

**NOTES FOR A TOAST TO BE GIVEN
BY SPEAKER KINSELLA AT A LUNCHEON HOSTED
BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE HELLENIC PARLIAMENT, ATHENS,
GREECE**

SEPTEMBER 11, 2012

Your Excellency President Meimarakis,
Honourable parliamentarians,
Distinguished guests,
Ladies and gentlemen:

Allow me to take this opportunity to express my deepest appreciation for your hospitality during our visit to the Hellenic Parliament. It is truly a pleasure to have occasion to enjoy the warmth and camaraderie that always exists in meetings with our Greek counterparts.

I would like to extend a personal word of thanks to President Meimarakis for taking time from his busy schedule to be here today. Your Excellency, it is a great pleasure to meet you. You have served tirelessly as a Member of Parliament since first being elected in 1989. Prior to your election as President of the Hellenic Parliament, you also served as Minister of National Defence from 2006 to 2009. It is an honour to learn more about the Hellenic Parliament from someone with your distinguished level and range of experience. During our visit, we look forward to your insights and to learning more about your nation's history, recent parliamentary developments and the current challenges facing your country.

I am pleased to note that relations between our parliaments have grown increasingly closer in recent years, in large part due to the frequency of parliamentary exchanges such as this one. For example, in March 2007, Canada's former Speaker of the House of Commons, Peter Milliken, visited your beautiful country with a delegation of parliamentarians. This visit was followed by a state visit to Greece by Canada's former Governor General Michaëlle Jean in October 2009, where she participated in meetings with then Speaker of the Hellenic Parliament, Mr. Philippos Petsalnikos. Our discussions today provide an opportunity to build on the solid work that has been done to date, to reflect on our current bilateral relations and – importantly – to identify areas for future collaboration.

The Greek–Canadian relationship is built on a solid foundation of shared values. Both of our countries have demonstrated commitments to international peace and security, human rights and – of course – the principles of democracy. Participation in multilateral organizations such as the United Nations, La Francophonie and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, or NATO, allow us to work together to build consensus on issues of common concern.

At the parliamentary level, we cooperate through the Inter-Parliamentary Union and the Canada–Greece Friendship Group, which has been active since 1983. President Meimarakis, I am told that you have experience with the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and the Hellenic Parliament Delegation to the NATO Parliamentary Assembly. I am certain that you would agree with me when I say that the value of these parliamentary forums should not be understated. Truly, they are essential vehicles for learning from each other, sharing best practices and attempting to resolve issues of shared importance.

As such, I am proud to note that Canada will be hosting the 127th IPU Assembly, which will take place in Québec City from October 21st to the 26th of this year. During these meetings, parliamentarians from around the world will gather to discuss significant issues of our time. These issues will include citizenship and cultural diversity in a globalized world, the responsibility to protect, sustainable development, and the use of social media to enhance citizen engagement and democracy.

Viewed from outside the parliamentary chambers, the work of parliamentarians is sometimes misunderstood. Some see democratic government as a result, while we know that – in fact – it is an ongoing process. It is important that parliamentarians from both Canada and Greece continue to work together in a spirit of openness, cooperation and ongoing dialogue in order to ensure that our relationship continues to evolve.

In closing, I would like to offer a toast to our host, President Meimarakis. Thank you once again for your warm reception. I always enjoy and appreciate hearing the different perspectives of my Speaker counterparts.

Εβίβα! (Ya-mas)! (Cheers)!