

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

ADDRESS TO THE PARLIAMENT OF MACEDONIA

**SKOPJE, MACEDONIA
SEPTEMBER, 2013**

Mr. President,

Mr. Prime Minister

Mr. Speaker,

Fellow Parliamentarians,

Добро утро! /dobró utro/ – Good morning!

Добар ден! /dóbar den/ – Good afternoon!

Добровечер! /dobróvecher/ – Good evening!

Mnogu mi e drago shto sum ovde. [I am very pleased to be here]

Please accept my gratitude for your very warm welcome to Macedonia and for honouring me with your gracious invitation to address this Assembly today. It is a privilege which is greatly appreciated and more than a little humbling given the list of luminaries who have previously addressed your legislative chamber, including the Secretary General of the United Nations, Ban Ki-Moon.

Here in this beautiful building, as a parliamentarian speaking to fellow parliamentarians, I want to take the opportunity to speak about the invaluable role parliamentary diplomacy has played in reinforcing the warmth and friendship between our two countries. With contributions from each of us, there is no doubt that our bilateral relations will continue to deepen and develop for our mutual benefit long into the future.

In this day and age, parliamentary diplomacy is an emerging and influential force for exchanging ideas, fostering mutual understanding and trust, enhancing cooperation, and building goodwill among countries. The value and potential of parliamentary diplomacy is evident when it is used to complement – not compete with – the official channels of the executive branch. Parliamentarians have greater flexibility to discuss and probe contentious issues where they exist, thereby contributing to global and regional peace and security. It has been my experience that parliamentarians, attuned to the importance of developing personal relationships, are able to open dialogues on difficult subjects.

Parliamentary diplomacy is essential to building networks and trusted relations between countries for the benefit of our societies. Accordingly, parliamentarians must nurture and encourage it at every opportunity. Our two parliaments have been doing exactly that. In recent years, our parliaments have participated in high-level exchanges which include the 2008 visit to your beautiful country of the then-Speaker of Canada's Lower House of Parliament, the House of Commons, together with a parliamentary delegation; the 2010 visit to Canada of my colleague, His Excellency Trajko Veljanovski also with a parliamentary delegation; and now my own visit.

In recognition of the value of parliamentary exchanges, attention should be drawn to the Parliamentary Group for Cooperation with Canada here at your *Sobranie* and the recently-created Canada-Macedonia Friendship Group at the Parliament of Canada. The activities of these groups – including welcoming visiting delegations – demonstrate the commitment on both sides to promoting bilateral parliamentary diplomacy among our parliamentarians.

This parliamentary diplomacy also has a multilateral dimension, by way of our participation in numerous regional and international inter-parliamentary assemblies. These include the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), the NATO

Parliamentary Assembly, the *Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie*, and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Parliamentary Assembly. During the meetings of these assemblies, we have worked together and exchanged ideas on a wide range of topics, from security to minority rights, from terrorism to the rule of law.

During my time as Speaker of the Senate, Canada's Upper House of Parliament, it has been my good fortune to witness the potential of parliamentary diplomacy in facilitating the sharing of ideas, values, knowledge and experience. Given Canada's history and geographic location, it is perhaps not surprising that parliamentary diplomacy plays such a significant role in enhancing Canada's relations on so many fronts: the Commonwealth, *La Francophonie*, the United States and the western hemisphere, Europe, Africa, and the Asia-Pacific region.

As concrete examples of parliamentary diplomacy in action between our two parliaments, allow me to expand on two themes that were raised during my meetings with your president, His Excellency Gjorge Ivanov in Ottawa earlier this year, and with the President of your Assembly, His Excellency Trajko Veljanoski during his visit to Ottawa in 2010. These two themes also help explain the enduring bond between our two countries.

The first theme is the strong people-to-people ties between our countries. It is well known that Canada has benefitted from the wisdom of the many cultures that have helped shape our multicultural society. Macedonians are part of our story and our success. Since the first Macedonians settled in Canada in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the community has flourished and grown to number in the tens of thousands.

Its members have been active in Canada's political, economic and social spheres. For instance, Lubomir (Lui) Temelkovski, was the first Canadian Member

of Parliament of Macedonian heritage when he was elected in 2004.¹

Economically, Macedonians in Canada – led by the highly energetic John Bitove -- are a strong, impressive force, notably in the catering, restaurant and hospitality sectors. Given the warmth and hospitality you have shown to our delegation on this visit, their success in this industry comes as no surprise.

Mr. Bitove's entrepreneurial insight has been passed on to his son, who has achieved significant success in his own right in Canada's commercial real estate and telecommunications/satellite sectors. What is particularly impressive is his strong commitment to the community, initiating programs to support the public school system across Canada, notably in arts and sports. No doubt his love for sports was behind his undertaking to establish the Toronto Raptors Basketball Club as part of the National Basketball Association (NBA) and to lead Toronto's bid to host the 2008 Summer Olympics.

Further to this sporting theme, it would be remiss not to make mention of the Canadian professional ice hockey players of Macedonian heritage who play in the National Hockey League (NHL): Ed Jovanovski of the Florida Panthers and Steve Stamkos of the Tampa Bay Lightning of whose achievements on and off the ice we are all proud.

Socially, the Macedonian community in Toronto, one of the largest in North America, has contributed invaluable to that city's landscape and multicultural fabric. Its vibrancy is evident in the numerous organizations as well as cathedrals present in the city. One of the first and largest of these cathedrals, St. Clement of Ohrid, was honoured a few years ago with the presence of our Canadian Prime Minister, Stephen Harper, who was attending the annual Gotse Delchev Evening.

¹ Mr Temelkovski was born in Macedonia. He represented the riding of Oak Ridges-Markham and was a member of the Liberal caucus. He was re-elected in 2006, but defeated in 2008 and 2011. The riding has been represented since 2008 by Paul Calandra of the Conservative Party of Canada.

Speaking of the Macedonian community's contribution to Canada's social fabric leads me to the second theme – multiculturalism. Multiculturalism was emphasised as an important commonality of our two countries and as an important source of enrichment for our societies.

Macedonia's multiculturalism derives from its location at the crossroad of so many cultures and religions and its ancient history. Accordingly, it stands to benefit enormously as a country as it harnesses the potential of its population's diversity, comprising not only ethnic Macedonians, but also Albanians, Turks, Serbs, and Roma, to name a few.

As two multicultural societies, we understand how collectively, the different ideas, values, beliefs, and languages enrich our outlook and facilitate efforts to address the challenges arising from the changing global dynamics. We are equally aware of how such diversity offers opportunities for enhancing our knowledge and innovation, developing our human capital, and promoting prosperity.

These remarks draw their inspiration from the IPU's Quebec City Declaration on *Citizenship, identity and linguistic and cultural diversity*, which the Parliament of Canada championed in order to raise awareness about a topic that is central to the Canadian experience.

Canadians are extremely proud of our ethnic diversity, linguistic duality and multiculturalism, representing communities from around the world; of the rich heritage and traditions of our Aboriginal peoples; and of our commitment to build an ever more accommodating and respectful society.

If you would allow me to speak frankly and as someone who has witnessed two unsuccessful efforts at constitutional reform in Canada, building a cohesive, stable, tolerant, and integrated society out of diverse populations is not an easy or

finite process. Even after many decades, Canada still finds itself in this process, but we are more committed than ever to achieving these objectives.

I personally draw inspiration from what I have seen taking place here in Macedonia. In particular, your commitment to strengthening stability through greater tolerance is evident in the 2001 Ohrid Agreement. The intercommunal circumstances under which it was brokered tested all stakeholders, and there are no doubt many opinions about its implementation. The make-up of your coalition government is also impressive, as it includes a political party representing ethnic Albanians. Ethnic Albanians have been elected as mayors of several municipalities. Congratulations are also in order to the scores of others for the advertisement “Ten Meters Apart” that promotes religious tolerance in Macedonia and that was awarded the Titanium Lion at the Cannes Lions advertising festival earlier this year. These achievements among others are the markings of a mature country with new priorities and a future built on an inclusive, tolerant society.

In this context, there is no doubt that through a combination of our parliamentary diplomatic efforts and achievements, our strong people-to-people ties, and our shared commitment to multiculturalism and tolerance that the bond between Canada and Macedonia will strengthen. Next spring, a native son of Skopje, Gradimir Pankov, will bring to your stage one of our premier cultural institutions – Les Grands Ballets Canadiens – which he now leads as Artistic Director. According to the Canadian Encyclopedia, his work has revolutionized contemporary dance in Montreal, attracting international praise and attention. These endeavours have already borne fruit at many different levels and give me tremendous confidence in the future of our relationship.

On the official front, diplomatic relations were established in 1996. As you sought to reform your political and economic structures following independence in 1991, we developed a sound partnership by cooperating on many joint initiatives.

Our first bilateral agreement, a Social Security Agreement, was signed in 2009. In other areas, we worked together to promote human rights, democratic development, good governance, respect for the rule of law and capacity-building in the public sector.

In addition, despite the geographical distance between our countries, our trade partnership is growing on track this year to total about \$30 million. This is just the beginning.

Opportunities for deepening our commercial relations in general and investment in particular abound as you look to boost your economic activities. For instance, Euromax, a Canadian exploration and development company, has made significant advances with respect to its copper-gold development asset project in Ilovitza. The company is engaging directly with the local population, holding consultations and using local staff, knowledge and technical expertise. Euromax also has committed to abide by EU environmental, health and social regulations as it continues this endeavour. The potential mutual benefits to be derived from the project are particularly evident given the high unemployment rate in the area.

Your progress in creating an attractive investment environment has been recognized by the World Bank, which ranked Macedonia 23rd among 185 countries in its 2013 Doing Business index, ahead of Switzerland, Austria, the Netherlands, Belgium, and France. Macedonia's relative resilience in the face of the global economic and Euro-zone crises is also a testament to its economic potential and projected growth.

My confidence in the future of our relations is strengthened by the role our strong people-to-people ties play in many areas of priority for Macedonia. In particular, the Bitove father and son are both playing instrumental roles in Macedonia 2025. In line with Macedonia's economic priorities, this organization,

with offices in Indiana, Toronto, and Skopje, is committed to optimising the country's strengths and resources in order to make it an important destination for foreign direct investment and to strengthen its economic prosperity and competitiveness.

The Canadian link to Macedonia 2025 is particularly prominent with respect to educational activities. For instance, a study tour to Canada took place this summer, during which participants visited prominent enterprises including SiriusXM, Microsoft, Bombardier, Sears, Magna International, Telus, and Saputo, and attended an international innovation conference. They also participated in an executive education program at The Schulich School of Business at York University.

International education more generally is a topic which is regularly raised in my parliamentary meetings and which was discussed at some length during my meetings with your President and President of the Assembly. It is perhaps not a coincidence that your country places such a high priority on education given the role that Saint Clement of Ohrid played in promoting language and education in the region as part of his prayerful life. There is great interest in expanding student exchanges between our countries, and you may rest assured that this message has been passed on to the appropriate people.

It is not surprising that Macedonia is focusing on its youth, given that youth unemployment is among today's most critical global challenges. You are to be commended for your 2015 Youth Employment Action Plan that was jointly assembled by the Ministries of Labour and Social Policy; Education and Science; Economy and Finance in collaboration with other government-affiliated agencies and non-governmental stakeholders. Such a whole-of-Macedonia approach to addressing this critical issue is inspiring.

Youth employment is another area where our people-to-people ties are being leveraged, particularly in priority sectors such as IT. Cosmic Development, a software development firm with an office in Skopje, has roots in Toronto. A young, energetic company, Cosmic Development is focused on promoting youth employment and has an active internship program. In 2012, it was ranked second best employer in Macedonia among companies with fewer than 100 employees.

Our future relationship is also promising based on common objectives on security matters and the strides we have made together to achieve them. Canada has been a strong supporter of Macedonia's membership in NATO, convinced that this would both strengthen the Alliance and enhance regional stability. Canada has worked with your country through such frameworks as Partnership for Peace and the Membership Action Plan in order to strengthen our interoperability.

In this context, your country has been an active participant in Canada's Military Training and Assistance Program since 1998. We have also worked together in Afghanistan in the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). Our activities there represent our joint commitment to the values represented by NATO in terms of promoting stability where it is threatened and of advancing collective security.

It is by staying true to these values, and seeking all opportunities to reinforce them, that Macedonia is demonstrating its commitment to its own stable future and that of the region. These values came to the fore in your handling of the 2001 crisis which threatened to engulf your country. They also underlie your pursuit of Euro-Atlantic integration as your most important foreign policy priority. The process of integration – whether into NATO or the European Union – has prompted you to undertake significant political, economic, and social reforms that have resulted in the remarkable progress you have achieved in building a democratic and prosperous state.

These values come into play as relations in the region are tested in one way or another. Managing the international environment and political dimension of Macedonia's accessions to NATO and the European Union, for instance, has not been an easy matter. But the doors to membership are not closed and the spirit of collaboration among neighbours will sustain progress to remove existing obstacles.

These and other tests reinforce the value of parliamentary diplomacy, of opening and sustaining dialogue across all available channels to exchange views, to build trust, and to address common concerns for the sake of good neighbourly relations. In so doing, we reinforce the foundation upon which stability and mutual prosperity can flourish and any challenge can be overcome for the sake of future generations.

As George Bernard Shaw said: "We are made wise not by the recollection of our past, but by the responsibility for our future." These words resonate for all parliamentarians charged with building stable, prosperous societies. There may be disagreements about the past, but we are united in a common future.

In conclusion, it has been a great pleasure to be present here today and to share views on parliamentary diplomacy, people-to-people ties, multiculturalism, education, and youth. These are topics that are especially important to me, and that also feature prominently in Canada-Macedonia relations, resonating with your country's positive direction. Our parliamentary relations have served as a vital component to our enduring ties, and will continue to sustain our shared values as we take our relations into the future.

Thank you for your attention.

Благодарам!/blagódaram/ – (Thank you!)