

Speaking Notes for Reception in Honour of Lifting Visa Restrictions for
Poland, Hungary, Lithuania, and Slovakia
March 5, 2008

I would like to thank the ambassadors of Poland, Hungary, Lithuania, and Slovakia for hosting this reception to celebrate the Government of Canada's lifting the visa restrictions.

This decision announced by the Minister of Citizen and Immigration, the Honourable Diane Finley, is due in no small part to the interventions of our illustrious hosts this evening. Since becoming Speaker, I have had the honour of meeting with them on a number of occasions and I can tell you this issue was the first on their agenda.

Along with the interventions of the ambassadors, I have heard from some of their parliaments, as well. As Speaker, I am often called upon to engage in parliamentary diplomacy. In that role, I have, thus far, led delegations to three of our hosts' countries and met with my counterparts. It was made quite clear to me that the visa restrictions were needlessly impairing an otherwise rapidly growing relationship and friendship between our countries.

Canada and Canadians recognize the tremendous work of the people of Poland, Hungary, Lithuania, and Slovakia who in only 15 years have emerged from the shadows and created stable democracies with respect for human rights, prosperous economies based on market economics, and have joined the European Union allowing borderless access to Western Europe.