



# *inform* **contact**

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

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### **THE GCTU HOLDS ITS 6<sup>TH</sup> CONGRESS IN MOSCOW**

The 6<sup>th</sup> Congress of the General Confederation of Trade Unions, GCTU, took place in Moscow 14 September 2007. Attending the event were delegates of nine national trade union centres in CIS countries and 29 industrial Trade Union Internationals, honorary guests from interstate CIS agencies, the employers' community, international trade union organisations, and journalists.

The Congress was opened and chaired by GCTU President Mikhail Shmakov. GCTU General Secretary Vladimir Scherbakov presented a report on GCTU activity in between the 4<sup>th</sup> and the 6<sup>th</sup> GCTU ordinary congresses (2002-07). Since the 4<sup>th</sup> GCTU Congress in 2002, the trade union movement of the CIS, he said, has been faced up with the growing processes of globalisation that make an increasingly adverse impact on workers' situation. With the econo-

mies of CIS countries becoming more and more open to the world market, the main task for the unions is to help create conditions for decent work in the CIS countries.

The reporter called on the GCTU affiliates to concentrate, in the period to come, on attaining the following objectives:

- substantial increases in the average wages;
- minimum pay at least equal to the subsistence minimum rate;
- minimum pension not lower than the pensioner's subsistence minimum, with its income replacement rate gradually approaching the internationally accepted threshold of 40 per cent;
- returning the insurance principles to all social protection projects, and securing trade union participation in the management of social insurance funds.

Report of the GCTU Control and Auditing Commission was present-

ed by its chairman Vladimir Kanyshhev.

Fourteen leaders of affiliated organisations took the floor during the debate on the reports. The Congress was also addressed by the representative of the ITUC Andrey Mrost and Vice President of the International Congress of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs Vladimir Kolmogorov.

Congress amended the GCTU Constitution and the Regulations for the GCTU Control and Auditing Commission, adopted the following documents:

- Guidelines for the Activity of the General Confederation of Trade Unions in 2007-2012;
- Appeal to the Heads of State, Heads of Government and Speakers of Parliaments of the CIS countries concerning the Rate of Minimum Work Remuneration;
- Appeal to the Heads of State, Heads of Government and Chairpersons of Parliaments of the CIS countries “Decent Living Conditions for Pensioners in the CIS Countries”;
- Resolution “On the Rights of Workers and Trade Unions”;
- Resolution “Labour Migration: a New Challenge for Trade Unions in the CIS Countries”;
- Resolution “On the Work with Youth”;
- Resolution “Labour Protection: a Principal Task for Trade Unions in the CIS Countries”; and
- Statement on the 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Tripartite Declaration of Princi-

ples concerning Multinational Enterprises and Social Policy

Congress elected the GCTU Council and the Executive Committee.

The leader of the Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Russia Mikhail Shmakov was elected President of the GCTU.

President of the CIS Federation of Timber and Related Industries Workers’ Unions Viktor Karnyushin was elected Vice President of the GCTU.

Vladimir Scherbakov was elected General Secretary of the GCTU.

At its first session held immediately after the congress, the GCTU Council elected Natalia Podshibyakina, Albert Potapov and Valery Yuriev as Deputy General Secretaries of the GCTU, while President of the TUI of Transport and Road Construction Workers Alexander Shurikov was elected Chairman of the Control and Auditing Commission.

The Congress received messages of greetings from President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev, President of Kyrgyzstan Kurmanbek Bakiyev, Chairperson of the CIS Inter-Parliamentary Assembly and Speaker of the Council of the Federation of Russian Parliament Serguey Mironov, Executive Secretary of the CIS Vladimir Rushailo, General Secretary of the CIS Inter-Parliamentary Assembly

Mikhail Krotov, and many other leaders of state and nongovernmental organisations of CIS countries. (More detailed information of the Congress and its documents is available at [www.vkp.ru](http://www.vkp.ru), Section “international pages”).

### **GCTU STATEMENT ON THE OCCASION OF THE UN DAY-2007**

The 24<sup>th</sup> of October is annually observed in the world as the United Nations Day. On this occasion, the General Confederation of Trade Unions affiliating the national trade union centres in countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States and 31 industrial Trade Union Internationals of the region confirms its high appreciation of the role the United Nations plays as the main instrument of keeping peace and security on Earth.

Trade unions in our countries are pleased that over the last decades the UN has been devoting increasingly more attention to the issues of social policy and their role in maintaining stability on this planet. The world summits it organised on social development, the status of women, sustainable development, environment protection etc., which were attended also by trade unions, have brought social problems to the forefront of world politics. The documents of paramount importance recently adopted by the UN, e.g. the Millennium Development Goals and the Glo-

bal Compact, have largely contributed to the development of novel, up-to-date approaches to such problems as respect of human rights, compliance with labour standards, social protection of working people, sustainable development etc.; therefore, we believe they concern directly all workers and trade unions as their principal defenders.

The GCTU welcomes the United Nations' consistent line for involving broad sections of civil society, including trade unions and other nongovernmental organisations, in the process of drawing up important international instruments, in the search for responses to the formidable challenges that globalisation issues to the world community.

At its recent 6<sup>th</sup> Congress, the GCTU confirmed that “as an organisation in official status with the ECOSOC and in the UN DPI, the Confederation will support and promulgate the activities by the United Nations and its specialised agencies aiming to strengthen the social dimension of world politics, settle the problems of sustainable development, eradicate abject poverty, put an end to economic underdevelopment and the lack of civil rights as pledged by world leaders at the Copenhagen Summit for Social Development in 1995. The GCTU and its affiliates will help implement the Millennium Development Goals adopted by the UN in 2000, and other initiatives pertaining to social justice, world peace and

security, disarmament, and a just settlement and prevention of armed conflicts”.

We are positive that the role and significance of the United Nations and its whole system will only grow as the process of globalisation builds up. Trade unions in the CIS countries have been making, and will continue to make, their tangible contribution to UN activities striving to achieve the above goals.

### **GCTU WORRIED OVER DEVELOPMENTS IN GEORGIA**

20 November 2007, the GCTU issued a statement on Georgia that says:

“Over the last few days, the situation in Georgia, a country where the General Confederation of Trade Unions has an affiliate, has seriously aggravated.

A peaceful demonstration has been brutally broken up in Tbilisi by order of President Mikhail Saakashvili. A state of emergency was declared in the country whereby considerable restrictions were imposed on many basic rights and freedoms of citizens and on the media, practically all TV channels were closed, and several opposition leaders were subjected to arbitrary arrests or expelled from Georgia.

The current developments are taking place against the background of a

deep economic crisis. Georgia ranks as one of the poorest CIS countries in what regards major social indicators characterising the living standards of the population. The country has witnessed repeated cases of infringement upon trade union rights and interference in the internal affairs of the Georgian trade union movement.

It should also be remembered that the new draft Labour Code was developed and adopted without any consultation with the Georgian Trade Union Confederation, and some of its provisions are in distinct contradiction with the basic ILO conventions. This fact has been specifically mentioned in the report by the ILO Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations. It is no wonder that the recent actions by Georgian state authorities have been condemned by the world trade union community.

The General Confederation of Trade Unions affiliating national trade union centres from nine CIS countries and 31 industrial Trade Union Internationals of the region expresses its deep concern over the developments in Georgia and their potential consequences.

The GCTU calls upon the Georgian state authorities to take urgent steps to normalise the situation in the country on the basis of lifting the state of emergency, returning constitutional

order to the country, preparing and holding the presidential elections in the atmosphere of peace and democracy, with due account of the true opinion of the Georgian workers and people.”

### **TU DELEGATION FROM MOLDOVA VISITS MOSCOW**

A delegation of the National Trade Union Confederation of Moldova (CNSM), comprising CNSM President Leonid Manea and Vice Presidents Oleg Budza and Mihail Hincu, visited Moscow from 20-21 December 2007 with a friendly visit at the invitation of the General Confederation of Trade Unions.

The purpose of the visit was holding consultations on the development of cooperation between the two confederations and on the prospects for CNSM joining the GCTU.

The National Trade Union Confederation of Moldova (CNSM) was set up 7 July 2007 as the result of a merger between the GCTU affiliate, the Confederation of Trade Unions of the Republic of Moldova, and the Confederation of Independent Trade Unions of the Republic of Moldova “*Solidaritate*”. At present the CNSM organises about 600 thousand members. The creation of the unified trade union centre was a significant event on the Moldovan trade union scene, as it helped to repair the seven-year old split and

restore the integrity of the country’s trade union movement.

During their stay in Moscow, the delegation met with the GCTU President and leader of the Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Russia Mikhail Shmakov, GCTU General Secretary Vladimir Scherbakov, and Deputy General Secretary Albert Potapov.

The guests informed the GCTU leaders of the current situation in the trade union movement of Moldova, and the concrete measures taken by the CNSM to strengthen the unions’ position and enhance the efficiency of their efforts in defence of workers’ rights and interests.

An open and fruitful exchange of opinions was held about the present-day situation in the trade union movement of the CIS following the GCTU 6<sup>th</sup> Congress, and about the prospects for GCTU-CNSM relations.

It was agreed that the GCTU would send a fact-finding mission to Moldova in the third decade of February 2008.

### **GCTU COOPERATING WITH CIS LEGISLATURES**

A GCTU delegation led by its General Secretary Vladimir Scherbakov participated in several events organised by the Inter-Parliamentary Assemblies of the CIS and the Eurasec

31 October 2007 in the Taurida Palace of St. Petersburg.

One of the sessions discussed the problem of migration, a major concern for trade unions. Various estimates suggest that there are 4-10 million migrants in the CIS, of whom 80-85 per cent, or the overwhelming majority, are illegal. Given the situation, it is vital that the legal frameworks in the Commonwealth countries should be urgently improved, their migration policies be better coordinated, and their cooperation in this field be enhanced.

In Russia and Kazakhstan, the solution of migration problems is part of the social programmes that are currently being launched. Information and training centres for migrants are being established. Special measures are being taken to legitimise the illegal migrants. However, the efforts have so far failed to bring any tangible results.

In this connection, the plans to set up a Council of Heads of Federal Migration Agencies of CIS Countries are expected to contribute towards a speedier adjustment of migration problems. The GCTU intends to apply for observer status with the Council to be granted to trade unions. The Assembly approved the Declaration on Coordinating Migration Policies of the CIS States adopted by the session of CIS Council of Heads of State held in Dyushambe (Tajikistan) 5 October 2007.

## **ARMENIA: UNIONS HOLD CONGRESS**

On the 26<sup>th</sup> of November, 2007, the Confederation of Trade Unions of Armenia, CTUA, held its regular congress in Yerevan, bringing together 117 delegates representing 23 industry trade unions and 4,700 local union organisations with a total membership of 400 thousand workers.

Congress noted that the economic and social situation in the country had been gradually improving. Over the first seven months of 2007, its GDP had increased by 13.3 per cent as compared with 2006. The average monthly pay was about USD 230 as from 1 November, while the pensions would rise by 60 per cent from 1 January 2008. However, there was quite a number of acute problems still waiting to be solved.

In his report to the congress, CTUA Vice President Hrach Hovhannisian stressed the importance of the new Labour Code (effective since 2005) for the regulation of labour relations. However, the unions had already prepared 69 amendments to be introduced into the document. An agreement had been signed on the implementation of the Decent Work Agenda for 2007-2011. The strategic programme to combat poverty was currently under review, and its realisation would require active involvement of trade unions.

The unions are particularly worried that 75 percent of industrial enterprises are in private hands, with most of them remaining not unionised.

The trade unions of Armenia have been waging an active struggle in defence of workers' rights and interests. In particular, over the last period they have won 54 lawsuits, mostly over wages.

With a view to raising the role and image of the unions, Congress considered and approved several amendments to the CTUA Constitution, and adopted a programme of activity for the period of 2008-2011. Delegates stressed the urgent need for the Confederation to launch its own newspaper or journal.

As the result of a two-round competitive election Eduard Tumasian was elected new President of the CTUA.

## **HOW LABOUR LAWS ARE OBSERVED IN BELARUS**

The Federation of Trade Unions of Belarus, FTUB, has analysed the results of public control over the observance of national labour legislation in the third quarter of 2007.

The analysis has revealed that the most common violations of the Labour Code both in the organisations inspected and generally in the country are:

- non-observance of the requirements as to the contents and conditions of collective agreements;
- failure to meet the deadlines for dismissal settlements;
- failure to meet the date of vacation payments;
- departure from the procedure for imposing disciplinary sanctions;
- non-observance of the procedure for keeping work record cards, etc.

Other cases of Labour Code violations also include:

- refusal to grant additional leave for working in a harmful environment;
- non-observance of the procedure of payment for working overtime, on public holidays and rest days;
- absence of internal work regulations, etc.

A respective report was sent to the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection that is legislatively entrusted with the function of coordinating the work of both state and public bodies of control and supervision over the observance of labour laws. At least 96 per cent of violations revealed by trade unions are reported to have been rectified as soon as demanded.

## **KAZAKHSTAN: TRIPARTITE COMMISSION MEETS IN ASTANA**

The Republican Tripartite Commission for Social Partnership and Regulation of Social and Labour Relations held its meeting 16 November

2007 in the House of Government in Astana.

Participants approved a list of industries where tripartite or bilateral commissions are to be set up as standing bodies entitled to ensure coordination of interests of all participants in social dialogue through organising consultations and negotiations, and concluding tariff agreements. The problem of developing an occupational pension system was also considered. The Commission instructed the national employers' and workers' organisations to make the necessary calculations by the end of 2008 that would stimulate workers employed in hard and adverse conditions to pay their voluntary pension fees.

### **KYRGYZSTAN: WAGES GOING UP**

Thanks to active measures taken by the country's trade unions, wages of the main categories of workers have been going up. For instance, in 2007 workers in the health service, education, science and culture got 30 per cent more in pay. The average monthly wage amounts currently to 3,727 soms, or US\$ 98.

### **RUSSIA: FNPR WORRIED ABOUT WORK CONDITIONS**

A session of the General Council of the Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Russia, FNPR, held 24

October 2007 at the Palace of Labour in Moscow discussed actions to be taken by trade unions to improve the unsatisfactory working conditions and the poor health of workers in the country.

FNPR believes the poor working and health conditions to be the result of the problem being neglected by federal and other authorities, employers and their organisations. Over the last decade, industrial medicine has been actually liquidated in Russia. One worker in four is employed in a harmful or dangerous environment. This fact accounts for the number of occupational injuries being very high. The federal executive authorities have dismantled their safety and health services, while similar services in the regions have been severely downsized. The regulatory legal acts relating to health and safety have not been renewed lately, and the reform of the social insurance system has been suspended.

As it expressed its concern over the state of affairs, the FNPR General Council proposed that, in order to remedy the situation, the Russian Government should consider a draft Concept of the Development of an Up-to-Date Labour Medicine System in the country, setting up an inter-agency commission to deal with occupational health and safety, and a possibility of authorising trade union safety inspectors to act as government representatives. The FNPR also



called on the State Duma to ratify ILO Convention No. 187 (health and safety) and No. 176 (coal-mining) and amend the Labour Code of Russia accordingly. A number of practical measures was also proposed aiming to improve workers' health and occupational safety.

### **RUSSIA: FNPR DEMANDS STABLE PRICES**

FNPR has issued a statement on the rising prices of basic foodstuffs and essential commodities and services in the country. The document pays particular attention to the sharp increase in the prices of foodstuffs and services rendered to the population, including housing and public utilities, communications, electricity and gas supply. Suffice it to mention that the housing and public services rates have risen by 13.3 per cent, public transportation by 10.6 per cent, communications by 10.8 per cent, electricity by 11.6 per cent, and gas supply by 18-19 per cent.

Hardest hit by such uncontrolled and economically ill-founded price rises are low- and medium-income families. They do not explicitly accord with the rises in the wages and incomes of the population, particularly of its low-income sections and people with fixed incomes (budget sector employees and pensioners), which eventually cuts down the living standards of a substantial part of Russia's population.

FNPR has demanded effective measures to be taken by the legislative and executive authorities in order to stabilise prices, implement the anti-monopoly laws, encourage competition and promote home production, regulate commodity markets, fight corruption, and overcome poverty. The Government should pursue such an incomes policy as would create conditions for a real improvement in the quality of workers' lives.

### **RUSSIA: UNIONS REJECT ATYPICAL LABOUR**

From 28-29 November 2007, the Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Russia, FNPR, held a round table on "Atypical Employment: Trade Union Response" in Moscow. Participants reviewed Russian and international experiences in regulating tripartite labour relations and their consequences, and trade union attitudes to the problem.

Attending the event were representatives of the Azerbaijan Trade Unions Confederation, the Belarusian Congress of Democratic Trade Unions, the Federation of Trade Unions of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Confederation of Free Trade Unions of Kazakhstan, the Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Russia, the All-Russia Confederation of Labour, the Confederation of Labour of Russia, the Federation of Trade Unions of Ukraine, and the Confederation of Free Trade Unions of Ukraine, as well

as the ITUC Pan-European Regional Council, the ETUC, Global Union Federations, and the ILO Moscow Office.

The final document issued by the meeting says that “the use of atypical employment in our countries, primarily agency labour, undermines seriously the employment guarantees, deteriorates the working conditions, and handicaps collective protection of workers, while providing employers with additional possibilities of fighting trade unions with a view to weakening their positions.

“The tripartite labour relations emerging from the use of agency labour and leasing workers from one company to another are unacceptable, as they do not fit into the legislation of the Russian Federation and most other countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States.

“We, the representatives of national trade union centres of Azerbaijan, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Russia and Ukraine, reject any attempts to use agency labour in our countries and declare our intention to resist its legalisation.”

### **RUSSIA: DIFFERENCE-FREE AGREEMENT SIGNED**

The national trade union confederations, the national employers’ associations and the Government of Russia signed the 10<sup>th</sup> General Agree-

ment for 2008-2010 at the House of Government 21 December 2007.

It is noteworthy that for the first time in recent years the parties managed to sign a General Agreement without attaching a “discrepancy protocol”. A trade-off solution was found to principal disputable issue, that of raising the minimum wage up to the level of subsistence minimum as from 1 December 2008.

The Agreement was signed by the coordinators of the Parties in the Russian Tripartite Commission (RTC) Mikhail Shmakov for the national trade union confederations, Oleg Yeremeyev for the national employers’ associations and Tatiana Golikova for the Russian Government. The signing ceremony was attended by Prime-Minister Viktor Zubkov and his deputy Alexander Zhukov.

### **UKRAINE: FTUU CALLS FOR CURB ON PRICE RISES**

Worried at the sharp rise in consumer prices, Ukrainian trade unions demand that steps be taken to stop it. This was the main message of a public appeal sent by the Federation of Trade Unions of Ukraine, FTUU, 18 October 2007 to the Ukrainian President and Cabinet of Ministers, the heads of local executive authorities, local government administrations, all-Ukraine manufacturers’ organisations, and political parties.

On behalf of its members, FTUU expresses deep indignation over the incessant price rises. The unions note, in particular, that since the beginning of the year the prices of food-stuffs, including fruit, meat, meat products and pasta, have gone up by 12.7 per cent.

“Indulged in parliamentary elections and the struggle for power, the political parties have warmed up inflationary expectations by their social promises,” the appeal says.

“The state authorities were not prepared to face up to the price leap. They failed to make a prompt forecast of the extents of the price rises, nor could they estimate the eventual negative impact of the well-known natural climatic, political and macroeconomic factors. This testifies to the lack of a consistent state price policy,” the unions pointed out.

The FTUU Presidium urged the President, the Government and other executive and local authorities to do all within their powers to curb the groundless growth of prices and rates.

### **UKRAINE: UNIONS WANT WORKER-FRIENDLY BUDGET**

The FTUU Presidium held a session in October 2007 to consider the Federation’s proposals for the draft State Budget-2008” and trade union involvement in the budgeting process.

The Presidium noted certain positive results, specifically, the increased allocations in the draft State Budget for financing social expenditures. However, the unions found it necessary to press for a more clear-cut socially-oriented draft State Budget. They also stressed the need for more consolidated efforts by national trade union organisations to protect citizens’ constitutional rights.

The FTUU affiliates approved of the Presidium decision and sent the FTUU a great deal of new proposals as to how trade union involvement in the budgeting process could be improved. In particular, they highlighted the necessity to:

- establish protection mechanisms for ensuring the realisation by the State Budget of citizens’ constitutional rights, including the right to remuneration not lower than the subsistence minimum;
- continue the efforts to negotiate a General Agreement that would observe the guarantees set by Ukrainian laws;
- launch an awareness-raising campaign, including an all-Ukraine public debate on one of the national TV channels and an all-Ukraine trade union conference with the involvement of representatives of the newly appointed Government, and heads of regional state administrations and Councils;
- stage a protest action on the day when the draft State Budget is planned to be considered by the

Supreme Rada of Ukraine (Parliament);

- introduce statutory indicators of the subsistence minimum for the regions, and regional minimum wages not lower than the actual values in the respective region for the previous year; and
- specify, in the Budget, the amounts of social payments in either absolute figures or in percentages, rather than empower the Cabinet of Ministers to determine the amounts of such payments within the available funds.

The FTUU has accepted the concrete proposals as guidance for its further contacts with the Government and other state authorities.

### **UKRAINE: WHITHER GOVERNMENT-UNIONS COOPERATION?**

The FTUU Presidium met 20 December 2007 to address cooperation with the new Ukrainian Government.

Presidium members discussed priorities of the Federation in its relations with the Government for the near future. These were specified as signing a new General Agreement for the next period, cooperation in the process of developing a draft State Programme of Economic and Social Development and a draft State Budget for 2008, combining efforts in adopting the Labour Code, wider trade union involvement in the discussion and adoption of political de-

isions crucial for the unions, overcoming the crisis in the National Tripartite Social and Economic Council, etc.

### **PENSIONS IN CIS GOING UP ALBEIT SLOWLY**

The growth of food prices in a number of CIS countries has affected the vital interests of millions of people, dealing a painful blow on pensioners and causing a wave of indignation in many regions.

Trade union centres in the Newly Independent States have made strong statements urging the authorities to take immediate actions to stop the food price rises. Today, the pension situation looks as follows.

**Armenia:** A decision was taken in October 2007 to raise the minimum pension from US\$ 12 to US\$ 19, starting from 2008.

**Azerbaijan:** Indexation of the insured part of the labour pension was effected from 1 January 2007 to agree with the rate of consumer price indexation in 2006. The minimum pension was brought up to US\$ 58 as from 1 August 2007. The minimum pension is planned to be raised by the end of 2008 to reach the level of the pensioner's subsistence minimum.

**Belarus:** The minimum pension for men with 23 years of service and for

women with 20 years of service covering a total of two million pensioners amounted to US\$ 92 as from November 2007. The minimum pension for people with a shorter length of service was US\$ 22. In September 2007, the subsistence minimum budget came to US\$ 40.

**Georgia:** Seniority pay was introduced to raise the minimum pension by US\$ 1.2 for five years' occupational life, and by US\$ 6 for the record of work of 25 years and longer..

**Kazakhstan:** As from 2007, the minimum pension equals US\$ 82.

**Kyrgyzstan:** October 2007 was officially declared the month of social support for elderly people. The basic part of the pension was set at US\$ 10.5 as from 1 October 2007, while the insured part of the pension was raised by 10%.

**Moldova:** The state authorities have set the task to reform the pension scheme in the country to bring it into line with international standards. Owing to these measures, the average pension has risen to US\$ 34 as from March 2007. The establishment of private pension funds is also under consideration.

**Russia:** As from 1 December 2007, an unplanned increase of the basic component of the pension by US\$ 12 was effected in response to the food price rises. The regular increase of the basic component of the pension

had been carried out earlier, on the 1<sup>st</sup> of October 2007, which brought it up to US\$ 52. By 2010, the minimum pension is expected to reach the level of the subsistence minimum.

**Ukraine:** Following the FTUU appeal to the President, Cabinet of Ministers and heads of local executive authorities, measures are being taken to improve the pension system. Parliament is preparing a draft law "On the Introduction of a Funded System in the Compulsory Public Retirement Scheme". According to this bill, the pension system will be a three-tier structure including the present-day solidarity-based scheme, a compulsory funded scheme, and voluntary supplementary pensions drawn from contributions to non-governmental retirement funds.

**Uzbekistan:** As from 1 August 2007, the pensions have been raised by 25 per cent on the average. The minimum old-age pension was set at US\$ 25 to be increased up to US\$ 30 as from 16 November 2007.

## UNIONS DISCUSS WATER TRANSPORT CHALLENGES

The 4<sup>th</sup> Congress of the International Confederation of Water Transport Workers' Unions, ICWTWU, was held 16 October 2007 in Kyiv, Ukraine. Attending the event were the delegates of the affiliated organisations in Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Ukraine, leaders

of associate trade unions from Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia, and other guests including a GCTU representative.

Both the report and the delegates' interventions recognised the great amount of work that had been done since 2002 to defend the rights and interests of workers in the water transport sector. Thanks to the coordinating role played by the Confederation, the actions by CIS water transport workers' unions were better organised, more solidarity-oriented and consolidated.

Although the social and economic situation of workers has slightly improved in most CIS countries, there still remain a lot of complicated challenges that the Confederation will have to address in the period to come. There are still cases when crews' pay is delayed. As the volumes of sea and river traffic are shrinking, the employment rates are falling down, and the working conditions are getting worse. Crime and corruption are flourishing, with seamen being compelled to pay handsome bribes to get a decent high-paying job. Raiders seize piers in sea ports (Ukraine) and pirates capture ships on the high seas.

Against this background, the trade unions are being subjected to intensive attacks. The delegates spoke of attempts to use administrative and punitive measures to suppress a protest action by dock workers in Novo-

rossisk, and the use of physical violence against a trade union activist in Kaliningrad. In this situation, the Confederation has attached particular importance to solidarity, both within its own ranks and internationally.

The delegates approved the Confederation's international activity. Regular contacts are maintained with the European Transport Workers' Federation which is presently affiliated to the PERC. Cooperation with the ITF has also quite a long history, with its ups and downs. Congress decided to develop closer ties with the ITF, and an *ad hoc* working group was set up to outline plans for such cooperation.

Congress highly appraised the activities of the GCTU and its Commissions. Particular appreciation was expressed for the assistance rendered in preparing the framework law "On the Specifics of Regulating Seamen's Labour", for whose ratification the ICWTWU is presently campaigning, and in the work on the ILO consolidated maritime labour Convention (2006).

Congress approved the Guidelines for the ICWTWU Activity in 2007-12 and adopted 16 resolutions, statements, appeals and other documents, including "The Code of Honour for Trade Unionists in Water Transport etc.

Georgy Stolyarenko was re-elected President for another term.

## **RAILWAY WORKERS: ADVANCING ALONG COMMON PATH**

The 3<sup>rd</sup> Congress of the International Confederation of Railway Workers' and Transport Builders' Unions, ICTURWTB, was held 15 November 2007 in Yekaterinburg, Russia. The Congress was attended by 34 delegates from the Confederation's affiliates.

Presenting his report to the Congress, TUI General Secretary Guennady Kosolapov said that over the last five years railways in the CIS countries and Baltic states had been gradually withdrawn from the state sector as a result of reforms in the railway industry. Once a single integrated complex, the industry is presently acquiring the structure of a holding company. The transfer of the railway complex to foreign governance (Estonia, Armenia, Georgia) is an increasingly alarming tendency, together with the sale of individual enterprises to private companies, including foreign investors that has already started.

The constructive cooperation maintained between the railway administrations and the trade unions made it possible to retain control over social policy in the industry in the context of institutional and legal reforms, and secure the continuity of the attained guarantees and benefits, and social stability in work collectives. The trade union unity, retained in spite of the

railway complex being fragmented, was also a helpful factor.

Delegates noted that a great deal of initiatives by individual trade unions were made widely known owing to the continual exchange of experience at workshops and seminars organised by the Confederation, and analytical materials it prepared. Suffice it to mention such initiatives in the sphere of wage indexation, the application of insurance principles for additional social protection of workers, the establishment of private pension funds and credit unions, the centralised transfer of membership fees, accounting servicing of trade enterprise union committees, and new approaches to the improvement of union structures.

Congress stressed the need for the ICTURWTB Council to continue promoting solidarity actions by trade unions, and developing its informational, analytical and educational activity. Some speakers proposed that the work be accelerated on the code of basic minimum social standards for the industry including the minimum remuneration, working conditions, schedule of work and rest, pension schemes, vital types of insurance, etc. The code should take the form of an interstate industrial agreement between the trade unions and the Railway Transport Council.

The leader of the Russian Railway Workers' Union Nickolay Nikiforov was re-elected President of the Confederation, and Guennady Kosolapov General Secretary of the Confederation.

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42 LENINSKY PROSPEKT  
119119 MOSCOW, RUSSIA  
TELEFAX +7(095) 938-2155  
PHONE +7(095)952-2782  
+7(095)938-8649  
Web site: [www.vkp.ru](http://www.vkp.ru);  
E-mail: [inter@vkp.ru](mailto:inter@vkp.ru)

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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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