

Speech given in Honor of the President of the Slovenian  
National Assembly, France Cukjati, M.D.,MP

November 7, 2006

Speaker Cukjati,  
Honoured guests,  
Ladies and gentlemen:

It is my pleasure to welcome Mr. France Cukjati, President of the National Assembly of Slovenia, and the members of his delegation to the Senate of Canada, and to propose a toast in their honour.

It has been over 14 years since Canada recognized Slovenia as an independent republic. Since then, we have had several parliamentary exchanges. My predecessor as Speaker of the Senate, Senator Hays, visited Slovenia in January 2004. Canadians, however, are not sufficiently aware of Slovenia and the successes you have had since independence. Exchanges such as this can help remedy this situation.

In the space of just under a decade and a half, the Slovenian people and their parliamentarians have built a viable multi-party democracy based on respect for human rights and the rights of minorities. With stable governments and through much hard work, they have achieved impressive economic growth.

Stability and moderation have made Slovenia a welcome addition to a wide range of international organisations. It has been very successful in the pursuit of its integration into the European mainstream, and has joined the European Union and NATO.

Relations between Slovenia and Canada have become particularly close over the past few years. We have a mutual interest in the peaceful resolution of conflicts and eliminating land mines.

Although few Canadians realize it, ties between Slovenia and Canada began prior to the Second World War, when Slovenians began moving to farms on the Canadian prairies and mining communities in Northern Ontario. More recently, Slovenian immigrants have settled in our major cities, where they have become part of the Canadian mainstream. Today, Canada is home to a sizable Slovenian community. Our 2001 census showed that about 29,000 people claimed some Slovenian origins.

In addition to the personal ties generated by this community, our government ministers meet regularly. But more could be done to develop our trade and commercial relations,

as well as the cultural and tourism links between our countries. Parliamentary exchanges such as this give us the opportunity to learn about each other and to discuss our concerns in an informal atmosphere.

Parliamentarians the world over face many similar concerns. Our citizens look to us to act wisely in the interest of the country as a whole. They look to us to make decisions in an open and orderly fashion. They look to us to ensure that every point of view is considered in the making of decisions. As the world becomes a smaller place, not only must our own citizens have the assurance that decisions are being made according to the rules, but people in other countries must also have the same confidence. Ensuring that legislative systems function properly helps maintain global stability.

By helping each other understand one another better, your visit here plays a valuable role in helping us fulfil our role as parliamentarians. You have come a long way to see us, but in this day of instantaneous global communication, you will never be far away. On behalf of my colleagues, let me wish you a pleasant and productive stay in Ottawa and a safe journey home.