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**SOURCE: PCO**

**DATE: FEBRUARY 29, 2008**

**REFERENCE/ RÉFÉRENCE:**

**LOCATION/LIEU: TORONTO, ON**

**TIME/ HEURE: 18H30**

**LENGTH/DURÉE: 9:02 MINUTES**

**PRIME MINISTER'S SPEECH AT CZECH RECEPTION**

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(APPLAUSE)

RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER (Prime Minister of Canada): Thank you. Merci beaucoup. Well, first of all, thank you very much, Jason, Minister Kenney for your kind introduction, for the great work you're doing as our Secretary of State for Multiculturalism and Canadian Identity. Please give Jason a hand for the work he's doing. (APPLAUSE) Bonsoir mesdames et messieurs. Good evening ladies and gentlemen. *Dobry vecer.* (LAUGHTER, APPLAUSE) Ambassador Vosalik, members of provincial and municipal government and dear friends of the Czech Canadian community, first of all thank you all for coming. It is a great pleasure for me to be here tonight at St. Wencelas Church accompanied...say that for me again?

UNIDENTIFIED: Wenceslaus.

RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: Wenceslaus. St. Wenceslaus Church hall, accompanied – I have a feeling I'm going to make a few of those mistakes tonight (LAUGHTER) – accompanied by our honoured guest and friend the Prime Minister of the Czech Republic, Mirek Topolenk... Topolánek. Excuse me. Told you. (APPLAUSE) Prime Minister, after excellent meeting in Ottawa yesterday, I'm pleased to join you again today at this gathering of the Czech Canadian community. Your visit to Canada reminds us of the shared history of the Canadian and Czech peoples, including the terrible trials we overcame during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Pope John Paul the Second described the 20<sup>th</sup> century as the century of tears. The world was infected by a lethal combination of utopian ideology and brutal despotism. It spawned totalitarian regimes, regimes that enslaved their own people and

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sought to subjugate others, snuffing out millions of innocent lives in the process. Our two countries fought nobly and paid dearly in the battles against fascism and communism. This long struggle united Canadians and Czechs as champions of freedom, democracy and human rights. And this year we are reminded of our close friendship by two important anniversaries: 2008 marks the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 1948 communist takeover that crushed the dream of democracy and post-war Czechoslovakia. 2008 also marks the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of those hopeful months in 1968, the peaceful resistance known as the Prague Spring before the entry of Soviet tanks. During these long decades, apologists for communism, even here in Canada, had tried to persuade us that the ideology was benign. They said we, Canada, should be neutral towards it, an honest broker because we had nothing to fear from the Soviet empire. Canadians knew better. We took a stand for democracy. We took a stand for freedom. We took a stand against the oppression of the Czechs and the other nations imprisoned behind the Iron Curtain. (APPLAUSE) And just as in 1938 and 1948, in 1968, Canada again opened its doors to thousands of Czechs seeking freedom. These newcomers made our country stronger and better. The presence of this community centre and church in the heart of Toronto is just one example. They included some of our most successful entrepreneurs like Thomas Bata and Steven Roman, some of our most accomplished musicians and composers, such as Oscar Morawetz and public figures like former cabinet minister Otto Jelinek. Canada was also enriched by distinguished Czech writers and academics, including Zidena, Salivarova and Josef Skvoretzki. (APPLAUSE) Whom we're all tremendously honoured to have with us tonight. Today...go ahead, everyone. (APPLAUSE)

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Today I'm pleased to say relations between our two countries have never been stronger or better. Czechs and Canadians are working together to bring freedom, democracy and security to a dangerous world. In Afghanistan our soldiers stand shoulder to shoulder, and I'm very pleased to note, Prime Minister, that your government is increasing its contributions to the mission in Afghanistan. As you know, we have been urging our NATO partners to boost their commitments. The Czech Republic is showing leadership within NATO by nearly doubling its troop strength, providing a dozen helicopters and taking charge of a new provincial reconstruction team in Logar province. (APPLAUSE) Together we are making a difference in the lives of millions of long-suffering Afghans. Canada and the Czech Republic are also allies in the cause of free international trade. We have implemented a youth mobility agreement, an agreement which will give thousands of young Czechs and young Canadians the opportunity to gain work experience. We're working together for a closer economic relationship between Canada and the European Union, and of course, we've lifted the visa requirement for Czechs travelling to Canada. (APPLAUSE) These measures will stimulate trade, investment, cultural exchanges and personal contact between our countries. So let us resolve then once again as Canadians and Czechs to continue to work together for freer trade and greater prosperity, for a stronger NATO alliance, and for a world where all of the peoples of tomorrow enjoy the freedom, democracy and human rights that our countries enjoy today.

Prime Minister, I mentioned to you yesterday that when I was a boy here in Toronto, one of my father's greatest friends was a Czech immigrant, Gerry Petricek. Now, he had anglicized his name so I could get it

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right. (LAUGHTER) Mr. Petricek delivered to our family the same message about his country that Czechoslovak Prime Minister Dr. Edward Benes addressed to the Canadian Parliament many years earlier in June 1943. Dr. Benes said of his era, and I quote, "After the final victory in this Great War is achieved, the Czechoslovak nation will reconstruct its old home rapidly and successfully, remaining faithful to the democratic way of life, to the principles of spiritual and religious freedom, and to the ideals of peace and peaceful international collaboration, of which Canada and its brave and freedom-loving people was always one of the most typical and courageous representatives in the whole world." Like Dr. Benes, our friend Mr. Petricek would not live to see the final victory over tyranny in his country, but I am sure that both Mr. Petricek and my late father are smiling today to see me as Prime Minister standing here in Toronto on the same stage with the Prime Minister of a free Czech Republic. (APPLAUSE)

Friends, it is now my pleasure, distinct pleasure to introduce tonight's guest of honour, though for those of you who follow news from Prague, I'm sure he hardly needs any introduction. He has been involved in public life in the Czech Republic for almost two decades. He is the leader of the Civic Democratic Party, and like me, has learned a thing or two about operating in a parliament without a majority. (LAUGHTER) So please join me in welcoming a friend of Canada, the Prime Minister of the Czech Republic, his Excellency, Mirek Topolánek. (APPLAUSE)

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