Speech by the Ambassador of the Czech Republic in Canada Martin Tlapa on the National Day of the Czech Republic, October 28, 2026, Ottawa

Your Excellencies, Honourable Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen, Dear friends of the Czech Republic.

Welcome and thank you for joining us as we celebrate the National Day of the Czech Republic and commemorate the 108th anniversary of the founding of Czechoslovakia in 1918.

I am delighted to welcome representatives across government, parliament, the diplomatic corps, business, academia, culture, as well as members of the Czech and Slovak community and all friends of our country. Allow me to extend a particularly warm welcome to Her Excellency Viera Grigová, Ambassador of the Slovak Republic to Canada.

Next year would have marked a notable milestone for Czechoslovakia – the 85th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between what was then Czechoslovakia and Canada, marked by the opening of the first Czechoslovak Embassy in Ottawa in 1942. On a consular level, official ties go even deeper - Czechoslovakia launched its first Consulate in Montreal as early as in 1920.

But long before modern diplomacy, people from the Czech lands contributed to Canada's story. The Moravian Brothers, whose roots lie in the historic lands of Bohemia and Moravia, established the first permanent European settlement in Labrador in 1771. Their missions played a remarkable role in preserving Inuit culture, fostering education, and building bridges between communities that continue to resonate ever since.

Today, the Czech Republic and Canada stand together as allies in NATO, partners in the OECD, and close friends committed to democracy, freedom, human rights, and the rules-based international order.

Our economic partnership is thriving, and our countries are growing even closer. Not only through agreements on paper, but through real work, real people, and real music.

PARTNERSHIP AND INNOVATION

First, business. Investment and industrial cooperation are stronger than ever. Especially in defence, aerospace, advanced manufacturing and engineering. Czech Canadian trade has grown to $1.5B annually.

Just two weeks ago, CSG Group made the largest investment of any Czech company in Canada through its investment in MDA Space – becoming the company's single largest shareholder. MDA Space is an industry leader in Canada and globally, building everything from satellites to the Canadarm. This partnership will make both our countries stronger and safer.

We also see great engagement from companies like Colt Canada, Wikov, Litostroj and Czechvar. Thank you to all of them. And thank you for being partners and sponsors of tonight's concert.

CONNECTING PEOPLE

But the most important bridge is between people. Nearly 94,000 Canadians visited the Czech Republic last year and the number continues to grow in 2026. Direct Air Canada flights between Toronto and Prague now fly four times a week in summer. They bring our families, students, and friends closer.

We also worked to bring our services closer to you. For the first time, our Embassy held consular days in Vancouver this year with a mobile passport station. Czechs on the West Coast could apply for passports without flying to Ottawa. This is what a modern, citizen-centered state should do – staying close to its people, wherever they are.

Canada gave Czechs a safe home during the hardest times of the 20th century. We will never forget that. Czechs have given back in science, in sports, in business, and in culture. Our community here in Canada is one of the largest Czech communities in the world. We are very proud of you.

MUSIC AND VALUES

Ladies and Gentlemen, tonight we celebrate another bridge. The bridge of music. For Czechs, music is not just culture. It is part of who we are. It is part of

our language. It is part of our soul. I often say this: When Canadians listen to Czech music, they begin to speak and understand Czech too. Not with words. But with the heart. That is one of the reasons we are so proud to be your friends.

And tonight's program shows exactly that. We will begin with Leoš Janáček. His String Quartet "Youth" is full of energy and color. It is music about being alive.

Then we will hear Antonín Dvořák. Three beautiful songs from his cycle Cypresses. Songs about love, about nature, about memory.

And then, the heart of the evening. Dvořák's "American" String Quartet. He wrote it here, in North America, in 1893. It has Czech melodies. But it also has the spirit of the New World. It is music from two homes. Just like our friendship.

We will close with the most famous Czech melody of all. The "Song to the Moon" from Dvořák's opera Rusalka. A song about hope. A song about reaching across distances. A song about connection.

This is what Czech and Canadian values have in common. Openness. Creativity. Respect. We believe in democracy. We believe in community. We believe that culture can connect us.

LOOKING AHEAD

This message matters today more than ever. Tomorrow, the EU–Canada Summit in Montreal will open new doors. Doors for trade, for innovation, for digital cooperation. We are also encouraged by the prospect of Canada joining Erasmus+. More students, more researchers, more exchange. More opportunities to learn from each other. The Czech Republic strongly supports this promising development. Because stronger links between Canada and Europe mean one thing. More prosperity. And a stronger democratic world that we both believe in.

Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for being part of this friendship. Thank you for building it with us, every day. Now let us enjoy wonderful music together. Music that speaks without words. Music that connects us all. Thank you again for being here and have a wonderful evening.