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LADB Staff

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Ex-Finance Secretary Jose Angel Gurria Elected Secretary-General of OECD

by LADB Staff
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The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) has elected former Mexican finance secretary Jose Angel Gurria Trevino as its next secretary-general. Gurria, who received an endorsement from most of the 30 member countries of the Paris-based organization, was chosen over former Polish prime minister Marek Belka.

Four other candidates, Sawako Takeuchi of Japan, Alain Madelin of France, Allan Fells of Australia, and Han Seung-Soo of South Korea, withdrew from the process during the past several months. Gurria will begin his five-year term on June 1, 2006, succeeding OECD Secretary General Donald Johnston of Canada.

Gurria will be the second consecutive non-European to run the organization, which was previously headed by citizens of France, the Netherlands, and Denmark. Gurria expected to recruit emerging economies. The OECD and other multilateral financial organizations like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) are under pressure to make changes to reflect the evolution of the global economy and to incorporate the viewpoints of emerging economies.

Gurria was considered the best candidate to lead this effort. "Jose Angel Gurria has his eyes on countries like China, India, Brazil, and Russia," said the German newspaper Suddeutsche Zeitung. The newspaper was quoted by Mexico's official news agency Notimex. Mexico is the only Latin American member in the OECD, which at times is known as the "club of the rich." The organization admitted Mexico in 1994, culminating an intense lobbying effort by former President Carlos Salinas de Gortari (see SourceMex, 1992-07-22 and 1994-03-30).

Some analysts said Gurria's leadership skills and his experience both as a trade negotiator and a finance secretary will serve the OECD well. He is widely credited for the successful implementation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and later for helping stabilize the Mexican economy in the wake of the peso devaluation in 1994. "He steered [the Mexican economy] towards lower inflation while maintaining strong growth rates, although external factors, such as the strength of the US economy in the late 1990s and the relative weakness of the peso, certainly helped him," said the London-based Financial Times.

Some observers expect Gurria's administration to be more efficient and transparent than his predecessor's. "Many expect [Gurria] to assume tasks that were neglected during the administration of Donald Johnston, when the OECD gained a reputation as an inefficient and closed organization," said Suddeutsche Zeitung. Gurria said he would like to turn the OECD into an information bank accessible to international economic leaders. "The OECD is an extension of the civil service," he told The Financial Times. "Everyone should feel comfortable with it. It's like a family."
Gurria's election welcomed in Mexico

Gurria's election to head the OECD was welcomed in Mexico, although some analysts said having a Mexican in such a high-level position would only make a slight difference in how Mexico conducts its economic policies. "It may help in the sense that Mexico will be the center of attention at the international level," said Javier Urbano, a specialist on international studies at the Universidad Iberoamericana in Mexico City. "Perhaps this will result in more solid domestic development policies."

Urbano pointed out that Mexico has consistently ranked low in many OECD reports related to development and the general welfare of the Mexican population. "We remain in practically the lowest ranks in terms of education, domestic development, and infrastructure," said Urbano. Still, Mexican legislators celebrated Gurria's ascent to the secretariat of the OECD.

Sen. Humberto Roque Villanueva, who chairs the commerce committee (Comision de Comercio) in the upper house, said Gurria is the most recent Mexican to attain a very important international position. Earlier this month, Mexican jurist Bernardo Sepulveda Amor was elected to serve a nine-year term on the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in The Hague (see SourceMex, 2005-11-09).

Carlos M. Jarque, former director of Mexico's statistics agency (Instituto Nacional de Estadisticas, Geografia e Informatica, INEGI), was appointed in November to a high post in the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB). Jarque will oversee the IDB's sustainable development division. He will begin his new position on Dec. 1, 2005.

Also, Foreign Relations Secretary Ernesto Derbez was a top contender for the post of secretary-general of the Organization of American States (OAS), a post that eventually went to Chilean Jose Miguel Insulza (see SourceMex, 2004-12-15 and NotiSur, 2005-05-06). [Sources: La Crisis, 10/27/05; Notimex, 10/26/05, 10/28/05; Criterios, 10/26/05, 11/11/05; Reuters, Bloomberg news service, Spanish news service EFE, 11/25/05; Los Angeles Times, 11/26/05; El Universal, 07/21/05, 11/09/05, 11/14/05, 11/25/05, 11/26/05; El Diario de Mexico, The Financial Times-London, 11/27/05; Reforma, 10/22/05, 10/28/05, 11/28/05; Suddeutsche Zeitung-Munich, 11/28/05; La Cronica de Hoy, 11/08/05, 11/25/05, 11/29/05; El Economista, 11/29/05; La Jornada, 07/21/05, 11/09/05, 11/26/05, 11/30/05; El Financiero, 11/30/05)

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