

65th Anniversary of Canada-Russia Bilateral Relations  
Speech by the Honourable Noël Kinsella,  
Speaker of the Senate of Canada  
November 07, 2007

Diplomatic Academy of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation

I am thrilled to be with you today to celebrate the 65th anniversary of diplomatic relations between our two countries. I would like to extend my sincere appreciation to the Diplomatic Academy of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation for hosting this Roundtable to mark the occasion – and for inviting me to say a few words. I am delighted to speak to an audience of young people who are committed to the ideals of diplomacy and to the strengthening of relations between our two countries.

It has become a cliché to say that Canada and Russia have much in common. But these commonalities are worth remembering. Our cold winters, vast land, sense of nordicité and love of hockey. Our shared federal system with inevitable tensions between the centre and the regions. Our multiculturalism, and the richness of our natural resources.

Canadian theatre director Michael Bawtree probably got it right, when in working on Gogol's *The Government Inspector* in the 1960s, he remarked that: "Canada and Russia are the largest countries in the world. They lie within the same latitudes. They share a climate of extremes. They share a sense of wind and plain, of airy desolation; and they enclose huddles of people within the harsh rhythms of the North." Bawtree added: "I've always felt that Canada has this kind of elementary kinship with Russia, a kinship more mysterious and so tougher than that with the sultry United States...it is time we shared not only snow but visions."

This elemental kinship is backed up a history of learning about each other. A search through Russia's archives turns up an enormous number of studies on Canada, often commissioned by the government – not surprisingly in areas where today we pursue cooperation. On agriculture, judicial reforms, forestry, municipal self-government, northern development and the Canadian Pacific Railway, for over 200 years there has been a Russian audience for the Canadian experience.

This interest was reciprocated, from the earliest days: our Under Secretary of State for External Affairs in 1942 tasked the newly-appointed Canadian Minister Dana Wilgress with obtaining as much information as possible on Soviet international civil aviation and development of the Far North. We were, in fact, so eager to get here that Wilgress and his staff endured a gruelling eight week trip – through Brazil, Ghana, Egypt and Iran – to reach Kuibyshev, today's Samara, the temporary wartime location of the Soviet Foreign Ministry.

Changes in both Canadian and Russian political systems in the 20th century engendered a new, dynamic bilateral relationship. In the wake of WWII, the Soviet Union was quick to realize that Canada wanted neither to fall into the American nor the British sphere of influence, but rather to scope out a distinct foreign policy that would make a special relationship with Russia possible.

Despite the obvious constraints of the Cold War, there were moments throughout that period when we tried to do just that. In 1955, at former Soviet Foreign Minister Molotov's invitation, Lester Pearson became the first NATO Foreign Minister to visit the Soviet Union. Canada was the first NATO country to break a boycott imposed at the time of the Czechoslovak crisis by inviting then Foreign Minister Gromyko to Canada. Two years later, former Prime Minister Trudeau made a trip through the Soviet Union, promoting our ties as northern neighbours by visiting Norilsk, Murmansk and Leningrad. Prime Minister Mulroney's highly successful trade visit to the Soviet Union in 1989 set the course of our currently excellent trade relations.

In more recent years, Canada initiated Russia's integration into the G7, a process that culminated with Russia's hosting of the impressive 2006 G8 Summit in St. Petersburg. Our bilateral negotiations on Russia's WTO accession were concluded successfully more than a year ago.

This selection of historical events omits, of course, the delicate moments and even confrontation which sometimes arose during the Cold War and even before it. Our first diplomatic "incident" actually occurred in 1892, when the Russian Navy seized six Nova Scotian ships in the Bering Sea! A quarter century later Halifax port authorities seized Leon Trotsky and confined him to Amherst, Nova Scotia for one month.

Leaving aside such incidents, however, the history of our relationship illustrates our common proclivity to frank and open discussions, to dialogue with "no strings attached" even under difficult conditions, and to finding a common ground which often eludes other partnerships.

### The Way Ahead

What is on the agenda today? And how can we realize our full potential as partners?

The current elements of our bilateral relationship, as outlined by Prime Minister Stephen Harper and President Putin in two Joint Statements issued in St. Petersburg, engage a wide spectrum of cooperation. The Canada-Russia Business Summit held earlier this year in Ottawa underlined the strong potential for amplifying our economic cooperation. Our joint projects under the Global Partnership Programme represent another key area of collaboration, as does our dialogue on Northern issues, including sustainable development and northern transport opportunities. We continue to hold annual strategic security talks, covering a wide range of international issues, and are reinforcing military contacts. The visit of Prime Minister Viktor Zubkov to Canada at the end of the month will no doubt strengthen these ties and introduce a new focus of cooperation as our countries engage in planning for the next two Winters Olympics - Vancouver in 2010 and Sochi in 2014.

While I have focussed mainly on strengthening the bilateral relationship, Canada and Russia have become partners in the global community. We share a profound respect for multilateralism and international law and cooperate on many issues. Our partnership in the G8 has become a central feature of our relationship and includes a shared responsibility for both Canada and Russia, as multicultural and complex nations, to demonstrate that democracy, freedom and citizen-driven governance are the only solid foundations for prosperous societies in the 21st century.

In conclusion, I am reminded how fortunate we are: Canadians and Russians find partnerships easy because of our remarkable similarities and long-held fascination with how the other lives. The Agreement of 1942 simply formalized a multitude of ties which already existed. A closer partnership is ours for the taking, but will not come without continuing dedication and heavy investments both across the board and by young people endowed with the energy and enthusiasm of those gathered in this room.

After 65 years of diplomatic relations, we all recognize that all the conditions are in place for Canada and Russia to pursue a common vision of economic growth and global stability. It is my pleasant task to invite you all to join us in getting on with this work.