

**Opening Remarks by Angel Gurría, OECD Secretary-General,
Delivered at the FIRST OECD EURASIA WEEK “Enhancing Competitiveness in Eurasia”**

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OECD Conference Centre, Room CC 4
(As prepared for delivery)

[Timing: 5mn]

Dear President Burelle of Medef International,
Dear Mr. Lorincze Member of the of the BIAC Executive Board
Ministers, CEOs,
Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen

It is my pleasure to welcome you today to the First OECD Eurasia Week. I am delighted that so many key stakeholders have come together to further strengthen OECD relations with Eurasia region countries, focusing on the theme of the week – *Enhancing Competitiveness in Eurasia*.

The OECD Eurasia Week brings together high-level representatives from the Eurasia region, OECD member countries, academics, business leaders, international partner organisations, civil society and relevant experts for three days of policy dialogue and knowledge sharing.

Let me give you a brief overview of the week ahead of us. This morning, the Business Forum is gathering more than 120 senior executives active or interested in the region along with high-level government officials. This afternoon, a thematic session on “Greening Economies through Green Growth” will focus on the role of SMEs, in co-operation with the OECD Environment Action Plan (EAP) Task Force for Eastern Europe, South Caucasus and Central Asia. Tomorrow morning, a meeting of the Steering Committee of the OECD Eurasia Competitiveness Programme will be held. Tomorrow afternoon and Thursday will be dedicated to the Second OECD Eurasia Competitiveness Roundtable, including peer reviews of competitiveness reforms in Armenia, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan.

I would like to express my deepest appreciation to our partners from the Business and Industry Advisory Committee to the OECD (BIAC), which is the voice of business at the OECD, and the French Business Confederation, via MEDEF International, for their valuable support to today’s Business Forum.

Eurasia: important strengths, but significant challenges ahead

Since the break-up of the Soviet Union and the transition-related recession of the early 1990s, countries in Eurasia have witnessed a giant leap forward in economic development, transition to a market economy, and living standards. Per capita incomes have increased fourfold over the past two decades and have led to rapid growth in the region since the 2000s, with 5.4% average regional growth in 2012. Poverty rates have halved, and about 100 million people have been lifted out of poverty in the past decade. Income inequality has narrowed, and education and health outcomes have also significantly improved.

The Eurasia region has great competitive advantages, including **proximity to markets** like the EU, Russia, China and Turkey, **natural resources** – it accounts for one-third of the world’s estimated reserves of oil, gas, bauxite, and gold – and **very high literacy rates**.

However, the region still faces a number of challenges, particularly in building strong institutions and governance systems, developing interconnectedness and integrating into global markets, and achieving inclusive growth.

Co-operation between the OECD and Eurasia is intensifying

The OECD has been supporting sustainable and inclusive growth in the Eurasia region for over a decade by promoting structural reforms, building policy making capacities, and facilitating policy dialogue within and amongst countries of the region.

In 2001, we established the Eurasian Corporate Governance Roundtable to share good practices on corporate governance and institution building.

Since 2003, the Anti-Corruption Network for Eastern Europe and Central Asia has provided a peer-review mechanism to support anti-corruption reforms in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, the Kyrgyz Republic, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Ukraine and Uzbekistan.

In 2008, our partnership intensified with the creation of the OECD Eurasia Competitiveness Programme. Over the past six years, the Programme has established strong regional policy networks at the highest political levels, undertaking a series of ambitious projects and reviews at the regional, national and sub-national levels.

By building on OECD good practices and instruments, and developing a platform for peer review and knowledge exchange, the OECD has helped countries in the region boost competitiveness, improve the investment climate and strengthen entrepreneurship.

But more needs to be done to tap the great potential of the region.

Today, I am pleased to open this first OECD Eurasia Week as a new forum for a broad spectrum of thematic issues relevant to the region's competitiveness, trade and investment visibility, and public-private dialogue.

Public-private dialogue is essential to boost competitiveness in the region

Businesses play a key role in creating jobs, wealth and development. They must respect legal and ethical standards when dealing with staff, sub-contractors, clients, the environment and tax authorities. Governments, for their part, should systematically consider private sector needs, and ensure transparency, value for money, and accountability in line with wider policy goals.

Mutual trust, determination, and public-private cooperation – at local, national and global levels – are at the heart of inclusive, resilient and competitive economies.

Today's Eurasia Business Forum is another major platform to foster this public-private dialogue and identify opportunities for further development of the region.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Let me conclude by emphasising that this first Eurasia Week, and the OECD Eurasia Business Forum today, are part of a much bigger picture of OECD work with partner countries. Our goal, together, is to build public policy and public-private dialogue for competitiveness, inclusive growth and better lives in Eurasia.

I will now give the floor to Mr. Burelle.

Thank you very much.