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Trade Unions – A New System of Social Partnership and Dialogue Principles in New Uzbekistan

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Abstract: the article describes the current state of digital tourism and the prospects for the development of digital tourism. It contains the author's opinions and conclusions together with the analysis of the literature on the topic.

Key words: tourism, digital tourism, advanced information technologies, telecommunication systems, modern trends.

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The Role of Trade Unions in Social Life

Today, trade unions make a significant contribution to the large-scale reforms being implemented in our country on the path toward building a prosperous and democratic society, as well as to ensuring their practical outcomes.

It should be noted that trade unions — the largest social organization in the country — actively participate in the process of profound positive transformations. In particular, based on the principles of social partnership and dialogue, systematic work is being carried out not only to protect the socio-economic interests and labor rights of workers, but also to improve the welfare of the population, ensure employment, and create decent working conditions.

Currently, Uzbekistan is widely celebrating the 120th anniversary of its trade unions in 2025. Today, comprehensive efforts are being made to enhance the effectiveness of trade union activities, create decent working conditions for employees, and introduce effective mechanisms for protecting their rights and interests. As our esteemed President has emphasized, *"Throughout its nearly 120-year history, the trade union movement of Uzbekistan has experienced periods of rise and decline, yet it has never lost its relevance."*

A trade union is a voluntary public association of citizens connected by common professional interests arising from their work or field of study, established to represent and protect their labor-related and other socio-economic rights and interests, and operating on the basis of its charter[1].

A trade union association is a voluntary union established to coordinate and consolidate activities aimed at protecting the professional, labor, and socio-economic rights and interests of workers, organized by sectoral, territorial, or other professional characteristics.

Citizens engaged in labor activities, as well as individuals aged fifteen or older studying at secondary special, vocational, higher education, or research institutions, have the right — without prior permission and regardless of any distinction — to establish trade unions voluntarily, and to join existing trade unions provided they comply with their charters.

The fundamental principles of trade union activities include legality, voluntariness, non-discrimination, independence and self-governance, equality, transparency, and openness.

Furthermore, trade unions, their associations, branches, and primary organizations have the right to participate in resolving issues related to employment, protecting workers who are being laid off, and in addressing other matters related to the protection of employees' socio-economic rights and interests.

Trade unions and their associations may participate in formulating social programs aimed at ensuring decent living conditions and the free development of individuals, as well as in developing measures for social protection and determining basic living standards and minimum subsistence levels.

A Historical Overview of Trade Unions

The term *"trade union"* refers to organizations dedicated to protecting the labor, social, and legal interests of workers[2]. The origins of trade unions trace back to the Industrial Revolution (19th century), when groups of workers in Great Britain and the United States began uniting to jointly struggle for improved working conditions, wages, and working hours. For example, in Britain, the *Trade Union Act of 1871* granted trade unions the legal right to operate.

Throughout the 20th century, trade unions expanded at the national level and later evolved into international organizations. One such example is the establishment of the World Federation of Trade Unions on October 3, 1945[3].

Trade unions eventually transcended national boundaries and integrated into global networks, enabling the alignment of workers' rights with international standards, conducting negotiations with transnational corporations, and improving social protection systems.

The history of trade unions in the Republic of Uzbekistan has a strong historiographical foundation. According to historical sources, the trade union movement emerged and took shape in the 1920s.

Overall, extensive and rigorous academic studies have been devoted to the history of trade unions in Uzbekistan. Systematic analysis of these works clearly shows the need to divide research on the history of trade unions into two stages: studies conducted during the Soviet era and those undertaken during the period of national independence.

The first stage includes research published during the administrative-command governance system, where the "class-based approach" influenced the choice of methods and interpretation of historical events and processes.

The second stage encompasses works published during Uzbekistan's period of national independence, based on universal human values, democratic principles, sustainable societal development, and modern scientific and methodological foundations[4].

Issues related to the emergence, development, social and personnel aspects of trade unions have been thoroughly examined by researchers during every stage of Soviet societal development. The trade union movement remained at the center of attention during the formation of the Soviet regime (late 1917 to early 1920). It was assigned a prominent role in the system of social relations and the political structure of the Soviet state. The Bolsheviks sought to instill their ideological

views in the population, which required establishing control over state institutions, including trade unions representing the working masses.

The rich body of scholarly literature reflects researchers' ongoing interest in the topic. By the late 1980s, concise historical essays on the activities of trade unions were published, major monographs were written, dissertations were defended, and numerous academic and popular science articles examined various aspects of trade union activities[5].

Development of Trade Unions in Uzbekistan (1970–1980s)

In the 1970s–1980s, the number of trade union members in Uzbekistan increased significantly. While in 1970 the total membership stood at 2.5 million people, by 1985 this figure had reached 4.7 million, accounting for nearly 95 percent of the working population.

Under the Soviet system, trade unions in Uzbekistan operated under the leadership of state and party bodies. The composition of the governing bodies of trade unions was approved by the Communist Party, which limited their ability to act independently.

At the same time, trade unions actively participated in the work of state and economic institutions. Representatives of trade unions served as deputies in the Supreme Soviet and local councils and took part in legislative processes. Trade union leaders were included in the boards of ministries and the collegiums of economic organizations.

Trade unions were authorized to conclude collective agreements jointly with the administrations of enterprises and institutions and to monitor their implementation. In the 1970s–1980s, more than 10,000 collective agreements were concluded annually in Uzbekistan, which played an important role in ensuring labor and social rights[6].

Researcher M.T. Ayupov highlights a number of difficulties faced by trade unions in Uzbekistan throughout their development. He notes: first, despite universal patterns inherent to the development of trade unions worldwide, *the remnants of Eastern feudalism, economic and cultural inequality, the strong influence of Islam on the population*, as well as the underdeveloped working class and intelligentsia, had a significant impact on the educational work of trade unions; second, the political system of the Soviet Union diminished the role of trade unions and restricted their participation in social relations; third, many difficulties resulted from the subjectivity and arbitrariness of state authorities[7].

The Federation of Trade Unions of Uzbekistan has been conducting systematic research aimed at enhancing the role of trade unions in society, including studying the history of this public organization and the origins of the early trade union movement. For this purpose, a special working group was established, and comprehensive research was carried out by leading historians, scholars, and orientalists in the Institute of History of the Academy of Sciences of Uzbekistan, the National Archive of Uzbekistan, the National Archive of Cinema, Photo and Audio Documents, the Archive of the Administration of the President of Uzbekistan, the Department of Rare and Valuable Publications of the National Library of Uzbekistan, the State Museum of the History of Uzbekistan, and other scientific institutions[7.

Additionally, over five thousand documents were studied in the Russian State Historical Archive and the Russian National Library in St. Petersburg, resulting in the discovery of valuable information regarding the history of trade unions in Uzbekistan. More than 500 issues of newspapers such as *Turkiston*, *Ishchilar Dunosi*, *Hurshid*, *Taraqqiy*, and *Samarkand*, which published materials on labor movements in the Turkestan Governor-Generalship, were analyzed.

Historical sources show that while the earliest trade unions emerged in the second half of the 19th century in England and America, the first trade union movement in the Turkestan region began in the early 20th century. According to research, as in many parts of the world, workers and

employees in Turkestan started forming various circles, gatherings, and associations even before trade unions formally appeared. In 1905, 15 such workers' circles were active in Tashkent.

Research indicates that trade unions in Uzbekistan have a history of nearly 120 years, with the first unions established in 1905 by railway workers and communication employees.

In the autumn of 1905, the Turkestan branch of the Railway Workers' Union was established. By early 1906, it had united around 8,000 workers from the Central Asian and Orenburg–Tashkent railway systems. At the First Congress of the Turkestan branch of the All-Russian Railway Union held in Tashkent on 1 July 1906, the Charter of the railway workers of Central Asia and Orenburg–Tashkent was adopted. A copy of this document is preserved in the Museum of the History of Trade Unions of Uzbekistan.

Archival documents report that on 24 October 1905, a general meeting of postal and telegraph workers was held in Tashkent, during which the decision was made to establish the Turkestan branch of the Postal-Telegraph Union and to elect a committee to manage its activities.

In February 1905, approximately 400 workers from the Orenburg–Tashkent railway and nearly 800 workers from the Central Asian railway's main workshops in Tashkent submitted a list of 19 demands to their administration. This list, aimed at protecting workers' rights and interests, can be considered a precursor to modern collective agreements.

The *Samarkand* newspaper, in its issue No. 116 dated 10 June 1905, published an article titled *"Railway Service Workers' Union"*, emphasizing the need to establish trade unions uniting workers of various professions in the railway sector. From 13 to 20 December 1905, the First Congress of the workers and employees of the Central Asian railways was held, during which an eight-hour workday was approved to take effect in January. This historic decision was a major victory for trade union activists.

On 24 October 1905, a meeting of communication workers in Tashkent resolved to establish the Turkestan branch of the Postal-Telegraph Union, to join the All-Russian Postal-Telegraph Union "based on the joint protection of moral and economic interests," and to elect a committee to manage the branch.

The *Russkiy Turkestan* newspaper (issue No. 264, December 1905) reported the formation of a Trade Union of Office Employees and Accountants in Tashkent. Articles from newspapers such as *Turkestan*, *Turkestanskie Vedomosti*, *Turkestanskiy Kuryer*, *Noviy Put'*, and *Vpered*, published in 1905–1906, mention founding meetings of unions such as the Tailors and Shoemakers Union, the Union of Waiters, Cooks, and Domestic Workers, the Printers' Union, the Tashkent Mechanical Factory Workers' Union, the Builders' Union, and the Union of Women Feldshers and Nurses[8].

After the establishment of the railway and postal-telegraph unions, several other mass trade union organizations began emerging in the summer of 1906. By late 1905, several smaller unions had appeared, including the "Transport Workers' Union" and the "Union of Accountants, Clerks, and Office Employees" in Samarkand. From June 1906, other similar unions began to form.

The first elections of the Turkestan Trade Unions were held from 22 June to 2 July 1918, with more than 92,000 trade union members participating. Of the 227 delegates to the congress, 75 were members of the Bolshevik Party, while the rest were Mensheviks, Social Revolutionaries, and non-partisans. The congress discussed and adopted the model charter of the trade union, which included provisions aimed at supporting the intellectual, moral, and political development of members and increasing labor productivity. A Central Council of 15 members for the Turkestan Republic's trade unions was elected at the meeting[9].

It was also discovered that as early as 1906, in order to expand its activities and equip its members with essential knowledge and skills, the Turkestan Trade Union opened its own library in Tashkent. This demonstrates the strong interest in trade union activities in the region and indicates that the early development of trade unions in Turkestan was grounded in knowledge and enlightenment.

These findings confirm that the earliest trade unions in Turkestan emerged in 1905.

In 1990, the Declaration on the Establishment of the Federation of Trade Unions of Uzbekistan was adopted, and the organizational formalization of the Federation was completed in 1991 with the adoption of its Charter.

From the earliest days of independence, special attention was given to developing non-governmental non-profit organizations within the new political, social, and economic conditions of the republic. Notably, one of the first laws adopted during the independence period was the Law "On Trade Unions, Their Rights and Guarantees of Their Activities," which defined the legal status of trade unions as one of the largest public organizations in the country.

Establishment of "Trade Unions Day"

In his congratulatory message addressed to the participants of the Eighth Congress of the Federation of Trade Unions of Uzbekistan in 2020, President Shavkat Mirziyoyev emphasized that large-scale measures had been implemented within the trade union system, that efforts to provide socio-economic support to employees in labor collectives had entered a new stage, and that the role and significance of trade unions—as the largest civil institution in the country—had been growing. In this context, he proposed that, for the first time in the history of independent Uzbekistan, 11 November be designated as *"Trade Unions Day."*

On 23 November 2020, the Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan *"On Designating Trade Unions Day in Uzbekistan"* was adopted, officially establishing 11 November as Trade Unions Day.

Today, the Federation of Trade Unions of Uzbekistan unites 14 sectoral trade unions as well as associations of trade union organizations of the Republic of Karakalpakstan, 12 regions, and the city of Tashkent, bringing together more than six million members.

The highest governing body of the Federation is the Congress, which convenes once every five years. Between congresses, the activities of the Federation are directed by the Council of the Federation of Trade Unions of Uzbekistan. Members of the Council are elected at the congresses of sectoral trade unions, conferences of regional councils, and at the Federation Congress.

A clear indication of the growing role of social partnership in a tripartite format—between the state, trade unions, and employers—over the past seven to eight years is the adoption of the new Law *"On Trade Unions."*

Within the system of the Federation, the Academy of Labor and Social Relations has been established, along with a Professional Development Institute, the Museum of the History of Trade Unions of Uzbekistan, the Fund for Supporting Child Health Improvement and Public Health Restoration, and the Department for Organizing Children's Recreation and Rehabilitation.

The number of children's recreation camps in the system increased from 18 to 107. In 2016, 17 sanatoriums were operating under the trade unions, whereas today their number has reached 32. The "Trade Unions Water Sports Complex," fully meeting international standards, has been commissioned. Another noteworthy fact is that in recent years the number of trade union members has exceeded seven million.

As a result of efforts to enhance the professional capacity of trade union specialists and activists, the recent elections to the Legislative Chamber of the Oliy Majlis and local councils led to the

election of 52 trade union employees and activists to district and city councils, and 17 trade union representatives to the Jokargy Kenes of the Republic of Karakalpakstan, regional councils, and the Tashkent City Council. This reflects the increasing public trust in trade unions[10].

The Role of Trade Unions in Legal and Social State-Building

It should be emphasized that today the role and influence of trade unions in the socio-political life of our country continue to grow. The main reason is that the trade union system has become deeply integrated into society, prioritizing the protection of people's interests, addressing their difficulties, and serving the population.

As a civil society institution, one of the most important tasks of trade unions in the democratization process is to strengthen the organizational and social protection functions of primary trade union organizations in labor collectives—drawing on international experience—while enhancing their decisive role in social partnership, ensuring their status as independent organizations, and consolidating sectoral trade unions. This is essential for the further development of civil society.

The new version of the Constitution enshrines the state's strategic goal of building a *social state*, introducing principles of social justice and solidarity, and establishing fundamentally new constitutional mechanisms for protecting human rights and freedoms. In particular, Article 73 of the Constitution stipulates: *"Trade unions represent and protect the socio-economic rights and interests of employees. Membership in trade unions is voluntary*"[11].

Citizens engaged in labor activity, as well as individuals aged fifteen or older studying in secondary special, vocational, higher education, or research institutions, have the right—without any restrictions or prior permission—to voluntarily form trade unions and join existing ones, provided they comply with their charters.

It is prohibited to obstruct citizens from exercising their right to join trade unions or to compel them to join or leave a trade union. State bodies, their officials, and employers must ensure respect for the rights of trade unions and their associations. Interference in the activities of trade unions—including demanding documents regarding their internal affairs—is not permitted.

Trade unions have the right to participate in the formulation of state policy on employment and protection of labor rights, to carry out public oversight over employers' compliance with labor and industry-related legislation, and to file claims in court for the protection of workers' rights, including applications for court orders when necessary. As the President has noted, he wishes that all employers and leaders in the country observe the following globally recognized rule: *every enterprise or institution must have a functioning trade union, and directors must work in close cooperation with them.* Only then can violations of labor legislation be prevented, and social justice can be further strengthened in society[12].

Trade Unions of New Uzbekistan – Moving Toward New Horizons

Under the conditions of economic reforms and market relations, the need to strengthen the organizational structure of trade unions and consolidate resources and capacities has significantly increased. Today, the Federation of Trade Unions of Uzbekistan has transitioned to a system based on social partnership and has begun to conclude bilateral regional and sectoral agreements with the government, ministries, agencies, and regional administrations. Ensuring employment for the able-bodied population, preventing unemployment, providing social services to workers, and safeguarding the health of employees and their families have remained among the key priorities of trade union activities.

The cultural center located in the heart of Tashkent—which for more than a century served as a cradle of national art and a venue where renowned masters of Uzbek and world culture once

showcased their exceptional talents—has now been transformed into the *"Trade Unions Palace."* This architectural complex, rebuilt through the initiatives of the trade unions, is making a significant contribution to promoting Uzbek culture and art, and to enriching the spiritual world of the younger generation[13].

The establishment of the Academy of Labor and Social Relations under the Federation of Trade Unions holds great importance for training highly qualified specialists and for conducting scientific research on labor relations.

In recent years, the cooperation of Uzbekistan's trade unions with their international and foreign counterparts has expanded considerably, contributing to increasing the country's prestige on the global stage. Notably, following the model of the Consultative Council of the Leaders of Central Asian States, the Federation of Trade Unions of Uzbekistan initiated the creation of the Council of Trade Unions of Central Asian Countries. This platform serves as an important arena for developing neighborly relations based on friendship, solidarity, mutual benefit, and trust among workers of the region.

It should be emphasized that the role and influence of trade unions in the socio-political life of the country continue to grow. The main reason for this is the organization's deep integration into society and its commitment to alleviating people's hardships and serving the interests of the population as a priority mission.

To strengthen the socio-economic protection of young people working in enterprises and studying at higher and secondary specialized educational institutions, as well as to support women, the Youth Council and the Women's Council were established under the Federation.

As part of efforts to support employment, trade unions are involved in verifying the authenticity of newly created jobs. A comprehensive set of measures has been developed and implemented to ensure the participation of trade unions in supporting employment and assisting college graduates with job placement.

Trade unions also place special emphasis on formalizing labor relations in the informal sector. Recommendations of the Federation on conducting awareness campaigns aimed at reducing informal employment have been disseminated across the regions. Specific measures are being implemented to attract employees of private-sector enterprises and organizations to trade unions.

To improve labor protection, prevent industrial accidents, and reduce occupational diseases, the Federation of Trade Unions, together with partner organizations, approved and implemented the *"Action Program for Improving Working Conditions and Labor Protection for 2015–2016."*

An interdepartmental working group was established and tasked with actively participating in developing normative documents in the field of labor protection, reviewing existing legislation and international standards, and preparing proposals for amending relevant regulatory acts.

To ensure timely identification and elimination of industrial accidents, methodological guidelines were developed for trade union labor protection specialists on participation in accident investigation commissions. Additionally, procedures were established for reporting industrial accidents within the Federation system, as well as for defining trade union representation in special investigation commissions[14.

To enhance the role and status of primary trade union organizations in enterprises and institutions and to support their activities in protecting the socio-economic interests of employees, the *"Best Primary Organization"* competition is held once every two years. A program for improving the activities of primary organizations has been adopted and is being implemented.

To support talented young professionals, the Federation and its member organizations conduct the annual *"Most Active Young Specialist of the Year"* competition.

In order to keep the public informed about the activities of trade unions, the official web portal of the Federation and the websites of member organizations are continuously improved. Interactive services have been introduced on the Federation's web portal, enabling citizens to submit online inquiries.

Practical cooperation has been established with the National Television and Radio Company of Uzbekistan and editorial offices of national printed media, which regularly cover the activities of trade unions related to the protection of workers' socio-economic interests.

International cooperation has also strengthened in recent years. The Federation of Trade Unions of Uzbekistan has become a member of the General Confederation of Trade Unions; agreements have been concluded with trade union organizations of Central Asian states; and cooperation with the International Labour Organization has advanced to a new stage.

Based on the above, the following proposals are considered appropriate for increasing the effectiveness of trade union activities:

- Ensuring the legal independence of trade unions and enhancing workers' legal culture.
- Developing and expanding the system of collective agreements at both national and sectoral levels.
- Promoting the widespread use of information and communication technologies by trade unions—using the internet and mobile applications for communicating with members and strengthening legal awareness campaigns.
- Expanding cooperation between national trade unions and international organizations through regular exchanges of experience, training programs, and international conferences.
- Conducting broad educational and promotional activities to enhance public understanding of the role and importance of trade unions in society.

Today, the sense of gratitude among our workers is steadily growing. Every initiative and action undertaken by trade unions is aimed at creating decent working conditions for every employee, supporting the well-being and future of their families and children, and ensuring their moral well-being and happiness.

New Uzbekistan presents new tasks for its trade unions. In particular, trade unions are taking active steps toward shaping a bright and prosperous future for workers, supporting young people, safeguarding and enriching the high moral qualities that form the essence of our national identity, and presenting them to the world. The achievements of New Uzbekistan in this sphere have already gained international recognition and high appraisal. Understandably, trade unions actively participate in ongoing reforms and contribute to protecting the socio-economic interests and labor rights of employees across various sectors.

In conclusion, it can be stated that the trade unions of our country—having a rich and extensive tradition and experience—will continue to successfully accomplish their mission and make a worthy contribution to the development and advancement of modern labor relations in New Uzbekistan.

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