

Minister Grabar-Kitarović,
Honoured guests,
Ladies and gentlemen:

It is my pleasure to welcome to the Senate of Canada Ms. Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović, Minister of Foreign Affairs and European Integration of the Republic of Croatia.

Minister Grabar-Kitarović, it is an honour to meet you again. We first met earlier this year during my visit to Croatia. We had fruitful discussions on matters of international interest, trade, and education between our two countries. I am glad we are able to continue our dialogue.

Minister Grabar-Kitarović, you are no stranger to Ottawa. From 1997 to 2000 you were posted at the Croatian Embassy here. This is a great help in our discussions, because you have personal knowledge of the situation in Canada.

It has been 15 years since Canada recognized Croatia as an independent republic. Canadians, however, are not sufficiently aware of Croatia and the progress you have made since independence. Exchanges such as this can help remedy this.

In a decade and a half, the Croatian people have developed a constitutional parliamentary democracy. In doing so, you built on traditions that go back to the year 925, when King Tomislav was crowned at the People's Assembly.

The transformations you have made have not always been easy, but, through your perseverance, you have made great strides toward joining the European and international mainstream. To that effect, you have begun accession talks with the European Union and are participating in NATO's Membership Action Plan.

Canada has encouraged Croatia in these efforts. Canadian soldiers took part in peacekeeping missions in Croatia following your independence. Canada also contributed to judicial reform, land mine programs, and peacekeeping training. Indeed, just this past week you spoke at the NATO Conference, in Quebec, about your country's continued support of the UN led mission in Afghanistan.

Although few Canadians realize it, ties between Croatia and Canada go back to earliest days of European exploration in North America. Indeed, two sailors from Dalmatia accompanied French explorer Jacques Cartier on his third voyage to Canada in 1541. Croatians

served in Austrian military units that helped defend New France in 1758. Croatians also took part in the Klondike gold rush of the 1890s.

Most of the immigration from Croatia to Canada took place in the 20th century. About 12,000 arrived in the 1930s, and thousands more came after the end of the Second World War. Many of the early immigrants settled in remote mining and mill towns. More recently, Croatian immigrants have settled in our major cities, where they have become part of the Canadian mainstream. Today, Canada is home to a sizable Croatian community. Our 2001 census showed that about 97,000 people claimed some Croatian origins.

I would like to point out that one of our Canadian Senators is of Croatian descent – the renowned former professional hockey player Frank Mahovlich.

The bonds created by these personal ties are important, but much remains to be done to develop our trade and commercial relations, as well as the cultural and tourism links between our countries. Exchanges such as this give us the opportunity to learn about each other and to discuss our concerns in an informal atmosphere. We are also helped by the presence in the Canadian Parliament of the Canada-Croatia Parliamentary Friendship Group.

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, allow me wish you a pleasant and productive stay in Ottawa and a safe journey home.