

NOTES FOR A TOAST GIVEN BY
THE HONOURABLE NOËL A. KINSELLA,
SPEAKER OF THE SENATE
AT A LUNCH HOSTED BY
THE MAYOR OF KOPER, BORIS POPOVIC

MAY 21, 2009

Mayor Popovic,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen:

On behalf of my colleagues, I would like to express how pleased we are to be here with you today. Since arriving in your beautiful country we have been greeted with warmth and generosity, and we would sincerely like to thank you for the hospitality that you have shown us.

Let me also say what a pleasure it is to be here in the coastal city of Koper. This is truly a place of great cultural and historical significance for your country.

Today, we present you with a memorandum of agreement from the Mayor of Saint John, New Brunswick, Mr. Ivan Court, about exploring the possibility of a twinning agreement between the great cities of Koper and Saint John. This project carries a particular significance for me because, as some of you know, Saint John is the city where I grew up.

Saint John and Koper share many similarities. As port cities, both have strategic significance as economic hubs of their respective countries. Both cities are also cultural centres, home to a number of beautiful Churches, museums, and architectural wonders. Most importantly, both cities are home to proud people who work hard and are committed to a better future for their country.

The similarities that exist between Koper and Saint John therefore represent an interesting opportunity in which two cities of distinct histories and backgrounds can work together to build a stronger relationship. By joining together in a twining agreement, we hope that our two cities will not only build on the economic and cultural connections that they already share, but will also foster greater personal contact between our countries.

A twining agreement is only possible because of the strong relationship that exists between Slovenia and Canada. In fact, the possibility of a twining agreement speaks to the close connections that have developed between our countries over the past number of years. Not only have our economic and diplomatic relations expanded, but increasingly, so have the personal ties that connect our two countries.

Although few Canadians realize it, ties between our countries began prior to the Second World War. At that time, many Slovenians immigrated to Canada's rural areas to begin lives in farming and mining communities. More recently, Canadians of Slovenian origin have migrated to Canada's urban centres, where they have integrated into the general population. Today, our statistics show that there are over 36,000 Canadians of Slovenian origin living in Canada.

The foundation for a strong and prosperous relationship between our two countries is therefore in place. However, more could be done to develop our trade and commercial relations, as well as the cultural and tourism links between our two countries. It is important, particularly during this time of economic slowdown, for Canada and Slovenia to explore creative and dynamic ways in which our relationship can expand.

It is in this spirit of creativity and opportunity that I hope a twining agreement between Koper and Saint John will be approached. We hope today will present us with the opportunity to discuss and explore how such a closer partnership could be mutually beneficial to our two great cities.

In closing, let me thank you once again for the warm welcome that we received here today. It has been a great privilege to say a few words here today, and I look forward to many more positive discussions to come in the near future.