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**Slovakia Becomes OECD's 30<sup>th</sup> Member, OECD Secretary-General Renewed for Second Term**

Coinciding with the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the signing of the Convention that created the OECD, the Organisation welcomed the Slovak Republic as its 30<sup>th</sup> Member and invited its Secretary-General, Donald J. Johnston, to serve a second five-year term.

The Slovak Republic's accession to the OECD, to be formalised later today when it deposits the instrument of ratification of the Convention with the French government, marks the conclusion of an important stage in expanding the OECD's membership in Central Europe that commenced in 1991 with the launch of the Organisation's "Partners in Transition" programme. Between 1995 and 1996, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland became Members of the OECD. Negotiations with the Slovak Republic, which had applied for membership in 1994, were concluded earlier this year.

Mr. Johnston, who is Canadian, took up his post as Secretary-General on 1 June 1996. A lawyer by profession, Mr. Johnston served as a Member of Parliament in Ottawa from 1978 to 1988 and held a number of posts in the Canadian government, including that of President of the Treasury Board. At the OECD, he has presided during the past four years over a process of redefining the Organisation's priorities and improving efficiencies, accompanied by a reduction in the Organisation's overall budget. He has also extended the OECD's contacts with major economies elsewhere in the world, launching a co-operation agreement with Russia and building on existing co-operation with China.

The OECD's priorities for the next five years focus on areas where multilateral co-operation is essential to ensure that citizens in all countries benefit from global interdependence and a globalised economy. These include the need to ensure that sustainable economic growth is accompanied by improvements in social conditions and environmental safeguards; co-operation with developing countries to maximise the benefits for all of trade and technological developments; the fight against harmful tax practices that distort competition; and the development of a policy framework to foster the growth of e-commerce.

"The OECD is a key forum for governments to address and develop policy responses to the challenges of a globalised economy," Mr. Johnston said. "I look forward to continuing our work with member governments in consolidating the framework of multilateral co-operation."

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