The official unemployment rate was 1.5 per cent of the able-bodied population last year.

By the end of 2006 the average monthly pay is planned to reach an equivalent of \$300 (\$250 in the budgetary sector). The parties agreed that in 2007 the minimum amount of the old-age pension should be brought up to the level of the subsistence minimum budget calculated for retired people.

Meanwhile, the strength of the FTUB grew by more than 90 thousand people in 2005, of whom 40.5 thousand were members of newly established trade union organisations. The trade union coverage has reached 93.3 per cent of workers.

### **GEORGIA: SCHOOLTEACHERS PLAY TRUANT**

On the 8<sup>th</sup> of March 2006, schoolteachers, mostly women, held protest actions in several Georgian towns demanding better working conditions. The actions were organised by the national trade union of teachers and scientists.

“We demand health insurance coverage for teachers, and pay raises to make our salaries equal to the subsistence minimum, which is 150 laris (approximately \$80)”, Manana Gurchumelidze, General Secretary of the Teachers’ and Scientists’ Union of Georgia told journalists outside the house of parliament in Tbilisi.

The protest was organised to coincide with the International Women’s Day, considering that about 98 per cent of Georgian schoolteachers are women. This category is currently the least protected in the country.

### **KAZAKHSTAN: WHO’S TO PAY FOR GALLOPING PRICES?**

A statement under this title was adopted by a meeting of trade union activists called by the Federation of Trade Unions of the Republic of Kazakhstan (FTURK) 7 February 2006.

“The country’s social sphere is being modernised, the Statement says. Social assistance is being rendered to the most vulnerable sections of the population, and the wages are growing. However, most people do not notice any improvement in their living standards because of the continual rises in the prices of basic consumer goods, rents, utility rates, and other services.

Even official statistics show that last year foods rose in price by 8.1 per cent, non-foods by 5.9 per cent, and services by 8.0 per cent. The municipal transport fares went up everywhere.

All regions of the country report new food-price jumps and the plans of monopolistic companies to raise substantially the utilities rates.

All this arouses legitimate indignation among the people”.

The Federation of Trade Unions rejects as ungrounded the allegations that pay raises may cause inflation, as the share of wages in the country’s GDP is only 32 per cent, whereas in many other market economies it amounts to 50-60 per cent.

As the production and efficiency rates are growing, the monopolistic enter-



prises and the owners of firms and companies keep increasing their profits. According to estimates by different international organisations, the number of people in Kazakhstan living below the poverty line is not diminishing. Hardest hit are the pensioners and other low-income citizens.

The trade union federation urged the government to immediately publish comprehensive information in the mass media about the price-rise situation and the measures it was planning to amend it. The unions also suggested that public hearings be held to discuss the changes in prices and service rates.

The FTURK considers the statutory amount of subsistence minimum of 7,945 tenges (\$63.6) to be obviously biased downward and far from the real figure. Independent experts and trade unions estimate that, with an allowance for the growing prices of foodstuffs, consumer goods and services, this social index should be 12,022 tenges (about \$96). Simultaneously, the minimum wage must not be lower than the minimum consumer budget.

If the demands by trade unions are further ignored, the Statement says, the Federation of Trade Unions reserves the right to organise active protest actions as provided for by national legislation.

### **KAZAKHSTAN: INSISTENCE STILL NEEDED**

The FTURK Executive Committee met 12 April 2006 to review the re-

sults of the joint law-making activities by the Federation and the *Enbek* parliamentary group in 2005, and draw up plans for 2006.

The Executive discussed the progress made in the preliminary examination of the draft Labour Code of Kazakhstan. It was noted that the parliamentary working group had agreed with over 70% of the FTURK's proposals. At the same time, a number of union proposals had been turned down (concerning workers' representation, strike invalidation, pay in the budgetary sector, etc.). The FTURK representatives were instructed to defend firmly the trade union position during further consideration of the draft Labour Code.

### **MOLDOVA: UCRM SUMS UP**

President of the Union Confederation of the Republic of Moldova (UCRM), Petru Chiriac, told a press conference in Chisinau about the results achieved by the UCRM in the sphere of protecting workers' socio-economic interests in 2005.

Last year, he said, the UCRM focused on solving such problems as pay increases and protection of workers' incomes; reduction of the unemployment and taxes; cuts in the informal economy volumes; consolidation of the union ranks, rejection of the attempts to split the Confederation, struggle against any interference in trade union activity, and many other issues.

The unions prepared and submitted for consideration amendments to the

collective agreements on working and leisure time, on the model individual labour contract, on the remuneration of workers employed under individual labour contracts, etc. Owing to the consistent pressure by trade unions, the minimum pay had doubled from 100 lei (\$ 8) to 200 lei (\$ 16) a month. Petru Chiriac provided details on pay raises for each category of budgetary workers.

The UCRM insists that the minimum wages for workers in the first qualification category employed in the national economy should be at least equal to the subsistence minimum, which presently exceeds 800 lei (\$ 100).

The industry trade unions affiliated to the UCRM did a lot of work setting up new trade union organisations through recruiting workers from the informal economy.

Despite the interference by the authorities of all levels in trade union activity, the UCRM managed to strengthen its ranks. The *Moldova-business-sind Federation* built 51 new organisations with 1,172 members, two new organisations numbering 104 members emerged in the transport workers' union, while the *SindLUCAS Federation* replenished its ranks with twelve new organisations totalling 179 members.

The UCRM continued its line for fuller integration into the ICFTU, which provided a basis for cooperation with trade unions in Central and Eastern Europe and in the newly independent states. The Confederation maintains friendly ties with trade unions in Alba-

nia, Bulgaria, Norway, Sweden, Belgium, Spain, Hungary, Poland, etc.

## **RUSSIA: FNPR REJECTS EXPENSIVE UTILITIES**

The Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Russia (FNPR) has made a statement in connection with the growing rents and public utility rates.

The utility rates established for 2006 in several subjects of the Russian Federation exceed substantially the margins set by federal law.

The Russian trade unions have repeatedly argued that any attempt to reform the management of housing and utility services must be carried out in agreement with the growth of the population's incomes. The changeover to a hundred per cent coverage by the population of the public utility costs, including the expenditures for capital repairs, introduced by law as from 2006, will only deteriorate the conditions for thousands of people and build up tensions in society.

Considering the low incomes of the overwhelming majority of the population, the FNPR has once again proposed that the maximum share of the family's expenses on rents and public utilities should be reduced from today's 22 per cent to 15 per cent of their total gains, and that some other financial means should be procured to ensure smooth operation and development of this life-supporting industry. The FNPR has called on the executive and legislative authorities in the subjects of the Russian Federa-

tion and on the regional tripartite committees urging them to consider the issues jointly with the trade unions.

### **RUSSIA: 6<sup>TH</sup> FNPR CONGRESS TO BE HELD 14-16 NOVEMBER 2006 IN MOSCOW**

Addressing a session of the FNPR General Council held 22 March 2006 in Moscow, FNPR President Mikhail Shmakov said “the struggle for higher pay is the cornerstone of the FNPR’s activities”. Today, with the real income of the population growing, “the share of wages in the GDP keeps falling down, while the unreasonably high degree of wage differentiation remains”.

Meanwhile, the state authorities of all levels are reluctant to use the available resources to achieve a more intensive development of the real sector of the economy and the growth of the GDP, and thus help the working population out of the category of the poor. The government stubbornly refrains from raising the minimum wages up to the subsistence minimum level. In this context, Mikhail Shmakov believes the trade unions must concentrate on the problem of pay raises, and make a better use of the collective bargaining potential to that effect.

The session pointed out that in 2005, according to official statistics, the wages of over 20 per cent of workers were lower than the subsistence minimum or equal to it, while over 65 per cent of workers were paid below the average wage. Meanwhile, the average pay is hardly sufficient to ensure mere reproduction of the labour force,

and the country’s human resources in general.

The General Council decided it would demand that the Russian Government submit to the State Duma a draft law providing, from 1 January 2007, for a minimum wage equal to the subsistence minimum of an able-bodied person. Apart from that, General Council members instructed the leaders of the Federation to press for the re-establishment of the Labour Ministry with the functions of formulating a single state policy in the sphere of wages and incomes.

It was decided to convene the 6<sup>th</sup> FNPR Congress from 14-16 November 2006 in Moscow.

### **TAJIKISTAN: GENERAL AGREEMENT COMES INTO FORCE**

A General Agreement for 2006-08 has come into force in Tajikistan. The document comprises six sections determining the key measures to be taken in the labour market regarding such spheres of socio-economic policy as wages, pensions, living standards, social protection, and occupational health and safety. The Agreement also specifies the rights and responsibilities of the employers and the workers.

Prime Minister of Tajikistan, Akil Akilov, said at the signing ceremony that his Government had already undertaken a number of practical steps to implement their obligations under the Agreement. These include allocating 50 per cent of the expenditure side of the State Budget for 2006 for developing

social sphere; amending and supplementing the Republic's Law on the State Social Insurance, etc.

### **TAJIKISTAN: UNIONS CARE FOR LABOUR MIGRANTS**

Over 3,500 building workers from Tajikistan received jobs in Russia in 2005 with the help of the Construction Workers' Union of Tajikistan. About 1,500 migrant workers became members of the Russian Construction Workers' Union. The labour migrants were given employment based on the agreement on cooperation signed between the two trade unions with the assistance of the International Confederation of Construction and Building Materials Industry Workers' Unions (a GCTU affiliate) and the International Labour Organisation.

Consultation centres for managing labour migrants in construction were opened in Tajikistan in 2005, one in the Sogdiana Province, and two in the southern Province of Khatlon. More centres are planned to be opened in 2006.

### **UKRAINE: SOLIDARITY BRINGS SUCCESS**

President of the Federation of Trade Unions of Ukraine (FTUU), Olexander Yurkin, sent a letter to the ICFTU, the GCTU, the industry Trade Union Internationals, and the trade union centres in CIS countries thanking them for their support of Ukraine's trade unions in their collective labour dispute with the country's Cabinet of Ministers.

"Your messages addressed to the top leaders of the Ukrainian state, says the letter, have played a crucial role in making the government change their position and in settling down the conflict. In fact, a first step has been taken towards resuming social dialogue at the national level. Moreover, the way the collective labour dispute with the government was handled, has shown that Ukrainian trade unions are capable of acting jointly and winning the case".

During the National Trade Union Conference 22 February 2006, an agreement was signed between the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine and the all-Ukraine trade union federations on the settlement of the labour conflict, which the employers acceded to later on.

The parties agreed that:

- The Cabinet of Ministers would issue a decree sanctioning the renewed lists of foodstuffs, non-food goods and services to be included in the consumer baskets for the main social and demographic groups of population, preliminarily approved of by a tripartite commission of experts (something the unions had been struggling for since July 2005). Besides, within a month's time, a special technique would be developed for estimating the subsistence minimum cost. With the involvement of social partners, a procedure for formulating the subsistence minimum would be established before 1 July 2006 in full accordance with Ukraine's legislation and international standards.

- At least 50 per cent of the wage arrears would be paid off to workers in state-owned enterprises before 1 May 2006, with the remaining sum to be settled by the end of the year.

- Prerequisites would be created for bringing up the minimum wages to the level of the subsistence minimum, an aim the unions had been struggling for since 1995 when the law on labour remuneration was passed.

Participants in the Conference urged all the parties to social dialogue to intensify the process of collective bargaining so that the General Agreement for 2006-09 could be signed not later than mid-March 2006.

The collective labour dispute has shown that Ukraine's trade unions are prepared to use every legitimate means at their disposal to achieve their goals.

## **UKRAINE: FTUU HOLDS 5<sup>TH</sup> CONGRESS**

The 5<sup>th</sup> Congress of the Federation of Trade Unions of Ukraine held 5 April 2006 adopted a Programme of Action, an amended version of the FTUU Constitution, and other important documents.

The Congress took place against the background of an intensive dialogue Ukraine's trade unions were having with the government and employers to achieve concluding a tripartite General Agreement for 2006-09. The 694 Congress delegates represented 70 industrial and regional trade unions

with a total membership of 10.6 million organised workers. Attending the event were also trade union delegations from 40 foreign countries.

Ukraine's President Viktor Yushchenko sent a greeting to participants in the congress.

Addressing the Congress, FTUU President Olexander Yurkin said: "All attempts by some forces to take advantage of the situation in order to undermine the unity of the trade union movement and even split the FTUU have failed disgracefully. Not only has our Federation survived, but also strengthened its position in society".

Delegates focused on the issues of protecting workers' labour and socio-economic rights in the present-day conditions.

They stressed that trade unions would further insist that the obligations to ensure pay rises and liquidate the pay debts for the previous years be included in the text of the General Agreement. Over the five coming years, the average wages should be raised to reach the sum equal to about five subsistence minimums (currently it amounts to less than two minimums).

Olexander Yurkin was elected President of the FTUU for another term.

Immediately after the Congress, the FTUU Council held a meeting to elect four vice-presidents of the Federation, namely Grigory Osoviy, Igor Lutzishin, Segey Kostin, and Sergej Ukrainetz.



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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, UZBEKISTAN, AND UKRAINE, AS WELL AS 32 BRANCH TRADE UNION INTERNATIONALS.*

*THE GCTU IS READY TO CO-OPERATE WITH ANY OTHER NATIONAL TRADE UNION FEDERATIONS, IRRESPECTIVE OF THEIR BEING MEMBERS OF OTHER INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS. ON THE OTHER HAND, THEIR PARTICIPATION IN GCTU ACTIVITIES DOES NOT IN ANY WAY RESTRICT THE INDEPENDENCE OF ITS AFFILIATES.*

*THE CONFEDERATION ENJOYS OBSERVER STATUS WITH THE CIS INTER-PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY, 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 , UN DPI AND ECOSOC.*

*THE GCTU SUPREME BODIES ARE THE CONGRESS, CONVENED ONCE 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**

The GCTU information bulletin "Inform-Contact" is also distributed by E-mail. Apart from that, the English and French versions of our publication are available on our web site: [www.vkp.ru](http://www.vkp.ru)

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