

28.01.19 _____ Speech of Natalia Zemlianska

Social Democratic Party of Ukraine, Federation of trade unions of Ukraine

1. Dear colleagues!

On behalf of the Social - Democratic Party of Ukraine, on behalf of 5 million members of the Federation of Trade Unions of Ukraine, I would like to thank you for the development of the global socialist trends. For the roadmap that trade unions can push forward in our country.

2. It's already been 5 years since the war was launched against us and part of our sovereign territory was occupied. Like the Second World War, this war overturned principles of the international law. When in 1994 Ukraine decided to eliminate all its nuclear weapons, three countries, the USA, the United Kingdom and Russia, in the Budapest memorandum guaranteed our sovereignty and security. France and China also provided Ukraine with similar assurances. Now one of these countries has broken its commitments while the others turned a blind eye to this.

3. As you know, a part of our land is not only occupied by Russia but also has been declared by the aggressor as its territory. I mean the Crimea, the integral part of Ukraine.

4. Our resistance and international pressure turned the war from the active phase into a frozen conflict. But last November, Russia once again performed an act of aggression – fire was opened on Ukrainian vessels, they were seized in sovereign Ukrainian waters and Ukrainian sailors were captured.

5. Ukrainian people are against the war. Today in Ukraine, like everywhere in the world, right-wing politicians, like Putin, are interested in the escalation because it sidelines the agenda of the left. The war is used as an excuse for the incompetent neoliberal policy that worsens people's suffering. Authorities are saying to people: "It is necessary to be patient because it's the war".

6. I am talking about this now not only because the main tool in our struggle against the aggression of the Russian Federation is the international support. I am talking about this to show you the foundation on which we every day, despite the military conflict, are striving to uphold socialist ideals, to promote reforms and protect rights and freedoms. Today, as never before, Ukraine needs worldwide solidarity, not the demonstration of financial egoism. If Russia should step over Ukraine, it would do it to come to the European Union.

7. In two months we will have presidential election, and in October - election to the Parliament. Ruling right-wing elite is serving not the interests of the people but the interests of the external management. Before it was the external management from Russia and now it is the external management from Germany. But such policy is losing the popularity in the society.

8. There are many problems in Ukraine, but we have the will to solve them. We have repeatedly proved our ability to unite and make life-changing decisions. I am sure you all know about the Revolution of Dignity, that five years ago marked the start of our path to the European values. We stood up against the oligarchs, and the Trade Union House in Kyiv became the stronghold of this Revolution, which hosted the protesters and eventually was completely burned down in 2014. We have restored the Trade Union House, and this building, like the entire trade union movement of Ukraine, once again is becoming the foundation, the spark that will set the social vector for the development of our country.

9. Regrettably, not only war stands in the way to the social justice in Ukraine. We are witnessing the strengthening of the clan oligarchic structures. Economic and social reforms are extremely painful and often are accompanied by violation of workers' rights. Existing social dialogue is not able to solve the most pressing problems.

10. Ukrainian trade unions support the ideas of socialism, and this is also one of the reason of the ever-increasing pressure on trade union movement. We are constantly facing the attempts to limit the autonomy and rights of trade unions, including the right to

organize pickets and strikes.

11. Pressure on trade unions in Ukraine has been growing since 2011. Throughout Ukraine trade unions are being evicted from their own buildings. Authorities seize trade union sanatoria, children's sports schools, training facilities, depriving workers of the right to rehabilitation, cultural and educational services.

12. Unfortunately, many aspects of the reforms carried out by the Ukrainian government have a populist nature. In particular, the size of the social contribution paid by employers was cut in two times – it's reduced expenses of oligarchs, but hasn't brought any positive result to the country and people, having little effect on the reduction of informal employment. As a result, the budgets of social funds have been significantly reduced, which lead to the deficit of social guarantees.

13. Among the most pressing social problems are growing wage arrears and unemployment rates, migration of the most qualified workers and the gender pay gap with the women's salary being in average only 80% of men's.

15. I began by saying that Ukraine faces many unsolved problems, and we have to address them under very difficult conditions. That is why the socialist example of your countries and your support are so important to us. Worldwide publicity, support of such a reputable organization as the Socialist International is the most important factor for trade unions of Ukraine and Ukraine as a whole.

16. Nobody will do our work for us, and nobody will develop the ideas of socialism in Ukraine except the Ukrainians themselves. But we need your support.

17. Glory to the Socialist International!

Glory to trade unions! Glory to Social Democratic Party of Ukraine! Glory to Ukraine!