

Projev VZÚ Bořka Lizce na oslavě „Česko 30“ (20. června 2023, Ottawa)

The modern Czech statehood, Czechoslovakia, was created in 1918 and saved during the 2nd World War with a great help from Canada, including from Czech Canadians. The Czech Republic was born after the Velvet Revolution of 1989, peaceful fall of communism in my country, with the Velvet Divorce, the friendly division of Czechoslovakia in 1993. I remember very well what I hoped for when I stood as a young student on the Prague's Wenceslas Square in 1989 with tens of thousands of others. We held the posters of our first Czechoslovak president Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk and dissident Václav Havel and demanded the Return to the West, to the legacy of the first Czechoslovak Republic build on democracy, humanism, tolerance and free entrepreneurship.

I think that looking back at the last 30 years, we can be quite proud of how we did in fulfilling those hopes and dreams. The Czech Republic joined NATO in 1999, the European Union in 2004, and became a successful export-oriented market economy. Prague has blossomed into an international metropolis at the top of world rankings not only for its beauty, but also economic performance and the standard of living.

While building on long traditions, Czech companies, supported by the Czech science, have marked global successes in innovative sectors of IT, aerospace, bio, cleantech, automotive, manufacturing, etc. Czechia has the highest share of industry in the GDP in Europe, second highest production of cars per capita in Europe, and – honouring one of our strongest traditions, the highest consumption of beer per capita in the world. One passion that Czechs and Canadians share – apart from beer - is certainly hockey. During the last 30 years, the Czech Republic won one Olympic gold and 6 World Championship golds. Jaromír Jágr is ranked 2nd in points in the NHL history, Dominik Hašek received 6 Vezina trophies and David Pastrňák finished second in goals and third in points in this NHL regular season.

Unfortunately, there is a shadow over this celebration. For 1 year and almost 4 months, the people of Ukraine have been bravely resisting the brutal Russian invasion of their country. Vladimir Putin has demanded the clock in Europe to be rolled back to 1997. As I mentioned before, my country, joined NATO, together with Poland and Hungary, in 1999. At this point, we should believe that - unless resolutely stopped - Vladimir Putin will attempt do to what he says, no matter how crazy and overambitious such plans may sound. Not to believe “Mein Kampf” in 1938 was a mistake. Ukraine is fighting for democracy, humanism, rules based international order, and literary for the survival of countries at least in Russia's vicinity, including the Czech Republic. We shall never forget the sacrifices made by the Ukrainian people, un-imaginable for our generations that grew up in peace.

My country has been very proud to be to be one of Ukraine's strongest partners in its fight for freedom and humanism. Till the end of last year, our military supplies included 89 tanks, 226 combat and armored vehicles, 1.5 mil. pieces of ammunition, including 60,000 rockets.

I am quite proud that during my tenure, one of the most significant Czech-Canadian projects of the past 30 years came into being with the purchase of Colt, including Colt Canada by Czech arms company Česká zbrojovka CZ. The Colt CZ Group plays and will play an important role in the Czech as well as Canadian aid to Ukraine. Recently COLT Canada was commissioned by the Canadian government to supply 21,000 assault rifles and 2.4 million rounds of ammunition to be delivered to Ukraine.

I would like to express our major gratitude to Canada for standing by Ukraine and us in Europe at this difficult time. Thank you for the training that you provided to more than 36,000 Ukrainian soldiers, for leading the NATO enhanced Forward Presence mission in Latvia (where the Czech soldiers serve under the Canadian command), and so much more.

In 1993, the Czech and Slovak Federation split, however, the unique bond between Czechs and Slovaks has not only survived, but has thrived. I have certainly seen that also in Canada, not at least in how warmly I have been always received by Slovak Canadians. To preserve this unique bond has been an indisputable priority for all Czech and Slovak governments over the 30 years. I think that it would be difficult to find other two countries that have such a close relationship as Czechia and Slovakia anywhere in the world. The fact that the Czech Republic assumed the command of the NATO international force protecting Slovakia against possible Russian Attack is a telling recent illustration of that. I am sorry that the mission of my friend, Slovak Ambassador H.E. Vít Koziak ended 3 days ago and he cannot be here tonight. I would like to thank him and his colleagues not only for the close cooperation during the past 4 years, but also friendship. With that I most cordially welcome among us Chargé d'affaires of Slovakia, Mr. Marián Adam.

I have tried to strengthen Czech-Canadian cooperation in all fields, in foreign policy, defense, joint advocacy of our shared values, such as human rights, in business, science, culture, and sport. Please allow me to add few words – in conclusion of my remarks – at least about one segment of my activities.

For me, the past 30 years were also about our return to our friends in North America, including Czech Canadians – after the terribly long 4 decades that my country spent locked up behind the Iron Curtain. With an attempt to visit the old Czech communities that stood by us during both World Wars, I took on a task that would have been worthy Hercules Poirot. I would like to thank my colleague Ms. Miloslava Minnes without whose help I could not have succeeded in the detective work, work that was certainly worth it. Often I was the first Czech official representative to visit these historic communities in more than 70 years.

My “blast from the past” visits were probably my most touching experiences in Canada. They always began with a huge applause upon my arrival to the local Czech hall or Church. The Czech Canadians still enjoy the old traditions, including music and culinary specialties; for the kolaches, they still grow their own puppy seeds, which, as I was reminded, must be grinded very, very finely; they still have portrait of President Masaryk on the walls of their homes, they still treasure the awards which were presented to their ancestors who fought and raised funds for our freedom. Many of them still speak Czech, even those whose ancestors left my country in early 1700s.

Talking about 1700s, the so-called Moravian brothers were the first settlers in Labrador in 1771. Today, 80% of the First Nations in that part of Canada are members of the Moravian church with roots in my country. The shared cultural ties between the Czech Republic and Canada have grown for centuries.

If you are interested in a more detailed report from my detective work, I would like to invite you to look up - online - my publication *Czechs & Canada* as well as my film documentary “Together to Victory” about how Canada helped save my country during World War II, which received support of both Prime Ministers of our countries. For these, you can visit my Facebook, Twitter and YouTube accounts as well as www.Traxler110.cz. There are so many, very special Czech-Canadian stories that do not deserve to be forgotten and I wanted to make sure that it does not happen. These include friendship between President Edvard Beneš and Prime Minister Mackenzie King, training of Czechoslovak World War II pilots in the Royal Airforce, Canadian support of the assassination of Reinhard Heidrich, principle architect of Holocaust, by members of the Czechoslovak army and acceptance of 36,000 Czech and Slovak emigrants during the Cold War who both contributed to the development of Canada as well as to saving our independent culture. I cannot omit the role played during World War II by the first Czechoslovak Ambassador to Canada H.E. František Pavlášek whose 100-years-young son and great supporter of Czech-Canadian friendship, Professor Tomáš Pavlášek is with us tonight.

Our friendship has truly a remarkably strong and deep foundation. I would like to conclude my remarks by thanking you Canadians and Czech Canadians of current as well as earlier generations for your lasting support of my nation over much longer than the last 30 years.