

SPEAKING NOTES
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SPEAKER OF THE SENATE

ON THE OCCASION OF THE VISIT OF
SPEAKER BEBIĆ OF CROATIA

JUNE 9, 2009

Your Excellency Speaker Bebić,
Ambassador Korac,
Honourable parliamentarians,
Ladies and Gentlemen:

I want to welcome you all to the Senate this evening, particularly our colleagues from the Croatian parliament, the members of their delegation, and the members of the Croatian diplomatic corps. As it is the last night here in Ottawa for the delegation, I want to wish you a safe and productive completion to your travels.

Speaker Bebić, I am particularly pleased to have made your acquaintance. You first enjoyed a prosperous business career before entering into public service as a Member of Parliament. That you have been elected for six consecutive terms shows that you hold the respect and trust of the people in your community. That you have been elected as Speaker of the Sabor shows that you hold the respect and trust of your parliamentary colleagues. We are honoured to be able to benefit from your long experience.

This morning's meeting was not only a personal pleasure for me, in that I was able to get better acquainted with our honoured guests here tonight, citizens from a country with a rich and complex history, but it was also an exceptional learning opportunity. As usual, it was interesting to share perspectives on common issues, especially those relating to our roles as Speakers.

The Croatian Sabor is an institution that, over the centuries, preserved the concept of a united Croatia. In these exceptional times, with Croatia preparing to take up its political and military responsibilities as a NATO ally, while adapting to the rigours of the European Union's *acquis communautaire*, and promoting sincere and sustainable regional reconciliation, the Sabor has a key role to play.

It is interesting to note that ties between Croatia and Canada go back to the earliest days of European exploration in North America. Two sailors from Dalmatia accompanied French explorer Jacques Cartier on his third voyage to Canada in 1541. They would have ventured as far up the St. Lawrence waterway as your destination tomorrow, the island of Montreal. Croatians also served in the Austrian military units that helped defend New France in 1758. And Croatians took part in the Klondike gold rush of the 1890s.

Most of the immigration from Croatia to Canada took place in the 20th century. Many of the early immigrants settled in remote mining and mill towns. More recently, Croatian immigrants have settled in our major cities, where they have become part of the Canadian mainstream. Today, Canada is home to a sizable Croatian community. Our 2006 census showed that over 110,000 people claimed some Croatian origins.

Through various fraternal societies, Croatian Catholic parishes, and an active press, Croatian Canadians have been able to maintain their identity. At the same time, they have become part of the Canadian mainstream. Some are very well known. Hockey players Frank and Peter Mahovlich and Joe Sakic, along with former Canadian Heavyweight Boxing Champion George Chuvalo, are familiar names to all Canadians. Frank Mahovlich is now a member of the Canadian Senate and is thus particularly well known in these quarters.

The ties between Croatian-Canadians and their homeland are important in cementing the bonds between us, but the ties between our parliaments are important as well. Through exchanges such as this, we come to appreciate the challenges facing each other's country.

Above all, however, the purpose of our visit here is to build lasting relationships with our Croatian counterparts. Our meetings will help dissolve the physical and cultural distances between us. Ziveli! (Zhi-vol-ee) To Life!