



**Visit of the Honourable Geoff Regan, P.C., M.P.
Speaker of the House of Commons,
and a Parliamentary Delegation,
Republic of Croatia and Czech Republic**

January 12-19, 2019

The Honourable Geoff Regan, P.C., M.P., Speaker of the House of Commons, led a parliamentary delegation on an official visit to the Republic of Croatia and the Czech Republic from January 12 to 19, 2019.

The delegation has the honour to present its

Report

The Canadian delegation was composed of the following members:

- The Honourable Geoff Regan, P.C., M.P., Speaker of the House of Commons;
- The Honourable Kelly Regan;
- The Honourable Candice Bergen, P.C., M.P.;
- Ms. Kate Young, M.P.;
- Mr. Brian Underhill, Chief of Staff, Office of the Speaker;
- Ms. Catherine Cuerrier, Delegation Secretary.

Background – Republic of Croatia

Croatia declared independence from the former Yugoslavia in June 1991, against a backdrop of ethnic conflict that continues to influence its relations with neighbouring countries, particularly Serbia. It is a unicameral parliamentary democracy with a population of approximately 4.2 million. The current President, Mrs. Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović, a member of the centre-right Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ), took office on February 19, 2015. Croatia held its last parliamentary elections in September 2016. The HDZ, led by former diplomat and member of the European Parliament, Andrej Plenković, won a plurality of votes.

Croatia did not develop any heavy industry when it was led by the central planners of the former Yugoslavia. As a result, the country is highly dependent on services, but has also suffered much less environmental contamination. Croatia's Dalmatian islands and Adriatic beaches represent some of the only Mediterranean coastlines that are still intact. As a result, Croatia is particularly dependent on tourism. The 2008 international financial and economic crisis had serious and lasting repercussions for Croatia, and it was the slowest country to recover in the European Union. Its economy continues to face significant challenges, including a lack of industrial competition, a rigid labour market, and a large and inefficient public sector.

A member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) since 2009, Croatia contributes to international security through United Nations (UN) mandated peacekeeping missions abroad, including in Kosovo. In 2013, it became the latest country to join the European Union. Canada supported Croatia's integration into Euro-Atlantic institutions and welcomed its official membership in NATO and the European Union.

Croatia's positions on international issues are well aligned with those of Canada, including on priorities such as women's empowerment, the rights of the LGBTI community (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex), migration and climate change. Canada and Croatia have similar voting records at the United Nations on human rights issues.

Croatia was a strong supporter of the Canada-European Union Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA), and on June 30, 2017, became the third European Union member state to ratify the agreement at the national level. In the first year following the provisional application of CETA, Canadian exports increased by 489%, while Canadian imports from Croatia increased by 107%.

Croatia is one of the "Balkan route" countries, and had approximately 600,000 migrants pass through between September 2015 and early winter 2016. The Croatian response during the migrant crisis was measured and compassionate, and civil society became heavily involved in providing assistance to migrants and defending their rights. Few of the migrants remained in Croatia, however.

Canada and Croatia enjoy friendly relations, with 2018 marking the 25th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries. These relations are founded on interpersonal ties, growing trade links and shared values and approaches to key regional and global issues. Canada is home to approximately 110,880 Canadians of Croatian background. They act as intermediaries in trade and tourism and are supported by the Canada–Croatia Chamber of Commerce.

Objectives – Republic of Croatia

The visit was intended to promote Canada's interests and democratic values, strengthen parliamentary cooperation and highlight the importance of Croatia's diplomatic relations with Canada over more than 25 years. Another goal was to confirm the importance of ratifying CETA, and reiterate its many benefits and advantages for members of the European Union. Finally, the delegation wished to underscore Canada's efforts to obtain a seat on the UN Security Council in 2020–21.

Meetings – Republic of Croatia

During its stay in Zagreb, Republic of Croatia, the delegation held official meetings with the following people:

- Her Excellency Kolinda Grabar Kitarović, President of the Republic of Croatia;
- His Excellency Gordan Jandroković, Speaker of the Croatian Parliament;
- His Excellency Andrej Plenković, Prime Minister of the Republic of Croatia;
- Her Excellency Marija Pejčinović Burić, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign and European Affairs;
- Mr. Darko Horvat, Minister of the Economy, Entrepreneurship and Crafts;
- Mr. Ivica Mišić, President of the Croatia–Canada Parliamentary Friendship Group.

Meeting with Her Excellency Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović, President of the Republic of Croatia

Accompanied by her Chief of Staff and political staff, Her Excellency Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović, President of the Republic of Croatia, hosted Speaker Regan and his delegation for a working lunch at her official residence. Her Excellency provided an overview of the

extent and scope of the challenges facing Croatia, including the failed agreement with Israel for the purchase of a squadron of twelve (12) F-16 fighter aircraft to replace its obsolete MIG 21 and modernize its air force. She also spoke about the difficult relations between Croatia and Serbia and her desire for reconciliation.

The participants then addressed the issue of trade and investment, expressing gratitude for the good relations between the two countries in this regard and discussing how to further strengthen these relations. They acknowledged that CETA has greatly assisted their economic partnership, but there are still many avenues to explore in order to expand that partnership, notably in the areas of agriculture and tourism. Her Excellency explained that the Croatian tourism industry, with its coasts on the Adriatic Sea, is heavily affected by environmental factors and remains dependent on trends and developments in the tourism sector. As this industry is the foundation of the economy, she indicated that they need a way to promote it that is independent of weather conditions. As for agriculture, Her Excellency reminded the delegation that the country had spent a long time under communist rule, which had compromised farmers' opportunities to develop their farms on a large scale. She argued that the agricultural industry must integrate environmental, social and economic issues into production and processing methods. The Canadian delegation expressed its complete understanding with regard to these issues and offered to participate in agricultural development through its expertise in land-irrigation technologies, among other things.

Finally, Her Excellency and Speaker Regan declared themselves allies in promoting gender equality issues and women's empowerment. They both voiced their commitment to women's leadership and the development of women's entrepreneurship.

The meeting ended with a discussion of Canada's candidacy for a seat on the UN Security Council in 2020–21.

Meeting with His Excellency Gordan Jandroković, Speaker of the Croatian Parliament

His Excellency Gordan Jandroković, Speaker of the Croatian Parliament, welcomed Speaker Regan and his delegation on the steps of the Croatian Parliament, and then escorted them to his office. His Excellency took the opportunity to express his gratitude for the warm welcome he had received during his visit to Ottawa and Toronto in October 2017. Reflecting on the various meetings he had and the places he visited, he indicated that his trip had been a resounding success. His Excellency added that although the two countries already enjoy a great friendship, Croatia is always eager to find new ways to strengthen their economic cooperation, and he hopes that other EU member states will ratify CETA in the near future. Finally, His Excellency highlighted the important role played by Canadians of Croatian heritage in actively promoting bilateral trade and organizing trade missions. He mentioned the strong impetus they provide for the development of trade and investment opportunities between the two countries, including through the Canada–Croatia Chamber of Commerce.

Speaker Regan said he was pleased with his stay in Croatia and praised the beauty of the country and the hospitality shown to the delegation, including in Dubrovnik, in southern Croatia. He indicated that the Croatian diaspora in Canada is a job creator and that its contribution is greatly appreciated. Speaker Regan went on to thank His

Excellency for his work and involvement in Croatia's ratification of CETA while he was Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee. He emphasized that the agreement will help to significantly deepen trade relations between their respective countries. He also stated that CETA will accelerate the diversification of Canadian export markets and consolidate its access to the European Union. Finally, Speaker Regan expressed his gratitude for Croatia's important contribution to international security through NATO.

The two speakers then discussed the situation in Europe, as well as climate change and refugees. His Excellency reiterated the challenges posed by the migrant crisis and the significant response that issue has necessitated in recent years. He added that migration will be a major challenge in the coming years. Speaker Regan thanked His Excellency for the key role Croatia has played in this crisis in Europe. He added that he has no doubt that Croatia will benefit from the qualifications and skills of these refugees and that they will contribute to the country's economy. His Excellency noted the importance of understanding and respecting individuals' different values, which are the personal principles that guide how they think, decide and behave. He added that the rule of law must nevertheless be respected. Following His Excellency's remarks, Speaker Regan stated that Canada shares the same values as the Croatian people and that he wishes Croatia much success.

The meeting ended with a discussion about tourism. The two speakers agreed on the importance of this industry and the good relations that can result from it. They concluded that the new Toronto-Zagreb air routes have had a positive effect on the frequency of passengers to Croatia.

Meeting with His Excellency Andrej Plenković, Prime Minister of the Republic of Croatia

His Excellency Andrej Plenković, Prime Minister of the Republic of Croatia, received the delegation in his offices. His Excellency reflected on the negotiations surrounding Croatia's ratification of CETA when he was a member of the European Parliament. He noted the many benefits and advantages of this agreement for European Union members, particularly in terms of the security it provides for foreign investors. He expressed his enthusiasm for strengthening the already strong relations between Croatia and Canada, and for the fruitful economic cooperation that CETA has already generated between the two countries. His Excellency referred to the many opportunities for future cooperation between the two countries, particularly in terms of expanding Croatia's activities in the energy sector.

Continuing on the same subject, Speaker Regan cited Canada's undeniable expertise in the field of energy efficiency as a potential benefit to Croatia. He informed His Excellency that Canada has the most efficient, safe and environmentally friendly energy. He also stated that due to its climate and resources, Canada is among the world's largest energy producers, and has a great deal of expertise in the safe and sustainable production, extraction, transportation and use of energy resources.

His Excellency briefly discussed the growing number of Canadian tourists visiting Croatia, which is just below that of Chinese tourists. He also spoke of the decline in the Croatian population and the temporary but renewable work permits that Croatia has granted to 165,000 foreign workers to support certain affected sectors, particularly tourism. He

admitted, however, that Croatia is not able to compete with other countries, such as Germany, when it comes to benefits for foreign workers. He added that Croatia will have to review and improve conditions for its workers if it is to eventually convince them to remain in Croatia. Finally, His Excellency was proud to comment on the Croatian government's very first budget surplus in 2017 which, in his opinion, reflects rigorous management of the Republic's public finances.

Meeting with Her Excellency Marija Pejčinović Burić, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign and European Affairs

Her Excellency Marija Pejčinović Burić, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign and European Affairs, met Speaker Regan and his delegation in the offices of the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs. She began by expressing her enthusiasm for CETA, which has strengthened economic relations and stimulated trade between Croatia and Canada. She reiterated the importance of interpersonal relationships, broader commercial ties and shared values and approaches to key regional and global issues when it comes to a wide range of topics such as NATO, gender equality and women's empowerment. She noted that she sees the Croatian community in Canada as an added value in developing networking, collaboration and partnerships between the two countries. Her Excellency acknowledged that trade and investment between Croatia and Canada are very important, as is the development of tourism. She also spoke of her enthusiasm for future cooperation with Canada in the agri-food sector and added that she was already in contact with some Canadian companies on this subject.

Speaker Regan confirmed the close bilateral ties between Croatia and Canada and highlighted the important contributions of Croats in Canada. He indicated that Croatia and Canada are working side by side to defend key values they both hold dear, such as freedom, democracy, human rights and the rule of law, and suggested that the two countries have a common goal of ensuring better security and well-being for their people, which is achievable through NATO, among other things.

Speaker Regan concluded the meeting by congratulating Her Excellency on the way Croatia has managed the migrant crisis. Her Excellency explained that because Croatia is on the Mediterranean route, a large number of refugees may arrive all at the same time, rapidly creating a situation that is difficult to contain. She indicated that through international organizations, Croatia has taken an approach that combines protecting its borders with providing humanitarian assistance. She briefly outlined the various reasons these people are fleeing their countries and indicated that, in her opinion, the situation will not be resolved any time soon.

Meeting with Mr. Darko Horvat, Minister of the Economy, Entrepreneurship and Crafts

Mr. Darko Horvat, Minister of the Economy, Entrepreneurship and Crafts, welcomed Speaker Regan and his delegation. He began the discussion by thanking Canada for 25 years of friendship and trust, and noted that 2018 was marked by success and growth in the diplomatic and economic relations between the two countries. Mr. Horvat went further by promising an even more prosperous 2019. He spoke about the budget surplus that the Croatian government recorded over the past year and acknowledged that the results were better than the government had anticipated.

Mr. Horvat explained that his mandate as Minister is to help businesses in Croatia become more successful, and he expressed a desire to see more Canadians visit and invest in Croatia. He noted that the increase in trade relations between Croatia and Canada demonstrates a growing bond of trust between the two countries, and expressed that Canada should consider Croatia as a safe country for Canadian investors.

He announced that there will be a digital shift in Croatia this year that will enable Croatians to take advantage of e-commerce, among other things. He mentioned electronic signatures, electronic stamps and electronic filing of tax returns in particular. Mr. Horvat added that he wants to increase activity in the industrial sector, as well as skill and technology transfers and exports. He said he would like Croatia to join the list of member countries in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and asked Speaker Regan and Canada to help him in this regard. Mr. Horvat pointed out that Croatia would like to adopt the best practices of leading countries such as Canada. Finally, he said that the Toronto-Zagreb direct air routes have not only had a positive impact on the tourism industry, but also on several other sectors, including trade.

Speaker Regan said that Canada is grateful to Croatia for ratifying CETA. He noted the many benefits the agreement brings to both countries, and reiterated that Canada supports and promotes Canadian investment in Croatia. Speaker Regan said that more than 300,000 Canadians have Croatian background, and that this represents a tremendous business opportunity for Croatia. He acknowledged that Canada is interested in building international partnerships to accelerate the pace of discovery and commercialization. He further indicated that Canada has a wealth of expertise, and both sides agreed that exchanges of students, professors and researchers should be encouraged.

Meeting with Mr. Ivica Mišić, President of the Croatia–Canada Parliamentary Friendship Group

The President of the Croatia–Canada Parliamentary Friendship Group, Mr. Ivica Mišić, offered a warm welcome to Speaker Regan and his delegation. Mr. Mišić spoke about the importance of democracy in establishing a frank dialogue among parliamentarians, and mentioned how Canada is an example for the Croatian people to follow. He acknowledged, however, that his country has a long way to go before it reaches the same level as some Western countries with a longer democratic tradition. Mr. Mišić informed Speaker Regan that a monument commemorating the victims of communism is to be built shortly. He then turned to the subject of immigrants, suggesting that Croatia has set a precedent with its crisis management.

Speaker Regan agreed that moving from a communist to a democratic regime could not have been easy, and he welcomed all the progress Croatia has made in this regard in such a short period of time. He expressed a desire to establish closer links with Croatia in various fora that could lead to increased cooperation and trade. He highlighted the cooperation between the two countries, including through NATO and CETA. Speaker Regan added that Croatia and Canada share common values in terms of the rule of law, not only at the parliamentary level, but also between business partners and individuals. Finally, he reaffirmed that Canada is pleased to support Croatia on its path to democracy.

Mr. Mišić said he would like to increase the number of Canadian tourists to Croatia. He noted that the new challenge in this regard is to introduce tourists to regions other than southern Croatia. He went on to say that he would like to promote opportunities for the exchange of expertise in the fields of technology and artificial intelligence.

Other activities – Republic of Croatia

Speaker Regan also had the privilege of addressing the media at a press conference celebrating the first anniversary of Croatia's ratification of CETA. He did so alongside the Speaker of the Croatian Parliament, the President of the Canadian Croatian Business Network (CCBN), the President of the Croatian Chamber of Commerce and the Ambassador and Head of the European Commission Representation in Croatia. The purpose of the event was to highlight CETA's successes and reaffirm and expand existing trade relations between Canada and Croatia.

Speaker Regan spoke at the University of Zagreb on multiculturalism and Canadian democratic values. The event provided an opportunity for young academics, civil society and the general public to engage in discussions with the Canadian delegation on national and international issues of concern to them, such as promoting democracy among young people, as well as human rights and populism.

The delegation also visited the municipality of Dubrovnik, capital of the Dubrovnik-Neretva County in southern Croatia, to meet with the Prefect of the Dubrovnik-Neretva County, the Deputy Mayor of the Municipality of Dubrovnik, the Mayor of the Municipality of Ston, as well as official representatives of Croatia and Canadian-Croat investors involved in a variety of economic sectors in Croatia. The discussions focused on the current business climate in Croatia.

The delegates had an opportunity to experience Croatian culture during their visit to the Municipality of Dubrovnik. They admired its ramparts on the Dalmatian coast; took in the splendour of the shoreline of the Adriatic Sea; learned about the medieval architecture of the ramparts surrounding the Municipality of Ston; visited an oyster farm at the Bay of Mali Ston; and visited a vineyard in the Peljesac peninsula.

Speaker Regan and his delegation were also given a guided tour of the Croatian Parliament and the city of Zagreb.

Background – Czech Republic

The Czech Republic is a bicameral parliamentary democracy with an estimated population of 10.5 million. It has been independent since January 1, 1993, when the Czech and Slovak Federal Republic, the last incarnation of the government of Czechoslovakia, was split. In 2016, the abbreviated name of "Czechia" was officially registered with the UN as the country's name, but Czech authorities prefer to use "Czech Republic." The lower house of Parliament, called the Chamber of Deputies, has 200 members, while the Senate has 81 members. The Prime Minister is the head of government and the President is the head of state. Mr. Milos Zeman, former Prime Minister, was elected President in January 2013 and re-elected in January 2018.

The Czech Republic has based its foreign policy on its accession to the European Union in 2004 and on its transatlantic ties through NATO, which it joined in 1999. The Czech government supports the European Union in general, but Prime Minister Andrej Babiš, a

former businessman who became Prime Minister in October 2017, has also called for reforms within that body, including the return of certain powers to member states. The Czech Republic supports NATO's dual approach to Russia, which focuses on deterrence and dialogue. Czech public opinion remains unfavourable to the acceptance of refugees, and Prime Minister Babiš has made illegal migration his flagship issue.

The Czech Republic has a variety of economic assets, including specialized human resources, significantly lower labour costs than Western Europe, a strong secondary sector, a strategic position in central Europe and good infrastructure that continues to benefit from European Union funding. The Czech Republic has a strong balanced budget and a stable banking sector. All of these factors attract foreign companies and investors, including Canadians. The country also has the lowest unemployment rate in the European Union, which has led to a shortage of workers in some regions. The country has qualified to adopt the euro, which is required by European Union treaties, but has not done so because it prefers to maintain its well-managed national currency, the Czech koruna.

The Czech Republic ratified CETA on October 11, 2017, which has and will continue to expand the bilateral trade relationship between the Czech Republic and Canada. In fact, in the first year of CETA's provisional application, the value of Canadian exports and imports to and from the Czech Republic reached \$984 million, an increase of 26.8% over the same period a year earlier.

The Czech Republic and Canada are both members of various multilateral fora, including the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). They share common values and approaches on issues such as supporting democracy and human rights.

Canada and the Czech Republic enjoy good bilateral relations underpinned by strong interpersonal ties. The Czech Republic sees Canada as an increasingly important partner in the transatlantic alliance on which it relies to ensure its security.

In 2016, there were more than 100,000 Canadians with at least some Czech ancestry. This large Czech community is the result of multiple waves of immigrants arriving in Canada before and after the two world wars.

Objectives – Czech Republic

The purpose of the visit was to reiterate the importance of the bilateral ties between the Czech Republic and Canada, to strengthen relations between the two countries and to encourage ongoing parliamentary dialogue by promoting an increase in parliamentary exchanges. Among other things, the delegation wanted to discuss the opportunities and many commercial benefits created by CETA for Canadian and European companies, and opportunities for trade in the areas of technology and artificial intelligence. Finally, the visit was also intended to promote Canada's bid for a seat on the UN Security Council in 2020-2021.

Meetings – Czech Republic

During its stay in Prague, Czech Republic, the delegation held official meetings with the following people:

- His Excellency Jaroslav Kubera, Speaker of the Senate;

- His Excellency Radek Vondráček, President of the Chamber of Deputies;
- Mr. Tomáš Hanzel, Deputy Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies, and Mr. Ondřej Benešík, Chairman of the Committee for European Affairs;
- His Excellency Jan Hamáček, First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Interior;
- His Excellency Tomáš Petříček, Minister of Foreign Affairs;
- His Excellency Lubomír Metnar, Minister of Defence;
- Mr. Vladimír Bártl, Deputy Minister of Industry and Trade.

Meeting with His Excellency Jaroslav Kubera, Speaker of the Senate

His Excellency Jaroslav Kubera, Speaker of the Senate, hosted Speaker Regan and his delegation, as well as senators and senior Senate officials, at a business dinner. His Excellency began the discussion by recounting the story of Jan Palach, a young student of Czechoslovak history and symbol in the Czech Republic of resistance to communism and Soviet occupation, who died by self-immolation in Wenceslas Square in Prague on January 16, 1969. His Excellency indicated that Wednesday, January 16, 2019, would mark the 50th anniversary of Palach's death. He thanked Speaker Regan for agreeing to participate in a commemoration ceremony and lay a wreath at Charles University with His Excellency, Mr. Radek Vondráček, Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies. He commented that the Czech Republic and Canada have a close and longstanding relationship and that he hopes to see it further intensified. He added that personal and family ties have been forged between the two countries, particularly through Canada's reception of Czechoslovak political refugees in 1948 and 1968, following World War II and the Prague Spring. He mentioned the recently established Canada–Czech Republic Friendship Group in the Canadian Parliament, and said he would like the group to convey the message that there are many beautiful things to see in the Czech Republic. Finally, he highlighted student exchange programs between the two countries and indicated that he would like more students to benefit from them.

Speaker Regan mentioned that it was a great honour for him to be given the opportunity to participate in the ceremony commemorating the tragic events surrounding the death of young Jan Palach. Speaker Regan elaborated that the Czech Republic and Canada have a long history of close cooperation and that there are strong ties between their respective populations. He added that Canada did indeed welcome many Czech refugees, particularly in 1968, following the Prague Spring, but pointed out that these refugees have made a significant and positive contribution to Canadian society. Speaker Regan referred to the ratification of CETA by the Czech Republic, which appears to have reinvigorated bilateral relations and will pave the way for a closer relationship in the future. He reiterated that their ties are based on common values, such as the promotion of cultural, social and economic rights, and that the two countries are NATO allies.

The two speakers concluded that it is important to promote the development of student and researcher exchanges and cooperation in areas such as trade, science and technology.

Meeting with His Excellency Radek Vondráček, Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies

Accompanied by his secretary general among others, His Excellency Radek Vodráček, Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies, received Speaker Regan and his delegation in his offices. He began by discussing the importance of parliamentary diplomacy in improving the already strong relations between the two countries, and announced to Speaker Regan his desire to visit Canada in 2019. His Excellency gave a brief overview of his role as Speaker and reflected that it is not always easy in an Assembly with nine different political parties. He then touched briefly on Brexit, identifying the global issues arising from the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the European Union.

Speaker Regan expressed his joy and gratitude over the warm welcome extended to him and his delegation by the Czech Republic. He mentioned that both the Czech Republic and Canada adhere to democratic principles, human rights and the rule of law. Speaker Regan thanked the Czech Republic for ratifying CETA, and reiterated the many benefits and advantages that this agreement confers on the members of the European Union. He noted that in his view, the number of student and academic exchanges between the two countries could be increased. Speaker Regan added that Canada appreciates the Czech Republic's foreign policy and noted that Canada will be seeking a seat on the UN Security Council in 2020–21.

His Excellency raised the issue of the labour shortage in the Czech Republic, particularly in the nursing sector. He assured the Canadian delegation that the Czech people are not xenophobic but explained that the language barrier is one of the main reasons that immigration is not the optimum solution for staffing hospitals due to the predominance of the Czech language among patients.

The two speakers concluded the meeting by discussing the restoration and modernization of the Canadian Parliament Building which will be occurring over the next decade.

Meeting with Mr. Tomáš Hanzel, Deputy Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies, and Mr. Ondřej Benešík, Chairman of the Committee for European Affairs

At a lunch in honour of the Canadian delegation hosted by Mr. Tomáš Hanzel, Deputy Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies, and Mr. Ondřej Benešík, Chairman of the Committee for European Affairs, Speaker Regan began by praising the good relations between the Czech Republic and Canada. He mentioned that both countries are working hard to uphold human rights. He said that as two small countries, they are both strong defenders of human rights and share the same approach and similar values. He noted that the Czech Republic was one of the first members of the European Union to ratify CETA in October 2017, and that Canada is grateful for this. He spoke about defence cooperation, particularly in Latvia, and thanked the Czech Republic for its support on the issue of Canadian detainees in China. Speaker Regan took the opportunity to thank the Ambassador of the Czech Republic, Mr. Pavel Hrnčíř, for all the work he has done to maintain good relations between the Czech Republic and Canada.

Mr. Hanzel replied that he believes the relationship between the two countries extends beyond economics and trade, and that the Czech Republic has much more to offer Canada in terms of bilateral relations. He assured Speaker Regan that the Czech Republic will do everything in its power to help and support Canada and the Canadian detainees in China. He went on to discuss the current threats to cybersecurity that could affect national and international interests.

Mr. Benešík said he recently learned of Canada's intention to accept one million new immigrants. Speaker Regan specified that this figure represents the number of newcomers that Canada expects to welcome between 2018 and the end of 2020. He said that one of the reasons for this number is the labour shortage that is affecting the country from coast to coast to coast. Speaker Regan added that Canada will take appropriate measures to ensure that these immigrants can pursue their professions in Canada, thereby contributing to Canada's economic and social development. Mr. Hanzel, in turn, conveyed his concerns about the aging Czech population and the current labour shortage in his country, particularly in nursing.

The discussion ended on the subject of the situation of women in the labour market, and particularly in politics. Mr. Hanzel informed the Speaker that the Czech Republic has a quota for women's representation in politics, which encourages women to become involved.

Meeting with His Excellency Jan Hamáček, First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Interior

During the meeting between His Excellency Jan Hamáček, First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Interior, and Speaker Regan and the Canadian delegation, Speaker Regan indicated that the Czech Republic and Canada enjoy excellent trade relations that are mutually beneficial, including in the area of scientific and technological cooperation. He acknowledged that CETA offers countless opportunities to build strong economic and trade relations between their respective countries. Speaker Regan briefly discussed his concerns about cyberspace and cybersecurity.

Continuing on the theme of security, His Excellency acknowledged that the Czech Parliament has concerns about the security of its premises. He explained that a demonstration in recent months outside the parliament buildings has prompted increased cooperation and coordination on security issues. He added that an incident in the public galleries of the Chamber of Deputies raised operational and security issues inside the parliament buildings. His Excellency also announced to Speaker Regan that the Czech Parliament is moving towards a facial recognition system, which will mean that deputies will no longer be required to carry a security card.

His Excellency mentioned the labour shortage in the country and added that Czechs are reluctant to use foreign workers. He admitted that the population is afraid that immigrants will represent an additional cost to the government and a burden on the Czech economy.

Using Canada's example, Speaker Regan informed His Excellency that it is important to verify immigrants' diplomas and skills and to ensure that professional associations in the host country recognize their qualifications. He said that it is also important, however, to ensure that immigrants' investment expectations are well managed. From his experience, Speaker Regan reflected that immigrants have all made invaluable contributions to Canada's wealth, prosperity and community, and that they are active members of society. He concluded by adding that the children of these immigrants will be well integrated by the time they join the labour market, as they will have spent their entire youth in Canada.

Meeting with His Excellency Tomáš Petříček, Minister of Foreign Affairs

His Excellency Tomáš Petříček, Minister of Foreign Affairs, received Speaker Regan and his delegation in his offices. His Excellency commented that the Czech Republic and Canada share a close and productive relationship. He highlighted the values and many commonalities shared by the two countries, particularly in the areas of human rights, trade, CETA and transportation technologies. He noted, however, that he would like to see more exports of Czech goods and services to Canada. His Excellency discussed the recent establishment of the Czech Republic–Canada Friendship Group. Both agreed that the group reflects the strong ties that have developed between Canada and the Czech Republic in recent years. His Excellency then addressed the issue of Canadian detainees in China, and confirmed that the Czech Republic is supporting Canada on this issue. He said that he had discussed the situation with the Chinese Ambassador to the Czech Republic. In return, His Excellency requested Canada’s support and cooperation with his country’s human rights files. Finally, he briefly discussed the Czech Republic’s support for NATO’s approach to Russia, and condemned the current situation in the Ukraine.

Speaker Regan informed His Excellency that Canada wishes to build its relationship with the Czech Republic in the areas of sharing of knowledge, expertise and best practices, and spoke about the international and economic situation which offers opportunities to develop Czech Republic–Canada relations. He commented that the Czech Republic and Canada share values and ideals, such as human rights and the rule of law, and stated that he is sensitive to the reality of certain neighbouring countries, such as the Ukraine. Finally, Speaker Regan reminded His Excellency that Canada will be seeking a seat on the UN Security Council in 2020–21 and said he hopes the Czech Republic will consider supporting Canada’s candidacy.

Meeting with His Excellency Lubomír Metnar, Minister of Defence

His Excellency Lubomír Metnar, Minister of Defence, received President Regan and his delegation in his departmental offices. His Excellency immediately thanked President Regan for Canada’s contribution to NATO missions in the Baltic states, and welcomed the increasing number of women in UN missions. His Excellency mentioned that he had sent an invitation to Canada’s Minister of Defence to conduct an official joint visit of Czech and Canadian troops in Latvia, and added that there is great potential for defence cooperation between the two countries. His Excellency remarked that the Czech government wishes to modernize its military technologies by equipping its army with more sophisticated equipment in order to improve its cybersecurity practices and strategies in particular.

Speaker Regan commented that the Czech Republic and Canada have close ties that are strengthened by Canadians of Czech background. He added that the two countries share a common perspective on issues of international and mutual interest, including human rights and national defence. He pointed out that although the Czech Republic and Canada are small countries, they are both guided by a desire to be heard. He added that visits such as this one are important because they strengthen parliamentary collaboration and reinforce the ties between the two countries. Speaker Regan expressed his concerns about cybersecurity and reiterated the importance for Canada of working together with countries such as the Czech Republic.

Meeting with Mr. Vladimír Bártl, Deputy Minister of Industry and Trade

After a warm welcome by the Deputy Minister of Industry and Trade, Mr. Vladimír Bártl, Speaker Regan and his Canadian delegation participated in a roundtable discussion with representatives of various companies in the Czech technology sector. The purpose of the meeting was to highlight and draw on complementary knowledge and expertise in order to increase collaboration between the Czech Republic and Canada in key sectors such as the aerospace industry, artificial intelligence and nanotechnology.

The meeting opened with a presentation by the Ministry of Industry and Trade that provided an overview of economic and trade cooperation between the Czech Republic and Canada. This was followed by a roundtable discussion in which the participating Czech companies were invited to introduce themselves and provide a brief summary of their business, expertise and success story with Canada. They all indicated that CETA has opened doors for them and has had an enormous positive impact on their companies.

Mr. Bártl confirmed that the Czech Republic sees Canada as an increasingly important economic partner with great potential for trade opportunities. He acknowledged that many Czech companies will take advantage of the business opportunities Canada offers, particularly since the Czech Republic ratified CETA.

Speaker Regan said he is very pleased with the undeniable economic benefits of CETA, and is looking forward to fruitful collaboration between digital and technology players in the Czech Republic and Canada. He asked the entrepreneurs present what Canada could do to support them more. In response, the entrepreneurs suggested that government delegates visit the Czech Republic to meet various companies and observe the Czech economy. Finally, they suggested increasing partnerships between the respective universities of the two countries in order to promote exchanges of students, researchers and start-up companies.

Other activities – Czech Republic

During their stay in the Czech capital, Speaker Regan and the members of the Canadian delegation were invited to attend a reception at the official residence of the Canadian Ambassador, where they were able to interact with various officials and representatives of the Czech Republic's business community.

Speaker Regan also had an opportunity to make a presentation at Charles University in Prague on multiculturalism and Canadian democratic values. The event provided a forum for young academics, civil society and the general public to engage in discussions with the Canadian delegation on national and international issues of concern to them, such as the presence of members of parliament among the population, the impact of "false news" on parliamentary work, human rights and same-sex marriage.

The Speaker of the House of Commons also participated, along with the Canadian delegates and the Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies, in a wreath-laying ceremony at Charles University to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the death of Mr. Jan Palach in January 1969.

Finally, the delegation had an opportunity to visit the Chamber of Deputies and to take in the country's culture through brief visits to various religious, cultural and historical sites, including Prague Castle, St. Vitus Cathedral, Old Town Square and Charles Bridge.

Acknowledgements

The delegation would like to thank the staff at Global Affairs Canada, the Library of Parliament and the Canadian embassies in the Republic of Croatia and the Czech Republic for their support, professionalism and help in preparing for the visit. It would like to thank Ambassador Daniel Maksymiuk and Ambassador Barbara C. Richardson for their support and presence throughout the visit.

Respectfully submitted,

The Honourable Geoff Regan, P.C., M.P.
Speaker of the House of Commons

Travel Costs

TRAVEL	\$43,605.81
ACCOMMODATION	\$2,344.93
PER DIEMS	\$3,903.56
PROTOCOL	\$446.90
MISCELLANEOUS	\$5.40
TOTAL	\$50,306.60