

COUNTRY:

Georgia

UNION:

Trade Union of Metallurgy,
Mining and Chemical
Industry Workers of Georgia
(TUMMCIWG)

profile

TEXT:

Ilya Matveev

PHOTO:

TUMMCIWG



“Believe it or not, I spend only two nights a week at home. The rest of the time I travel around the country and talk to workers,” says Tamaz Dolaberidze, TUMMCIWG president.

In 2010, when Tamaz was elected president, the union had merely 1,500 members – today it counts 5,000 in its ranks.

In the last three years, TUMMCIWG has been organizing workers at large mining and chemical plants. Local unions have been created at the Zestafoni Ferroalloy Plant, the Chiatura processing plant, the Hercules metallurgical plant in Kutaisi, and several others.

“The labour market in Georgia is extremely deregulated and employers have very few obligations to abide by. This situation gives collective agreements a crucial importance, although it’s very difficult to get to the point when they are signed,” Tamaz explains.

GEORGIA: successful organizing in difficult conditions

With its abridged 2006 Labour Code, subject to an ILO complaint, and multiple rights violations, Georgia is a difficult place for union organizing. And yet, in just three years the Trade Union of Metallurgy, Mining and Chemical Industry Workers of Georgia (TUMMCIWG) has more than tripled its membership.

Organizing a plant starts with a careful study of its workforce. The union then tries to establish contacts, holding meetings at the entrance of the plant. Union activists visit workers at home and try to get them to join the union. When around 20-25 new contacts are established, the TUMMCIWG invites these workers to a workshop. Within two or three months it begins to show who are the potential leaders, who then start building the new union.

“Both internal and external organizing is important”, says Tamaz. **“Not all organizing efforts are successful, but this is the only way forward.”**

However, there is a widespread resistance to organizing. At the moment, the union is struggling with the employers at four plants. At Georgian Manganese, a metallurgical company, collective bargaining begun in January 2013. The union prepared a draft collective agreement, and both sides were ready to sign it. But at the last moment the management rejected the agreement, which prompted a workers’ strike.

At another company, the GTM Group, several union activists were fired the same day as the union was created. The union president was verbally abused by the general director and escorted off the plant premises. The union filed a court complaint in response to the treatment endured.

But despite these difficulties, the TUMMCIWG is steadily growing and signing new collective agreements.

Tamaz Dolaberidze, the man behind TUMMCIWG’s success, started his career as a worker at a chemical plant in 1992,

while simultaneously studying in Tbilisi, the capital of Georgia. He joined the labour movement in 2003, and after becoming the Georgian Trade Union Confederation’s representative in one of country’s regions, Tamaz moved on to become the assistant president of TUMMCIWG. In 2010 he was elected president of the TUMMCIWG.

Now Tamaz looks to the future. **“The most important thing is that there are 10,000 unorganized workers in the industry, most of which are Chiatura miners”** he says. **“The union will strengthen its communications work and fight for collective agreements at all the plants. Another important goal is to change the whole ideology of union work; to talk more about rights and less about material aid to workers.”**

TUMMCIWG and IndustriALL Global Union

In Georgia’s difficult circumstances IndustriALL lends as much support as possible to TUMMCIWG. IndustriALL general secretary Jyrki Raina has sent several letters to Georgian companies, condemning their anti-union practices. Tamaz plans to sign a Global Framework Agreement with Georgian Manganese, and IndustriALL’s role in this is also crucial.

“Our union advances day by day, and IndustriALL’s help in this is very important,” says Tamaz.