

**NOTES FOR A TOAST TO BE GIVEN
BY SPEAKER KINSELLA AT AN OFFICIAL
LUNCHEON HOSTED BY THE SPEAKER
OF THE PARLIAMENT OF ALBANIA**

Your Excellency Speaker Topalli,

Honoured Guests,

Honourable parliamentarians,

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Madame Speaker, it is very nice to see you again. I had the pleasure of first meeting you when you led a parliamentary delegation to Canada in 2007. I want to offer my personal congratulations to you on your recent re-election to your office.

Your Excellency, before becoming Speaker in 2005, you had been Deputy Speaker for eight years. Albania is a young democracy, and you have had first-hand experience with its development. I am fortunate to be able to learn about your country from someone who has personal knowledge of the changes you have gone through.

Although Albania has an ancient history, Canada's contacts with your country began only recently. The first contacts began in the late 1940s, when Canada was involved as an observer with the United Nations Special Committee on the Balkans.

Since your first democratic elections in 1991, Canada's policy has been to support the shift to the market economy and democracy and promote the establishment of lasting trade and investment ties.

To these ends, Canada has supported the economic, political, and military reforms Albania has undertaken in its efforts to join both the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. Indeed, I am very glad to see that these efforts have borne fruit and I congratulate you on formally joining NATO in July 2009.

We also cooperate through the NATO Parliamentary Assembly and La Francophonie, of which Albania has been an associate member since 1999. We are also both members of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly. Most recently, some Canadian parliamentarians participated in the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly's election observation mission for the 28 June 2009 parliamentary election in Albania. I understand that this was the first parliamentary election held according to a new electoral code and I was intrigued to hear the details of the code during this visit.

Of course, we must not forget the important contribution that the 22,000 people of Albanian descent in Canada play in fostering good relations between us.

Canada and Albania are also developing other ties. Our trade relations, although fairly slight, have increased over the past few years. In 2008, our two countries traded over 40 million dollars worth of goods – a substantial increase since 2001, when two-way trade totalled only 3 million dollars. Although the balance of trade is in Canada's favour, the establishment of a good trading relationship can only help strengthen our ties and lead to increased contact.

That is why my visit here is so important. It builds on these budding contacts and allows our countries to get to know each other better. Nothing can replace personal contact as a way of developing real understanding.

I am anxious to learn more about the situation in this part of the world, an area with which few Canadians are familiar. The Republic of Albania faces a number of daunting challenges, and I am interested in hearing from you the ways in which the Parliament of Albania is dealing with them.

By helping each other understand one another better, exchanges such as this play a valuable role in helping us fulfil our role as parliamentarians. Be assured that once I have returned home, I will continue to follow the situation in Albania.

In closing, Madame Speaker, allow me to thank you once again for your gracious hospitality.