



STATEMENT

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**NOTES FOR AN ADDRESS BY
THE HONOURABLE ANDRÉ OUELLET,
MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS,
AT A SEMINAR ON
THE CANADIAN PARLIAMENTARY SYSTEM**

OTTAWA, Ontario
May 31, 1994

Mr. Speaker of the Senate, Mr. Speaker of the House of Commons, parliamentary colleagues, ladies and gentlemen:

On behalf of the Government of Canada, I would like to welcome the parliamentarians from Central and Eastern Europe to Ottawa. Your objective is to learn how our Parliament works, but your visit should also serve as a reminder to us of the value of this institution.

Regardless of our political affiliation, we parliamentarians all share this conviction: it is absolutely necessary to debate current issues freely. We represent the people, and in this capacity we speak for them in our debates.

Nevertheless, it is easy to get carried away with partisanship and forget this essential duty. You are well aware of how fragile democratic institutions are and of how expediency and strong-arm methods can displace due parliamentary process.

I would like to salute your courage, and that of your compatriots for fighting relentlessly against tyranny to build your legislative assemblies — for fighting force with reason to form your political parties. Yours is an example that we cannot allow ourselves to forget.

Many of your compatriots gave their lives for the institutions that you serve today. You are the representatives of the new Europe, and it is our duty to ensure that your fight was not in vain.

Your visit comes at a particularly interesting time in the history of Canadian democracy and parliamentarianism. The results of our last federal election were interesting, to say the least!

Canada's political map has been drastically changed. Never have so many new parliamentarians been elected to the House of Commons — more than 200 out of a total 295 seats!

This historic event leads me to believe, on the one hand, that our democracy is doing well. On the other hand, these results show me that Canadians expect their elected representatives to listen to them, and want a role in this country's decision-making process.

Our government has recognized the importance of the geopolitical changes that you not only witnessed but played a part in. It has also clearly heard the message from the inhabitants of this country.

These two facts both come into play in the review of Canada's foreign policy launched by this government.

The purpose of this review is not only to prepare Canada for the new century that is approaching, but also to enable Canadians to participate in the country's foreign policy.

We held a two-day national forum on Canada's international relations. This forum brought together about 200 business executives, representatives of non-governmental organizations, journalists and professors to discuss the directions this country's foreign policy should take.

We have asked Parliament to review Canada's foreign policy. The joint committee is currently travelling across the country to gather ideas from our people in this regard.

On five occasions over the past six-month period, we have asked Parliament to debate important issues concerning our foreign policy.

By doing so, we hope to restore to Parliament and its members a leading role in the conducting of this country's business.

During the debate that we had in this House on the review of Canada's foreign policy, I emphasized that our main duty in Europe is to contribute toward establishing economic and democratic structures and to guarantee Central and Eastern European security.

I have just returned from Paris, where along with your foreign ministers I participated in the inaugural conference on the European Stability Pact. This initiative reflects the importance we attach to a prosperous and peaceful future for Europe.

Five years after the momentous events of 1989, you, fellow parliamentarians, are engaged in building new societies. You expect meaningful, tangible assistance. This seminar expresses, I believe, Canada's determination to share our expertise and experience in an endeavour critical to your political and economic reforms: the effective functioning of Parliament.

You are faced with uncomfortable legacies of the old period. These cannot be denied or suppressed. Instead, they must be dealt with honestly by new parliamentarians. From Estonia to Ukraine and south to Sofia, many assemblies have constituencies which are nervous, even fearful about the future. Recent history tells us that Parliament and its proceedings can easily be exploited to stall reform and innovation.

I trust that this seminar will reinforce your confidence in the rightness of your democratic choice and help to ensure that your own parliaments continue to serve your citizens so that they do not attempt to seek refuge in extremist solutions or the discredited ideologies of the past.

With citizenship issues not fully resolved in Latvia and Estonia, parliamentarians there confront the difficult task of representing members of society who do not vote in the national elections. The challenge is particularly difficult in small countries which have reason to feel vulnerable next to larger neighbours. Indeed, in Estonia, Russian troops are still quartered a mere 100 meters from the parliament buildings.

This government is keenly aware of your security concerns. We firmly believe that NATO [the North Atlantic Treaty Organization] should welcome new members in contributing further to the stability of Europe. We will contribute to the full extent of our capacities to NATO's Partnership for Peace; and we urge your governments to do the same.

Associate membership in the Western European Union and the European Union has been granted to most of your countries. We expect full membership will follow and encourage you to prepare for it.

A stable economic environment truly is the basis for long-term prosperity. We are encouraging foreign direct investment. Canadians have been hesitant to enter your markets but trade levels are steadily increasing. We expect this to continue and acknowledge your efforts to facilitate trade.

We will also continue our efforts to further expand trade and investment in Central and Eastern Europe.

A month ago, I went to Poland and Ukraine accompanied by a delegation of business people. During my meetings with President Walesa and President Kravchuk, I expressed Canada's support for their process of economic reform. I also wanted to hear their respective security concerns.

While in Poland, I announced new Canadian programs in support of that country's agricultural reforms. In my meetings with Prime Minister Pawlak and Foreign Affairs Minister Olechowski I also discussed possible youth exchanges and opportunities to facilitate trade.

Canada strongly supports Ukraine's democratic and economic development. No other country contributed as much as Canada toward the recent Ukrainian parliamentary elections. In my meetings with President Kravchuk, Minister of Foreign Affairs Zlenko, Minister of Foreign Economic Relations Slepichev and Minister of the Economy Shpek, I emphasized that a friendlier business environment is an essential ingredient of economic reform.

I welcome this opportunity today to announce the appointment of an Honorary Consul in Sofia. Bulgaria occupies an important geo-

strategic position in Central Europe, and Canada has a long-standing interest in this part of the world and close ties with its people.

I will shortly be making the final decision on an Honorary Consul and hope that Mr. Flis, my Parliamentary Secretary, will be able to open the office in Sofia in the near future.

Canada recognizes that security in the modern world is multi-faceted. Beyond membership in regional security organizations, we are convinced that only true democracies can ensure peace, security and stability in Europe. This is why Canada strongly supports the European Stability Pact. I made this point very clear to your respective foreign ministers in Paris last week.

Again, let me wish you a memorable and productive stay in Ottawa. I am confident that we can learn from one another. Together we must identify the challenges facing Eastern and Central Europe and recognize the importance of democratic institutions in building your new societies. Thank you.