

**EPSU Russia and Central Asia
Constituency Meeting
3-4 March 2016, Moscow, Russia
Draft Minutes**

Participants:

KAZAKHSTAN

<u>Trade Union of Health Workers of Kazakhstan</u>				
Butina	Mereke	F	Participant	apologized

KYRGYZSTAN

<u>Health Workers Union of Kyrgyzstan</u>				
Saaliev	Naken	M	Participant	confirmed

Utilities workers Union of Kazakhstan

Surlevich	Veniamin	M	Participant	apologized
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RUSSIA

<u>All-Russia Electrounion</u>				
Vakhrushkin	Valery	M	Participant	confirmed

Shpilkina	Galina	F	Participant	confirmed
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All-Russian Life-Support Workers' Union

Vasilevskiy	Alexander	M	Participant	confirmed
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Klimova	Olga	F	Participant	confirmed
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Health Workers Union of the Russian Federation

Kuzmenko	Mikhail	M	Participant	confirmed
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Kostin	Kirill	M	Participant	confirmed
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TAJIKISTAN

<u>Health Workers Union of Tajikistan</u>				
Ulmasov	Rajab	M	Participant	confirmed

Energy Workers Union of Tajikistan

Nazarzoda	Asliddin	M	Participant	apologized
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Sanginov	Davron	M	Participant	confirmed
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European Federation of Public Service Unions

Goudriaan	Jan-Willem	M	Secretariat	confirmed
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Zhankevich	Olga	F	Secretariat	confirmed
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1. Welcome; adopting the agenda and the Minutes of the previous meeting; arising questions.

Olga Zhankevich called the meeting to order as she welcomed everyone to Moscow, listed apologies from those unable to attend and wished the participants a fruitful discussion. She also presented the agenda, which was adopted unanimously.

The Minutes of the previous meeting were adopted unanimously.

2. Reports by country: trade union rights, collective bargaining process; actions taken by member organisations

O. Zhankevich presented the document (attached) prepared on the basis of information received from the member organisations.

A. Vasilevsky noted in his opening speech that Russia was currently going through difficult times, being placed in a position of fighting to survive. In some recent speeches, Russia was labelled a major threat on par with ISIS and the Ebola virus.

Despite many problems, there is a way out of the crisis: a decent work and employment level, plus employees' basic labour rights.

Alexander proposed steps for overcoming the crisis:

- bringing the minimum wage up to the level of a living wage;
- adjusting pensions to the real inflation rate;
- ensuring compliance with Presidential orders;
- setting base salaries for public sector employees by qualification group;
- retaining the current retirement age.

R. Ulmasov noted that the sanctions imposed on Russia had also affected citizens of the CIS countries and that 250 million people had suffered as a result.

In 2015, the majority of the Tajik economy's sectors were greatly influenced by external factors and this process had a certain negative impact on development of commercial ties, on the national currency and on the state budget indicators. Compared to 2014, Tajikistan's foreign trade turnover fell by 18% in 2015, exports fell by 9%, imports by 20% and fee-based services by 7%.

In 2015, we employed traditional approaches, such as social support for union members, financial aid, children's health farms, sanatorium-and-spa treatments. In addition, under the market economy, we prioritised the issues of wages, employment, legal aid to union members, bargaining, concluding collective bargaining agreements and monitoring compliance therewith, regulating labour relations, work safety, financial aid, representing employees' interests in various agencies, organising leisure, education, providing socially significant information, youth participation in enterprise management via collective agreements, plus the issue of pensions.

N. Saaliev said that, in 2015, the sectoral trade union had focused on the social, economic, legal and labour protection of union members. In 2015, the Labour Code was amended to state that persons working part-time in regions with regional multiplying coefficients and wage premiums were to be paid without such coefficients and premiums. That led to medical personnel losing 3,000 somoni in wages. This happened mostly in mountainous regions that are short of medical personnel.

D. Sanginov dwelled in his speech on the problems in his sector:

- 15.8% of the electric power produced is wasted;

- the sector fails to collect electricity payments from the population (up to 20%) and this problem precludes wage increases for the sector's employees, modernisation, renovation of small and large hydropower plants, and improvements in the working environment. The trade union is working actively in that area.

M. Kuzmenko noted that the sanctions and the continuing crisis had had an impact on the healthcare system. Sectoral financing dropped significantly to 3.2% of GDP, effectively making the situation critical. Real wages were falling while the inflation rate was on the rise.

Russia is 120,000 doctors short; the entire workload falls on the remaining medical personnel. The optimisation currently being carried out in the sector is effectively equivalent to lay-offs. Medical professionals are becoming poorer; the quality of the services provided is suffering as a result. Recently, the volume of fee-based medical services tripled. These events heighten tensions among personnel and people are beginning to mount collective action. The trade union prepared a letter to the President and to all government agencies describing the current situation.

V. Vakhrushkin stated that international trade union organisations should speak up about the political changes taking place. Unfortunately, our member organisations are not currently seeing any such activity.

Wages have virtually halved owing to the falling rouble. This started in Belarus, continued in Kazakhstan and has now manifested itself in Russia. An active attack on trade unions has been mounted. Previously, utility rates were set in accordance with rules, whereas now there are only recommendations. Employers put pressure on primary member organisations and alter the social guarantees stipulated in collective bargaining agreements.

J.W. Goudriaan noted in his speech several disturbing trends that have concerned employees in European countries last year. In many countries, right-wing parties gained significant strength. This happened in Ukraine, Germany, Slovakia, etc. The new government of Georgia wants to abolish the right to strike. In France, Spain and Great Britain, trade unions found themselves under attack. Throughout Europe, campaigns are being held to increase the minimum wage, so coordinating such actions is of extreme importance.

The participants noted that, owing to the employees' falling standard of living, trade union federations in many countries have appealed to their governments for incomes to be adjusted in accordance with the inflation rate. The Russian Federation of Independent Trade Unions adopted an address to the President of the Russian Federation, to the Government of the Russian Federation, to the deputies of the Federation Council and of the State Duma. The address states the need to preserve the existing mechanism for adjusting pensions and social benefits to the real inflation rate; to ensure unconditional compliance with Presidential orders on increasing wages for some public sector employees and preventing any attempts artificially to lower the target wage indicators and rigging of the methods used to calculate the average wage. The address also demands an increase in unemployment benefits and a stop to levelling taxes on individuals' property based on its cadastral value until a single and mandatory method for determining cadastral value has been approved and the economic situation in the country has stabilised.

Recapping the discussion, **O. Zhankevich** singled out priorities common for the majority of organisations in the sub-region:

- increasing membership
- increasing wages
- migration (domestic and foreign)
- the Customs Union
- the rights of trade unions

- youth involvement and organisation

The participants agreed with the defined areas of activity, noted the attached report and adopted a decision to carry out joint actions within the above-stated spheres.

3. Report by the Sub-regional Officer Olga Zhankevich: activity and recent political events in the sub-region

O. Zhankevich presented the document (attached). In her speech, she touched upon the macroeconomic situation in the countries of the sub-region. An analysis of the socioeconomic indicators over the first nine months of 2015 demonstrates that the economy in many countries of the sub-region is still in recession, with the principal socioeconomic indicators growing but growth slowing down. The drop in Russia's GDP is 3.7 and 3.5% respectively.

The increase in consumer prices in many countries was, to a certain extent, linked with the national currencies falling further in relation to the US dollar. For instance, as of June 2015 compared to June 2014, the Russian rouble was 12% lower and the Kazhakh tenge 42%. In late July and August, the Russian rouble fell by 20%.

V. Vakhrushkin, N. Saaliev, R. Ulmasov, and A. Vasilevsky took part in the discussion:

- approving the work of the sub-regional office in Moscow;
- emphasising the need to continue the specified activity in the sub-region, particularly in Central Asia;
- expressing their appreciation of the high quality of the documents prepared.

The participants noted the report of the sub-regional secretary for 2015.

4. EPSU 2016 priorities and plans – Jan Willem Goudriaan, EPSU General Secretary

J.W. Goudriaan presented the item on the agenda in his speech on the EPSU action plan for 2015-2016. He focused on:

- structural reforms;
- reduction of government procurement;
- attempts to weaken sectoral agreements;
- the fight against trade agreements;
- the role of social services, including in-home caregiving and childcare

The participants noted the speech by the General Secretary and agreed with the EPSU's proposed priorities and action plan.

Financial issues, admitting new members, membership dues. Future areas of activity in Central and Eastern Europe (*in accordance with the Executive Committee document*)

J.W. Goudriaan presented the item on the agenda. He described the EPSU's financial situation, the results of the 2015 fiscal year and the draft budget for 2016, noting that the situation had not improved from last year and the budget had been compiled with a small deficit. Union membership is dropping (Sweden, countries of the Mediterranean, etc.); at the same time, the demand for measures by our member organisations is on the rise.

O. Zhankevich noted the need to attract new member organisations into the PSI/EPSU. Each trade union in the sub-region should get in touch with their colleagues and hold additional meetings/conversations on joining PSI/EPSU. The organisation's membership must be increased for financial and sectoral representation purposes. As of today, only healthcare is well-developed in the region, so the energy and utilities sectors, etc. have great potential.

The participants noted the information presented. Member organisations also agreed to inform the PSI/EPSU's sub-regional office in a timely manner of the results of their talks with potential member organisations.

5. PSI Congress 2017, priority activity areas for 2017—2020

J.W. Goudriaan presented the item on the agenda, describing the amendments proposed to the PSI Constitution, the activity of the working group drafting the Constitution, and other documents of the PSI Congress.

The participants took under advisement the information presented and noted that, in order to discuss the Constitution, they needed to have the document at their disposal. It was, therefore, decided to submit comments and notes on the constituent documents after the documents are received and carefully studied.

6. Other events, 28 April (World Day for Safety and Health at Work), 01 May (May Day), 23 June, the UN Public Service Day (commerce, taxes, proud to work in the public service sector, etc.)

J.W. Goudriaan presented the item on the agenda, describing the upcoming EPSU events and international trade union campaigns. He dwelled specifically on World Health Day (7 April), World Water Day (27 March), World Day of Safety and Health at Work (28 April), and also on the UN Public Service Day (23 June).

The participants noted the above-mentioned information.

4. Any other business

The next meeting will be held in the first half of 2017 in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. The exact date will be announced later.

O. Zhankevich thanked the participants for a fruitful discussion and the Health Workers Union of the Russian Federation for assistance in organising and holding the event and closed the meeting.

Olga Zhankevich
EPSU Sub-regional secretary
for Russia and Central Asia