

**SPEAKING NOTES
THE HONOURABLE NOËL A. KINSELLA
SPEAKER OF THE SENATE**

**ON THE OCCASION OF A RECEPTION
IN HONOUR OF THE 90TH ANNIVERSARY OF
DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS BETWEEN CANADA AND
THE CZECH REPUBLIC AND THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC**

**OTTAWA
2 NOVEMBER 2010**

Your Excellency Ambassador Karel Žebrakovský,
Your Excellency Ambassador Milan Kollar,
Honourable Senators and Members of the House of Commons,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen:

Welcome to Parliament and to the Speaker's quarters, where we are gathered to celebrate 90 years of diplomatic relations between Canada and the Czech Republic and the Slovak Republic. Despite the physical distance between our countries, we enjoy long-standing relationships built on a history of cooperation.

I am particularly pleased that both Ambassador Žebrakovský and Ambassador Kollar were able to join us on this occasion. Both of you have done exceptional work in representing your countries and we are grateful for the unique perspectives you bring as we continue to strengthen ties with our European partners. We are also fortunate to have with us this evening the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic, Mr. Vladimír Galuška.

People of Czech and Slovak descent first came to Canada about 130 years ago, primarily settling in the Canadian prairies and making western farmland their home. They helped make Canada a more vibrant and diverse country, and they have also been a major factor in forging the bonds of friendship between our nations.

Both the Czech Republic and Slovakia have made remarkable strides during the course of the 90 years of our formal diplomatic relations. Following independence, a tremendous effort has been made to create stable, multiparty parliamentary democracies based on the rule of law, respect for human rights, and tolerance of differences.

Although young democracies, democratization and economic liberalization have swiftly brought about significant changes and we have enjoyed excellent partnerships throughout these transitions. Between 1990 and 2004, Canada provided support to the Czech Republic and Slovakia through the Technical Assistance program, helping to ease the transition from a managed economy to a market economy.

As a result, we are now able to better address issues of common concern in areas such as private sector development, financial sector reform, and education. Thanks to the success of these reforms, our countries have enjoyed more integrated economic activities, particularly as a result of trade negotiations with the European Union. While our economic ties are both solid and growing, the Canada-EU Agreement being negotiated holds the promise of an even closer association.

Following the entry of the Czech Republic and Slovakia into the EU in 2004, both countries committed to becoming aid donors, and joined the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA)'s Official Development Assistance Program in Central Europe (ODACE). While this initiative ended in 2008, it

supported the establishment of development programs, and now we work together to support the most vulnerable populations around the world.

At the multilateral level, our nations cooperate in a number of forums, including the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the World Trade Organization, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Canada was proud to be the first country to ratify the memberships of both the Czech Republic and Slovakia in NATO.

Many of the problems facing us today are common not only to our three nations, but to many others around the world. Emerging international issues such as terrorism, the economic and financial crisis, and climate change, have illustrated the extent of our global interdependence. Further strengthening our deep-rooted understanding of one another will play an integral role in fostering the cooperation required to address modern challenges.

As parliamentarians, we can help achieve these goals. Canadian parliamentarians place a great deal of importance on inter-parliamentary relations as a way of improving ties with other countries. I had the pleasure of leading a delegation to the Slovak Republic in 2007, and Slovakian parliamentarians have visited us here in Ottawa since that time. Just last month I had the opportunity to lead a parliamentary delegation to the beautiful city of Prague, where we discussed a number of shared concerns including the economy, agriculture and transportation. The conversations we hold on such visits – both formally and informally – further strengthen our flourishing and productive relationships.

Our celebration this evening is a testament to the respect we hold for each other as partners and allies on the international stage.

In closing, I would like to once again express our thanks to Ambassador Kollar and Ambassador Žebrakovský. Please join me in raising a toast: to 90 years of excellent diplomatic relations between Canada and the Czech Republic and the Slovak Republic, and to many more!