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Ukraine's Foreign Minister Hennadiy Udovenko (insert) was unanimously elected to be the president of the 52nd United Nations General Assembly.

Ukraine Chairs UN's 52nd Assembly

United Nations, Sept. 16, 1997... On the session's opening day, Ukraine's Foreign Minister Hennadiy Udovenko was elected by acclamation to serve as president of the UN's General Assembly for a term of one year.

Ukraine's Foreign Affairs Minister, Hennadiy Udovenko, was elected by acclamation to serve as President of the 52nd session of the U.N. General Assembly on the sessions opening day, to serve a term of one year.

During his 20-minute inaugural address, Mr. Udovenko acknowledged the privilege that had been given Ukraine and stated that he felt it is "symbolic that a representative of a renewed democracy, which is living through a period of fundamental social, economic and political reform, has become President of the General Assembly at a time when the issue of United Nations reforms tops its agenda."

Among the most controversial issues that face the assembly representatives are the ways in which U.N. structures should be reformed, including expansion of the Security Council, breaking the continuing stalemate over non-payment of arrears (overdue monies) by a dozen countries and the restoration of fiscal stability to the international organization.

As head of the General Assembly, Mr.

Udovenko will oversee the daily work of six permanent assembly committees, and of the assembly body composed of 185 representatives. Already there are more than 160 agenda items scheduled for consideration by the General Assembly, including approval of the U.N. annual budget, a process fraught with conflict in the past. Last year's agenda included 168 items.

The 185 members-states of the United Nations are informally divided into five regional blocs - Africa; Asia; Eastern Europe; Latin America and the Caribbean; Western Europe, the U.S. and Canada - and presidency of the General Assembly is rotated annually between regional blocs in the above order. Mr. Udovenko was the sole candidate put forth by the Eastern European bloc for approval by the full assembly.

In his remarks Mr. Udovenko offered a hopeful scenario, stating that "this session of the General Assembly has all the prerequisites to become a watershed session... We have a chance to revitalize this universal organization ... and mark the beginning of a new era in the history" of the U.N.

Secretary-General Kofi Annan, who met with Mr. Udovenko on September 12, praised the selection of Mr. Udovenko by the Eastern Europe bloc, citing the diplomat's experience and knowledge of U.N. procedures as factors that should ensure the success of the session.

NATO Info Centre Holds Seminar

Oct. 13, 1997... The NATO Information Centre jointly and the Centre for Social and Political Research held a seminar for representatives of Ukraine's local media. Although Ukraine held its first talks with NATO more than 5 years ago, most of the population is still not familiar with its work. The head of NATO's information centre in Kyiv, Roman Lyschchynsky, confirmed that more seminars for local journalists would be arranged soon. Deputy Information Minister Oleh Bai suggested that local papers help by writing special columns to give Ukrainians more information about NATO.

Ukraine gets Agreement to Join CEFTA

Sept. 12-14, 1997... A Ukrainian delegation to the Central European Free Trade Association's joint meeting in Slovakia secured an agreement on a framework for Ukrainian accession to CEFTA. Accession would mark an important point in Ukraine's relations with her Western neighbours, further distancing Kyiv from Russia and the CIS, and underscoring Ukraine's commitment to trade liberalization. The meeting was attended by the Prime Ministers of the six member countries: Slovenia, Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, and Romania. Officials of six countries seeking membership - Bulgaria, Croatia, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, and Ukraine - were guests.

In order to join CEFTA, Ukraine must become a WTO member, conclude individual free-trade agreements with all current CEFTA countries, and conclude an associate membership agreement with the EU. Ukraine is expected to be admitted to the WTO later this year; and the Prime Ministers of Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia told PM Valeriy Pustovoitenko, who led the Ukrainian delegation, that their countries will conclude free-trade agreements with Ukraine by early 1998 at the latest.

RADA Amends Election Law

Sept.-Oct. 1997... The Ukrainian parliament on Oct. 15 amended the law on parliamentary elections which it had adopted on Sept. 24. Acting in response to President Leonid Kuchma's observations and reservations to