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NEWS FROM THE GENERAL CONFEDERATION OF TRADE UNIONS

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GCTU GETS STATUS WITH CIS MIGRATION COUNCIL

At its constitutive meeting held in Minsk 29-30 January 2008, the Council of Heads of Migration Authorities of the CIS Countries granted observer status to the General Confederation of Trade Unions.

The Council reviewed the cooperation among CIS states in the sphere of migration, and considered some concrete measures to be taken to raise the efficiency of their interagency links, and the guidelines for the Council's activities. The establishment of a properly organised system of recruiting migrant workers was specified as a priority for 2008. The Council recommended that the migration authorities in the CIS countries consider availing themselves of the capacities of nongovernmental structures in their practical activities.

The Council discussed a draft Convention on the Legal Status of Migrant Workers and Their Families whose text had been earlier amended to accommodate proposals and comments made by the GCTU. GCTU deputy General Secretary Natalia Podshibyakina represented the General Confederation of Trade Unions at the session in an observer capacity.

GCTU & PERC LEADERS MEET IN MOSCOW

A GCTU delegation led by its General Secretary Vladimir Scherbakov and Vice-President Viktor Karnyushin met 11 February 2008 with a delegation of the Pan-European Regional Council (PERC) of the International Trade Union Confederation headed by PERC President Mikhail Shmakov and General Secretary John Monks.

The PERC representatives were informed of the guidelines for the activity of the GCTU and its place and role in the trade union movement of the Commonwealth of Independent States. John Monks, in his turn, outlined the PERC structure and principles of work, and the ways it implements ITUC policies in the European Region, particularly in the CIS countries.

The participants also exchanged opinions on the prospects for cooperation between the two organisations. While noting the similarity of approaches to a number of urgent socio-economic problems facing the trade unions in Europe and elsewhere in the world, both parties considered it possible to organise practical cooperation in the four fields: protection of trade union rights and freedoms, the situation of migrant workers, training of trade unionists, and exchange of information and survey findings.

GCTU DEMANDS RESPECT OF UNION RIGHTS IN KYRGYZSTAN

On the 11th of February 2008, the General Secretary of the General Confederation of Trade Unions, Vladimir Scherbakov, addressed President of the Kyrgyz Republic Kurmanbek Bakiyev with the following letter:

“The General Confederation of Trade Unions (GCTU) has received a message signed by 27 members of the Council of the Kyrgyzstan Federation of Trade Unions (KFTU) informing us of the temporary suspension of KFTU President Sagyn Bozgunbayev from his office. This decision by the Pervomaysky District Court of Bishkek invokes bewilderment and misapprehension as Sagyn Bozgunbayev was democratically elected President of the Federation at the 20th Congress of Kyrgyzstan Trade Unions 29 September 2005, while the criminal case against him had been closed by the Prosecutor-General’s Office of the Kyrgyz Republic in 2006 for lack of *corpus delicti*.

It should also be mentioned that the GCTU 6th Congress held 14 September 2007 unanimously elected Sagyn Bozgunbayev a member of the GCTU’s Executive Committee and Council, the governing bodies of our international trade union organisation.

The message also refers to attempts by State authorities to forcefully seat M.I.Biybosunov as the KFTU First Vice President, which is blatant interference in the internal affairs of trade unions and a violation of the universally accepted international labour standards and ILO Conventions 87 and

98 ratified by the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic. Industrial ministries and Governors keep exerting pressure on KFTU Council members who have voted down the candidature of Mr Biybosunov by an overwhelming majority. The current situation causes utmost concern and worry.

The GCTU reiterates its principled position that such actions are inadmissible, and expresses its full support for, and solidarity with, the struggle of the Kyrgyzstan Federation of Trade Unions in defence of workers' interests."

UNIONS REJECT AGENCY LABOUR

A working team of experts held a session in St. Petersburg 7-8 February 2008 to modify and complete the draft framework laws "On private employment services (agencies)" and "On labour migration in the member states of Eurasec". Natalia Podshibyakina of the GCTU and Nikolay Gladkov of FNPR, who attended the session, were compelled to make an official statement on the problem.

The statement says:

"The draft framework law 'On private employment services (agen-

cies)' examined by the working team of experts is crucial for building formalised relations in the labour market. It deals with the legal foundation for private employment agencies and their activities in the labour market, involving three actors of social dialogue. Therefore, according to ILO principles and Convention 181, decisions on such issues must be taken following consultation with the most representative organisations of workers and employers.

The debates have unfortunately shown that the experts did not take the trouble to find a compromise solution suitable both to the trade unions and the private employment agencies in Eurasec countries. As a result, support was given to the proposal by the representatives of public employment agencies that draft law should incorporate a provision making it possible to regard private employment agencies as an employer (agency labour) and allowing them to charge job-seekers a fee for the employment services provided.

The GCTU and FNPR representatives who took part in the session of the working team of experts have to state that:

1. The issue of agency labour (personnel leasing) can be treat-

ed in Eurasec legislation only provided the national tripartite commissions (councils) for social partnership have given due consideration to the matter and taken the appropriate decision thereupon.

2. Private employment agencies are not eligible to charge the job seekers any direct or indirect fees, whether in full or in part, for the employment services they render them.

Guided by the interests of certain groups of job seekers and following consultation with the most representative organisations of employers and workers (trade unions), national legislation may make some exemptions for several categories of job seekers, as well as for some specific services performed by private employment agencies”.

Both the GCTU and FNPR will insist that their standpoints and proposals be taken into consideration in the process of further development of framework draft laws on this problem, vital to workers in CIS countries.

ARMENIA DISCUSSES INFORMAL ECONOMY

A round table on the issues of the informal economy in Armenia

was organised in Yerevan from 4-5 February 2008 on the initiative of the Confederation of Trade Unions of Armenia (CTUA).

Its participants included the leaders of CTUA-affiliated industrial trade unions, and representatives of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, the State Employment Service, the Employers' Union, the State Labour Inspection, the International Labour Organisation, the International Trade Union Confederation, etc.

In his opening speech, CTUA President Edward Tumasian said the informal economy embraced both the production and the non-production spheres. According to statistics, its level in the Trans-Caucasian states varies from 50 to 80 per cent, the highest figure among the former Soviet republics and Central European countries.

Trade union participants considered the theme of the seminar to be extremely important and topical both to the Government and to the employers and trade unions of Armenia. One reason underlying the existence of informal economy is the legal incompetence of the population. A vast number of people employed in the informal sector do not formalise their labour relations with the employer,

which increases the informal economy volumes. In this context, participants highlighted the need for the unions and the government to consistently raise the awareness of workers, particularly young workers, of their rights, so that they could make avail of the knowledge in their further labour relations.

It is also important to establish cooperation between trade unions and the State Labour Inspection to make the unfair employers abide by the laws and build their labour relations within the legislative framework. The unions are particularly interested in achieving such result, as employment in the informal sector reduces their membership ranks. The worker must realise that informal employment strips him/her of the right to legal protection.

AZERBAIJAN UNIONS HOLD CONGRESS

Four hundred and twenty delegates representing 25 industrial unions and three regional trade union confederations took part in the 3rd Congress of the Azerbaijan Trade Union Confederation (ATUC) held in Baku 5 February 2008.

Among the invitees were leaders of the national legislative and ex-

ecutive authorities, employers, representatives of the mass media, and numerous foreign guests, including a GCTU delegation headed by its General Secretary Vladimir Scherbakov.

President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev sent a message of greetings to the Congress, and later received all its delegates and foreign guests.

In his report to the Congress, ATUC President Sattar Mohbaliyev noted the radical transformations that had taken place in the country's economic and social life over the last five years. The material standing of the population had improved significantly, and society in general had been substantially renewed. Much had been done to develop democracy, eliminate unemployment, reduce poverty, and promote regional growth.

The speaker dwelt upon the work done by the Confederation to consolidate the organisational structure of trade unions, promote important legal acts, protect workers' rights, and solve social problems.

Congress amended and supplemented the Statute of the ATUC, and approved the guidelines for its activity in the forthcoming period.

Bro Sattar Mohbaliyev was elected President of the Confederation for a new term of office.

BELARUS: LABOUR PROTECTION NEEDS FIRMER LEGAL SUPPORT

The Federation of Trade Unions of Belarus (FTUB) takes an active part in the standard-setting activities aiming to improve the legal basis for labour protection.

In 2007 alone, the technical inspection of the Federation examined, approved, amended, or referred back 19 draft regulatory acts relating to labour protection.

The FTUB, in particular, proposed that additional payments should be raised for work in harmful and/or dangerous working environments.

KAZAKHSTAN: PRESIDENT PROMISES HIGHER BENEFITS BY 2012

The pensions and state benefits in Kazakhstan will increase by an average of more than two times by 2012, said President Nursultan Nazarbayev in his annual address to the nation 6 February 2008.

By 2011, he stressed, the basic pensions will have achieved a level equal to 50 per cent of the subsistence minimum.

Starting with 2009, the state social benefits and special-purpose state allowances will annually rise by nine per cent, while the monthly child care allowance in 2011 will be two and a half times higher than in 2007.

By 2012, the salaries and wages in the budgetary sector will double, through gradual annual increases by 25-30 per cent.

RUSSIA: FNPR GENERAL COUNCIL MEETS IN MOSCOW

At its session held 29 January in Moscow, the General Council of the Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Russia (FNPR) focused on the ways to enhance cooperation between the unions and state authorities in the solution of socio-economic problems in Russia. FNPR President Mikhail Shmakov presented a report on the issue.

Participating in the session were First Deputy Prime-Minister Dmitry Medvedev, Minister of Public Health and Social Development Tatiana Golikova and Chairman of the Coordinating

Council of the Employers' Association of Russia Oleg Yere-meyev.

Following a detailed debate, the FNPR General Council noted that trade unions exerted influence on the shaping of legislative state authorities. They are represented at all levels of the Deputy Corps, avail themselves of the law-making mechanisms, and are in general integrated in the processes of improving the country's legislation and legal system. Cooperation with executive authorities at the federal and regional levels is carried out primarily in the form of social partnership and tripartite negotiations.

It was under strong trade union influence that the government had radically changed its attitude to the issue of minimum state guarantees in work remuneration. The powers of Federal Regions in establishing their own regional minimum wages not lower than the subsistence minimum of the local able-bodied population have also been extended substantially.

FNPR has concluded successful agreements with the Prosecutor-General's Office and the Federal Labour and Employment Service on cooperation in securing citizens' labour rights.

The General Council concluded that a new stage was opening up for cooperation of trade unions and state authorities in the solution of socio-economic problems that have become major constraints on economic growth in Russia.

The decision taken by the session determines the following first-priority tasks for further cooperation with state authorities:

- establishment of minimum wages not lower than the subsistence minimum of the able-bodied population;
- updating the contents and costs of the consumer basket;
- working out a concept of transition to work evaluation standards based on development-boosting consumption;
- return to the system of extra-budgetary social insurance funds;
- ratification of the European Social Charter and ILO conventions on socio-economic issues;
- restoration of the RF Ministry of Labour as part of the executive power system.

The General Council also reviewed the implementation of the General Agreement between the all-Russia trade union federations, the all-Russia employers' associations and the Government of the Russian Federation for

2005-2007, the measures to improve FNPR's information activity, and several other issues.

PRODUCTIVITY AND PAY: FNPR PRESIDENT'S VIEW

In an interview given to *Radio Russia* 22 February 2008, FNPR President Mikhail Shmakov touched upon the necessity of establishing a rigid linkage between pay increases and the growth of labour productivity, a problem currently much debated in RF governmental circles.

He dismissed such an approach as incorrect, though agreeing that labour productivity growth was an utterly objective imperative of our times. Indeed, the labour productivity in Russia is lower than that of her major global rivals, and therefore, it needs to be raised.

“As regards the allegations by some economists that our wages are growing faster than our labour productivity, this is not quite the case. The reason is simple: since our economic reforms began about 15-17 years ago, the prices have jumped up by many times. Some economists say, by 10 thousand times, should we take into account the giant inflation leap of 1992. Today, the prices of many goods and services in Russia

compare with European or world prices, and even exceed them.

“However, the wages in our country, that is, the price of labour, have not made a similar leap. No doubt, they are gradually increasing, but are still substantially lagging behind the sharp price rises of goods and services that surround every person. Therefore, wages will continue growing, and in fact they must grow faster than labour productivity, at least at this stage.

“Today, the Russian labour market is actually integrated into the European labour market. Of course, ours is not a free labour market like they have, for instance, in the European Union. Nevertheless, quite a lot of our specialists and other citizens are migrating in search of higher paid jobs in European and other countries of the world. At the same time, Russia is the receiver country for a great influx of migrant workers from the CIS and elsewhere. This, by the way, creates new problems in our labour market as well.

“President Putin said at the latest session of the State Council that we must raise labour productivity by four times, but I'd like to add that this should be accompanied by a six-fold increase in wages. And this will be fair.

“Only then will we be able to attain a relative balance between the price of labour and labour productivity. Today, if calculated on the basis of a wage unit per manufactured product unit, the labour productivity of the Russian worker is three times as high as that of the West-European or American worker. When we attain this balance, we’ll be able to tie up pay rises with the growth of labour productivity more tightly.

“At this stage, labour productivity can be raised only through upgrading the technologies. We must change the technologies, and invest more in production renewal, and this is, in fact, the task of the owner of production means, whether public or private (in Russia, 85% of enterprises are private).”

RUSSIA: TRIPARTITE COMMISSION SCRUTINISES IMPLEMENTATION OF GENERAL AGREEMENT

The Russian Tripartite Commission for Regulating Socio-Economic Relations held its regular session 27 February 2008 in Moscow to review the fulfilment of the General Agreement between the all-Russia trade union federations, the all-Russia Employers’

Associations, and the Government of the Russian Federation for 2005-2007.

In his report, Chairman of the Working Group on Social Partnership and Coordination of Activities of the Parties to the Agreement, a FNPR Vice President Vitaly Budko, said the efforts by the Tripartite Commission to secure the implementation of the General Agreement had been based on integrated plans of actions. The Parties coordinated such plans every six months.

However, the documents and materials prepared often lacked the proper quality, and the deadlines for their submission were not always met, mainly through the fault of the Government. When preparing its draft regulatory legal acts (including those concerning the unemployment benefits and labour migration), the Government did not always hold preliminary consultations with trade unions and employers.

Some of the planned measures were not completed in established time.

Trade unions believe unsolved socio-economic problems to be the main hindrance to economic growth in today’s Russia. They

insist that the minimum pay should not be lower than the subsistence minimum of the able-bodied population.

TAJIKISTAN: COOPERATION WITH ILO TO CONTINUE

President of the Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Tajikistan (FITUT) Murodali Salikhov met with the ILO National Coordinator for Tajikistan 6 March 2008.

The issues discussed covered occupational safety and health, the protection of workers' rights, the elimination of the worst forms of child labour, and a number of other problems. The FITUT leader informed the ILO representative of the structure and activities of the Tajikistan trade unions, including their national industrial committees, social partnership practices, the General Agreement concluded by the Government, the employers' associations and the FITUT, and the relations of the trade unions with the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of the Population.

The ILO National Coordinator for Tajikistan expressed her satisfaction with the scope and contents of cooperation in the sphere of joint activity. She said that practical as-

sistance would be provided to the Republic in implementing its Decent Work Agenda. Other questions concerning the strengthening of cooperation with the ILO were also discussed.

UKRAINE: PRESIDENT AND UNIONS FOR SOCIAL DIALOGUE

Trade union representatives met with Ukrainian President Victor Yushchenko 31 January 2008 in Kyiv.

The President invited the union representatives to get actively involved in formulating the state socio-economic policy and spoke in favour of working out universal national regulations for social dialogue. In this connection, he once again stressed the urgent need for adopting the law "On the Fundamentals of Social Dialogue in Ukraine" that could form the basis for developing social dialogue in the "government–unions–employers" format.

The Head of State supported the trade union demand for resuming the work of the National Tripartite Socio-Economic Council. He also proposed calling an all-Ukraine conference of representatives of the National, regional and provincial tripartite councils to give a

fresh impetus to this advisory and consultative body under Ukrainian President providing an important framework for dialogue between government institutions and trade unions.

The President and the unions stand for the adoption of the new version of the General Agreement, and for the conclusion of collective agreements at all enterprises, irrespective of their forms of ownership, which would facilitate more effective protection of workers' rights and interests.

The discussion also involved other topical issues, such as the country's economic and social development, the formation of civil society, occupational health and safety, Budget-2008, combating poverty, securing decent jobs and decent pay for workers, and the outlooks for settling down the problems of trade union property.

As a follow-up of this meeting, the Head of State gave the necessary instructions to the heads of respective central executive bodies.

UKRAINE: SOCIAL FORUM TO ANNUAL

The first meeting of Ukrainian trade unions with scientific work-

ers and representatives of the employers' associations and public organisations has been organised in Kyiv to discuss the possibility of establishing an annual social forum "Ukraine in the Third Millennium: Prosperity through Consolidation".

This initiative by the Federation of Trade Unions of Ukraine is viewed as an attempt to find a new form of continuing and developing the long-existent annual All-Ukraine Forum "Socially Oriented Business, Business Caring for People" that is believed by experts to have largely fulfilled its tasks.

The aim of the Social Forum is to determine the ways of rallying the efforts being taken by the government, employers, trade unions and other public organisations around the formulating and practical implementation of a socio-economic model of development for Ukraine based on the concept "Competitive and Well-off Citizens, Highly Civilised Society (and Business), Prosperous Country".

The meeting also discussed the question of setting up a standing scientific and expert council with sections for various fields of activity to service the Social Forum.

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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
