

**TOAST GIVEN BY SPEAKER KINSELLA
TO THE POLAND-CANADA FRIENDSHIP GROUP**

Members of Parliament, ladies and gentlemen:

Czesc (Chesh),

On behalf of my colleagues, I would like to thank you for your warm welcome and to tell you how honoured we are to continue the tradition of exchanges between our two parliaments.

Canada has a large and vital Polish community, so it is only natural that relations between our countries are so warm. The bonds between Poland and Canada are like those between family members – we welcome every opportunity to meet, to explore new avenues for trade and investment, and to expand our co-operation in the international arena.

Even though our two countries are geographically far apart, the ties between us go back a long way. There were individual Poles in Canada as early as 1752, and the first Polish families settled in Ontario in 1858.

Around the beginning of the last century, Canada began actively encouraging Polish immigrants to come and settle our prairies in Western Canada. Thousands made the long journey in successive waves of immigration. Today, some 800,000 Canadians claim Polish ancestry – roughly three percent of the population. As well, over 30,000 Poles visit Canada every year.

These numbers alone do not give the full extent of the contribution Poles have made to Canadian society. Through their hard work and perseverance, Poles helped open the wilderness, settle the prairies, and develop Canada's mining, forestry, and farming industries. Today, they are prominent in many sectors, including the media, politics, and industry. At the same time, Canadians of Polish decent have kept their culture and traditions alive through the Roman Catholic Church, community centres, credit unions, and other institutions.

In addition to the close personal ties created by immigration, history has often brought Poles and Canadians together. When the Second World War broke out, Polish art treasures were sent to Canada for safekeeping. We fought side by side during that conflict and during the Gulf War. Today, our troops are working together in Afghanistan.

To support Poland's economic and political reforms, in 1989 Canada launched a program of technical cooperation. Managed by the Canadian International Development Agency, it focused on the development of the private sector, the agriculture sector, and education and training.

Given the great strides Poland made, our program of aid ended when you joined the European Union in 2004. Today, rather than being a recipient of aid, Poland works with Canada to fund development projects in other countries

Let us not forget Canadian-Poland trade relations. Last year, for the first time two-way trade surpassed one billion Canadian dollars – which is about 2.6 billion zlotych.⁽¹⁾ In addition, more and more Canadian firms are investing in Poland.

Visits such as this go a long way to building and reinforcing these ties between us. As parliamentarians, we will be called up on to make decisions regarding our common interests, and the more we know about Poland, the better we will be able to make informed decisions. At the same time, we are able to tell you about Canada's concerns and goals. By sharing such information, we help each other develop images of each other's country that are built on personal information, rather than second-hand knowledge.

We will soon be returning home, but we will continue to follow developments in Poland closely. I hope we will have the chance to continue these exchanges. In closing, I would like to thank you for your warm hospitality, and I hope we will have the chance to meet again.

Dziękuję bardzo (Zhe-koo'-yay bahrd'-zoh)

(1) Zlotych is the plural of zloty – the Polish currency.