



Report

**Visit of the Honourable George J. Furey, Q.C.,
Speaker of the Senate,
and a Parliamentary Delegation,
Slovenia and Czech Republic**

September 5-9, 2016

The Honourable George J. Furey, Q.C., Speaker of the Senate, led a parliamentary delegation on an official visit to Slovenia and the Czech Republic from September 5 to 9, 2016.

The delegation has the honour of tabling its

Report

The official delegation comprised the following members:

- The Honourable George J. Furey, Q.C., Speaker of the Senate;
- Mrs. Karen Furey;
- The Honourable Terry M. Mercer, Senator;
- The Honourable David M. Wells, Senator;
- Ms. Nicole Proulx, Chief Corporate Services Officer and Clerk of the Standing Committee on Internal Economy, Budgets and Administration;
- Mr. Stuart Barnable, Chief of Staff to the Speaker; and
- Ms. Evelyne Côté, Secretary to the delegation.

Background – Slovenia

Slovenia is a bicameral parliamentary republic with approximately two million inhabitants. The year 2016 marks the 25th anniversary of its independence from Yugoslavia. In the 1990s, Slovenia quickly gained worldwide recognition, which enabled it to join the European Union (EU) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in 2004 and the Eurozone in 2007. Slovenia was hit hard by the 2008 economic crisis and, despite its slow economic recovery, remains the most advanced republic of the former Yugoslavia. In spite of this, political instability has recently plagued the nation, with presidential elections having been held in 2012, 2013 and 2014.

Canada and Slovenia have maintained diplomatic relations since 1993. Bilateral discussions focus for the most part on multilateral matters and the EU. The Slovenian government supports the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) between Canada and the EU, and believes it will do much to enhance investment and trade relations which are modest currently. Slovenia is a key player in demining efforts and in raising awareness of the terrible impact of landmines through the International Trust Fund for Demining and Mine Victims Assistance (ITF). Canada has contributed more than US\$11,000,000 to date, including US\$600,000 in 2015–2016 for a project in Bosnia and Herzegovina. At present, there are more than 36,000 inhabitants of Slovenian descent in Canada.

Objectives – Slovenia

The main purpose of the visit to Slovenia was to promote Canada's interests and to encourage economic relations between the two countries. In the wake of the outcome of the United Kingdom's referendum to leave the European Union (BREXIT) on June 23,

2016, the visit also aimed to confirm the importance of ratifying CETA and reiterating its many benefits and advantages for EU members.

In addition, the visit served to strengthen relations between the Senate of Canada and the National Council of Slovenia, and to foster parliamentary and educational exchanges.

Meetings

During its visit to Ljubljana, Slovenia, the delegation met with the following officials:

- His Excellency Miro Cerar, Prime Minister of the Republic of Slovenia;
- His Excellency Borut Pahor, President of the Republic of Slovenia;
- Mr. Karl Erjavec, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs;
- His Excellency Mitja Bervar, President of the National Council of the Republic of Slovenia;
- His Excellency Dr. Milan Brglez, President of the National Assembly of the Republic of Slovenia;
- Mr. Igor Ivancic, Deputy Secretary General of the National Assembly;
- Ambassador Damjan Bergant, Director of the International Trust Fund; and
- Colonel Boštjan Blaznik, Head of the NATO Mountain Warfare Centre of Excellence.

Meeting with His Excellency Miro Cerar, Prime Minister of the Republic of Slovenia

Speaker Furey met with the Prime Minister to discuss CETA and its many advantages. His Excellency noted that Slovenia fully supports the ratification of the treaty, to which Speaker Furey replied that Canada is prepared to ratify the agreement and that swift action serves the interests of both countries. His Excellency added that from what he understands, some people are under the impression that the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) and CETA are the same agreement. He stated that it is critical to promote them as two completely different treaties and to treat them as such. The Speaker and the Prime Minister went on to discuss multilateral cooperation, acknowledging the tradition of cooperation between the two countries.

They concluded by addressing the importance of establishing a dialogue with Russia to reiterate Canada's and Slovenia's support for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, in addition to the importance of fully implementing the Minsk agreements.

Meeting with His Excellency Borut Pahor, President of the Republic of Slovenia

President Pahor welcomed Speaker Furey and his delegation. They discussed BREXIT and its impact on the EU and G20. The President noted that BREXIT is creating uncertainty and that it would be preferable to start the separation process as soon as possible so that the key issues can be given due consideration.

The President stated that the Slovenian government is giving CETA its full support and that he feels confident ratification will happen soon, despite the concerns of some non-governmental organizations. He went on to say that he hopes the finer outstanding

details can be resolved without having to reopen negotiations. He later added that it is extremely important for the TTIP not to be connected to CETA under any circumstances, since these are two completely different agreements.

President Pahor and Speaker Furey briefly touched on the situation in Ukraine, agreeing that it should remain a priority. Both agreed that although their respective countries are supportive of Ukraine, it is of paramount importance to have a dialogue with Russia because a peaceful outcome is practically impossible otherwise. President Pahor ended the meeting by saying that Slovenia should become a choice destination for Canadian tourists.

Meeting with Mr. Karl Erjavec, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs

During the meeting, Speaker Furey and Deputy Prime Minister Erjavec discussed CETA, with Mr. Erjavec showing very keen interest in the agreement. He added that he believes that one of the greatest challenges Canada will face in ratifying the agreement is the widespread perception that it is a Trojan horse for the TTIP. The Deputy Prime Minister stated that CETA would improve bilateral exchanges between the two countries.

Mr. Erjavec and Speaker Furey then addressed the issue of Turkey. The Deputy Prime Minister insisted on the importance of a dialogue with the Turkish government, referring to meetings that have taken place over the past few months (a meeting of EU foreign affairs ministers with Turkey's Minister of European Union Affairs; the G20 in China; and attendance at the Bled Strategic Forum by the Minister of Turkish Affairs). He added that an agreement on immigration between the EU and Turkey is crucial.

The Deputy Prime Minister said that to deliver on a promise made to Canada's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Stéphane Dion, he would be visiting Canada in early 2017. He added that he plans to travel with a delegation of business representatives in order to create new trade ties between Slovenia and Canada, and to strengthen current relations.

Meeting with His Excellency Mitja Bervar, President of the National Council of the Republic of Slovenia

The President of the National Council extended a warm welcome to the Speaker and his delegation, and indicated how happy he was to be having this meeting to discuss business, cultural and tourism opportunities. Speaker Furey took the opportunity to thank his counterpart for his generous hospitality and thanked Ambassador Cencen for all the work he had done to maintain good relations between Canada and Slovenia.

The President and the Speaker then discussed the inner workings, legislative process and challenges of the National Council of Slovenia and the Senate of Canada, as well as their changing mandates since they were each formed. They later discussed the fact that the National Council represents groups while the Senate represents regions, and the resulting differences. President Bervar said that two groups, namely retirees and youth, are currently underrepresented in Slovenia. He added that other groups are extremely well represented, both locally and nationally. President Bervar pointed out

that despite being quite new, the National Council has had a few difficult years, but that after the 2012 election and the many efforts that National Council members have made to remedy the situation, the institution has earned a great deal more respect.

Both officials then addressed the issue of the economy and trade relations. Although the distance between Canada and Slovenia is a major challenge, there appears to be enormous potential and interest in the automotive, biotech and agricultural industries. President Bervar added that although Slovenia has some reservations about the TTIP, it strongly supports CETA. Speaker Furey added that some countries backed away from CETA after BREXIT and that Canada needs partners, such as Slovenia, to exert a positive influence on those countries.

They then talked briefly about the ITF. President Bervar stressed that Canada is one of the largest donors and that Slovenia is exceptionally grateful for not only this financial support, but also Canada's participation in many of the organization's activities. Speaker Furey added that Canada is keenly awaiting new ITF proposals.

Meeting with His Excellency Dr. Milan Brglez, President of the National Assembly of the Republic of Slovenia

President Brglez thanked Speaker Furey for his visit and added that relations between Canada and Slovenia are very friendly and well developed. He also thanked the Speaker for Canada's generous contribution to the ITF in recent years. Speaker Furey said that the success of ITF is the result of global efforts and cooperation between numerous contributors. Speaker Furey then said that he was glad to be in Slovenia and to have the opportunity to foster and enhance the already good relations between the two countries. Both then agreed that these relations are based on shared values, such as human rights and respect for the rule of law, as well as solid cooperation and a strategic partnership.

President Brglez then informed the Canadian delegation that the ratification of CETA is very important for Slovenia and that the agreement is expected to be adopted in the National Assembly in late October. Both agreed that an agreement such as CETA would enable Slovenia and Canada to increase the amount and value of trade between the two countries. President Brglez added that the two main issues that Slovenia wants to work on with Canada are to promote tourism and increase investment.

The President and the Speaker briefly touched on security and terrorism. They believe that knowing how to adapt to different situations is important and that a dialogue with all parties involved is critical because a peaceful solution is generally impossible without it.

Meeting with Mr. Igor Ivancic, Deputy Secretary General of the National Assembly

Speaker Furey thanked the Deputy Secretary General of the National Assembly for agreeing to meet with him on such short notice, as security is a topic of great importance to him.

The delegation and Mr. Ivancic discussed security procedures for the National Assembly and National Council buildings. Mr. Ivancic said that the police are responsible for providing security for parliamentary buildings. He added that the police

can access the National Assembly and the National Council to investigate criminal activity. He went on to say that this is a highly sensitive topic because in no way does anyone want to give the impression that the police can encroach on the legislative process.

Meeting with Ambassador Damjan Bergant, Director of the International Trust Fund

Ambassador Bergant warmly received the Speaker and his delegation and thanked them for Canada's generous contributions to the ITF over the past 18 years. He added that Canada's contributions, which total close to US \$400,000,000, have funded projects in more than 25 countries. He said that Canada is considered to be one of the Fund's best partners. Speaker Furey thanked the Ambassador for all the work that the ITF has done and will continue to do in years to come.

The Speaker and the Ambassador then discussed the many projects that the ITF has undertaken over the past few years, such as those in the Balkans and Colombia, one of the top five most mine-affected countries. Ambassador Bergant explained that the Fund would like to begin working in Ukraine but, unfortunately, the current situation is preventing that from happening because it does not meet international safety standards. The Ambassador added that Slovenia decided to help children in Western Ukraine by offering psychological and social assessments. He went on to say that the ITF has not always been able to provide this type of support, but that the Fund's mandate has changed considerably over the past eight years and, since children are most affected by mines, it is important to educate and guide them properly. Speaker Furey said this is an excellent initiative that has Canada's full support.

Ambassador Bergant ended by adding that he visits Canada every year to discuss future projects and to follow up on those underway.

Meeting with Colonel Boštjan Blaznik, Head of the NATO Mountain Warfare Centre of Excellence

Colonel Bostan Blaznik welcomed Speaker Furey and the Canadian delegation to the NATO Mountain Warfare Centre of Excellence, located in Poljce. Col. Blaznik gave a presentation on the Centre of Excellence, which is fairly new. The memorandum of understanding was signed on March 15, 2015, with their three partners, Italy, Germany and Croatia. He added that the Centre's main mission is to provide opportunities and to improve and standardize education and training for NATO members and partners.

After the presentation, the delegation was given a short demonstration on the new project from Elan, a company currently working with the Centre of Excellence to develop skis better tailored to meet the needs of members of the armed forces engaged in mountain warfare.

Other activities

During their visit to Slovenia, the delegation had a chance to learn more about Slovenia's sports culture and alpine heritage by visiting the Planica Nordic Centre and

the Slovenian Alpine Museum. The delegation also had the privilege to visit the Church of St. Mary of the Assumption, located on Slovenia's only island, Bled Island, to gain a better understanding of Bled's rich history.

Background – Czech Republic

The Czech Republic is a parliamentary democracy with more than ten million inhabitants. It used to be part of Czechoslovakia and became an independent state in 1993. After the fall of communism in 1989, the Czech Republic became the first Eastern Bloc country to achieve developed country status. In 2013, the Social Democratic Party won the general election and formed a coalition with the Action of Dissatisfied Citizens (ANO) movement and the Christian Democrats (KDU-CSL). Relations within the coalition were intensely strained before the regional and Senate elections scheduled for October 7 and 8, 2016.

In July 2015, the Czech government approved an update to the Czech foreign policy strategic framework, which includes a desire to strengthen diplomatic relations with Palestine and normalize diplomatic relations with Iran, as well as a commitment by the Czech Republic to take part in international efforts to reach a lasting solution to the crisis in Syria.

Canada and the Czech Republic have a very strong relationship characterized by close cooperation. One of the keystones of this relationship is the warm welcome that Canada extended to Czechoslovakian refugees in 1948 and 1968, as well as the support it provided in the early 1990s when the Czech Republic was modernizing its political and economic institutions. In addition, Canada was one of the first countries to support the Czech Republic's membership in NATO.

The Czech government has a positive stance on CETA and believes that this treaty will significantly enhance the fairly modest trade relations between the two countries. In 2013, the Canadian government lifted the visa requirements for Czech nationals travelling to Canada.

Objectives – Czech Republic

The main purpose of the visit to the Czech Republic was to continue discussions on the issues raised during President Milan Štěch's visit to Canada in May 2016, particularly the development of economic exchanges, the many potential advantages arising from the ratification of CETA, security in the parliamentary precinct and the migration crisis.

The visit also sought to enhance relations between the Canadian and Czech parliaments and to promote and maintain academic exchanges.

Meetings

During its visit to Prague, Czech Republic, the delegation met with the following officials:

- His Excellency Bohuslav Sobotka, Prime Minister of the Czech Republic;
- His Excellency Milan Štěch, President of the Senate of the Czech Republic;
- Mr. Jan Mládek, Minister of Industry and Trade of the Czech Republic; and

- Mr. Jaromír Jermář, Chairperson of the Committee for Education, Science, Culture, Human Rights and Petitions of the Senate of the Czech Republic.

Meeting with His Excellency Bohuslav Sobotka, Prime Minister of the Czech Republic

Prime Minister Sobotka extended a warm welcome to the Speaker and his delegation, and said he was extremely happy that President Štěch's official visit to Canada in May 2016 had been a great success. He said that the visit had enabled Canada and the Czech Republic to strengthen their already strong relationship. The Prime Minister added that the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Lubomír Zaorálek, and the Minister of Culture, Mr. Daniel Herman, are planning a visit to Canada in the near future. Speaker Furey told his host that the visit of the two Czech ministers to Canada is very good news and that he is delighted with the idea that bilateral relations will continue to be strengthened.

They went on to discuss CETA, with Prime Minister Sobotka telling the Canadian delegation that the Czech government fully supports the treaty and will back the ratification. Speaker Furey said that Canada is pleased to hear that it will be supported by the Czech Republic. He added that the Canadian government realizes that many challenges still lie ahead. President Sobotka and Speaker Furey then raised the issue of the EU's future after the BREXIT vote.

President Sobotka believes that the United Kingdom made a political error in leaving and, given what is happening on the world stage, this will only weaken the Union. He added that this outcome will also slow the Union's economic expansion when everyone should instead be focusing on economic growth, security and the immigration crisis.

Lastly, members of the delegation and the Czech President discussed the situation in Ukraine and the importance of having a dialogue with Russia to ensure that the latter complies with the Minsk agreement. They also agreed on the importance of providing Ukraine with support.

Meeting with His Excellency Milan Štěch, President of the Senate of the Czech Republic

President Štěch thanked Speaker Furey for his official visit to Canada in May 2016 and pointed out that the visit was perfectly organized. He added that it was a priority for him to come to Canada to maintain the already strong relationship between the two countries and that he was all the more grateful that Speaker Furey accepted his invitation so quickly. Speaker Furey added that since Canada's lifting of the visa requirements for Czech nationals in 2013, the relationship between the two countries has deepened and that many very high-level visits have taken place.

The President and the Speaker then discussed the Czech Senate and the challenges it has encountered since being reinstituted (the Czech Republic had a bicameral parliament, but the Senate had not been active since the Second World War; it was finally revived in 1996). They discussed the legislative role that each of the two senates plays and their differences. Speaker Furey asked his counterpart about the cooperation

between the two chambers and the relationship between members of parliament and senators. President Štěch told the Canadian delegation that senators work more closely with political players at the regional and provincial levels than members of parliament. He added that senators have a tendency to be far more active and in touch with the people because they have more time to work with the electorate.

President Štěch then mentioned that Senate elections were planned for a third of the senators at the beginning of October, but that he was not expecting much of a change. He added that since the country is relatively well off economically and socially, there are no major problems that could be instrumental to the elections. He further added that the only factor he sees as potentially precipitating a change is political fatigue with the Social Democrats, who have been in power since 2008. He said that ANO, the party currently in second place which is headed by Mr. Andrej Babiš, led a highly combative campaign that might affect the election results.

Meeting with Mr. Jan Mládek, Minister of Industry and Trade of the Czech Republic

Minister Mládek welcomed Speaker Furey and the Senate delegation. The Minister raised the topic of free trade and its importance to a country's economic development. He then stressed the importance of expanding free trade zones and that CETA offers this type of opportunity. He added that this is an immensely significant agreement with countless opportunities for the Czech Republic.

Speaker Furey and the Minister then discussed the importance of making a clear distinction between CETA and the TTIP, and ensuring that all interested parties have a thorough understanding of the difference between the two because there is unfortunately a lot of confusion at the moment.

The delegation and the Minister then touched on BREXIT. The Minister said that the outcome was certainly not desirable and that the Union will no doubt be weakened by it. Swift action is critical. He feels that the longer there is confusion, the risk of the EU growing weaker increases, and that the priority now should be to make the Union stronger than ever.

Mr. Jaromír Jermář, Chairperson of the Committee for Education, Science, Culture, Human Rights and Petitions of the Senate of the Czech Republic

The Chairperson of the Committee for Education, Science, Culture, Human Rights and Petitions of the Senate of the Czech Republic welcomed Speaker Furey and his delegation. Mr. Jermar then briefly spoke about his committee's broad mandate and how closely all the different facets of his committee are linked.

Speaker Furey indicated that he was informed that public education in the Czech Republic was free, even at the university level, and that he would like to learn more. Committee members informed the Canadian delegation that despite the very generous public system, there are a number of private academic institutions, from kindergarten to university, throughout the country and that these institutions are usually operated by church missions. The Canadian delegation and the Committee members then

discussed academic exchanges between Canada and the Czech Republic, and the many advantages that such academic experiences can offer to students. The Czech parliamentarians pointed out that Czech students are immensely interested in studying in Canada, but that tuition is one of the greatest challenges because education is free for them if they stay in the Czech Republic.

Other activities

During their visit to the Czech capital, the members of the Canadian delegation had an opportunity to attend a breakfast meeting with representatives and members of the Canadian Chamber of Commerce in Prague, during which they discussed the current business climate in the capital. In addition, the delegation had a chance to learn more about Czech culture and history during their visit to the Charles Bridge and the Cathedral of Saints Vitus, Wenceslas and Adalbert.

Acknowledgements

The members of the Canadian delegation would like to thank His Excellency Mitja Bervar, President of the National Council of the Republic of Slovenia, for his warm welcome as well as the National Council's protocol team. They would also like to extend their thanks to the staff of the Embassy of Canada to Hungary, Slovenia and Bosnia and Herzegovina for providing them with assistance before the visit and during the meetings, and for accompanying them in their travels. The delegates are appreciative to Mr. Michael Horler for the quality of the meetings that were organized and the smooth conduct of the visit.

The members of the delegation would also like to express their gratitude to His Excellency Milan Štěch, President of the Senate of the Czech Republic, for his generous hospitality, with further thanks to the staff of the Czech Senate's protocol team for their dedication throughout the visit. They would also like to thank Mr. Otto Jelinek, Canada's Ambassador to the Czech Republic, and all embassy staff for arranging this visit. Lastly, the delegates are grateful to Global Affairs Canada and the Library of Parliament for the documents they provided in preparation for this visit.

Respectfully submitted,

The Honourable George J. Furey, Q.C.
Speaker of the Senate

Travel Costs

Visit of the Honourable George J. Furey, Q.C., Speaker of the Senate, and a Parliamentary Delegation, Slovenia and Czech Republic

TRAVEL	\$ 26,273.62
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ACCOMMODATION	\$ 0.00
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PER DIEMS	\$ 3,207.61
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PROTOCOL	\$ 1,738.79
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MISCELLANEOUS	\$ 0.00
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TOTAL	\$ 31,220.02
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