

Canada's Prime Minister Stephen Harper Celebrates the 50th Anniversary of the United Macedonians Organization of Canada during Gotse Delchev Night

Toronto, February 8, 2009

The United Macedonian's annual Gotse Delchev Evening, held in the year of the 50th Jubilee of the organization took place on Saturday February 7, in the Clement Room of the Macedonian Orthodox Cathedral St. "Clement of Ohrid" in Toronto. The 500 attendees were honoured with the presence of the Prime Minister of Canada, The Right Honourable, Stephen Harper. Mr. Harper is the first Canadian Prime Minister to attend an event organized by the United Macedonians or to visit the first and largest Macedonian cathedral in Canada.

The Prime Minister was welcomed in front of the cathedral St. "Clement of Ohrid", by the president of the Organization Dragi Stojkovski, where he viewed the beautiful frescoes and signed the golden Guest Book. There was an outpour of emotions when Mr. Harper entered the banquet hall. Everyone wanted to shake his hand and personally thank him for the recognition of the constitutional name of the Republic of Macedonia and to share a photo with Canada's leader.

Among the other guests at the celebration were Canadian dignitaries such as The Honourable Jason Kenney, Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, and Member of Parliament Paul Calandra, while the Macedonian side was represented by Vlatko Gjorchev and Aleksandar Nikoloski, both MP's in the Macedonian Parliament, and Martin Trenevski, Consul General of the Republic of Macedonia in Toronto and others.

The President of the United Macedonians, Dragi Stojkovski, spoke about the importance of the Gotse Delchev Night and the 50th Jubilee of the Organization.

On behalf of all Canadian Macedonians, as well as Macedonians worldwide, Stojkovski thanked the Prime Minister for recognizing the historic and constitutional name of Macedonia in 2007. He encouraged the Prime Minister to intensify trade and cultural ties with the Republic of Macedonia and to open a Canadian Embassy in Skopje, the Macedonian capital.

Stojkovski praised Canada's multiculturalism and encouraged "Greece and Bulgaria, two of Macedonia's neighbours...to learn a lesson from Canada".

Prior to introducing the Canadian Prime Minister, Minister Kenney spoke about the contribution that Canadian Macedonians have made in Canada.

The Canadian Prime Minister thanked the more than 500 guests with "blagodaram", (which means "thank you" in Macedonian). Harper was pleased with the warm welcome and expressed his satisfaction of the good relations between Canada and the Republic of Macedonia.

Macedonian Prime Minister Gruevski sent a greeting of his own for the celebration, which was read by Stojkovski. In it, Mr. Gruevski conveyed his "personal gratitude and the gratitude of the Macedonian people to the Prime Minister Harper and the state of Canada for the overall support this friendly country provides to us in the field

of the European and Euro-Atlantic integrations, as well as for the recognition of our Constitutional name, the Republic of Macedonia.”

Before departing, Prime Minister Harper presented the President of the “United Macedonians”, Dragi Stojkovski, a certificate in recognition of the 50 year “effort to enrich the lives of Canadians of Macedonian descent through community unification, and the celebration of your proud heritage and traditions.” In return, as a sign of respect for the Prime Minister and gratitude for the recognition of Macedonia’s name, Stojkovski presented Mr. Harper a sculpture of Alexander of Macedon in one of his victories, while the Macedonian hockey team “Macedonian Lions”, presented Mr. Harper with a hockey jersey bearing his name.

The Consul General of the Republic of Macedonia in Toronto, Martin Trenevski and Macedonian MPs Vlatko Gjorchev and Aleksandar Nikoloski also spoke at the gathering, and greetings from the “Union of Association of Macedonians from the aegean part of Macedonia – Skopje” were read.

From the Information Service of the “United Macedonians”

The United Macedonians Organization of Canada is the oldest and largest Macedonian national and cultural organization in the Diaspora. Founded on April 28, 1959, in Toronto, with the mission to promote unity and friendship among all Macedonians on this continent and elsewhere, regardless of their religious beliefs, political opinions or affiliations, the Organization was and remained a pillar in the fight against all foreign propagandas whose aim was and still is to achieve the demise of the Macedonians on the North-American continent and elsewhere. For more information visit our website www.unitedmacedonians.org or write to us at info@unitedmacedonians.org.

Speech by Dragi Stojkovski, President of the United Macedonians Organization of Canada

February 07, 2009

The Right Honourable Stephan Harper, Prime Minister of Canada;

The Honourable Jason Kenney, Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism;

Dear guests from the Macedonian Parliament, Vlatko Gjorchev and Aleksandar Nikoloski;

Consul General of the Republic of Macedonia, Ambassador Martin Trenevski;

The founders of the United Macedonians Organization and past presidents;

Our Parish Priests; presidents of the Macedonian Orthodox Churches and organizations;

Dear Macedonian - Canadians and friends;

This evening we have been honoured as never before. On this day, we celebrate the 137th anniversary since the birth of the great Macedonian visionary and freedom fighter, Gotse Delchev, who dedicated his life for the liberty of Macedonia and the Macedonian people. Through this anniversary we are honouring the lives of all

Macedonians that have devoted and given their lives for the liberty of Macedonia and its people. At the same time, we honour all Canadians who have given their lives for the liberty of Canada, including the courageous Canadian soldiers that fight to bring peace and prosperity to the people of Afghanistan.

This year, all of the events of the United Macedonians Organization of Canada are dedicated to our 50th anniversary celebrations. 50 years ago, young Macedonian Canadians, veterans of the Second World War, encouraged by their involvement in the resistance effort to crush Nazi Germany and the reality that part of the Macedonian people had formed a Republic in 1944, refused to listen to those who wanted to deny the uniqueness of our language, culture and faith and established what was to become Canada's largest Macedonian organization. They had foresight and vision. A vision that unity is strength. And on the 28th of April, 1959, at the King Edward Hotel in Toronto, they decided to form the "United Macedonians". Their goal was very simple and honourable: To promote unity and friendship among all Macedonians on this continent and elsewhere, regardless of their religious beliefs, political opinions or affiliations.

50 years is definitely a long enough time to declare that the vision of the founding fathers of our organization is still alive and strong and for that we salute you and thank you. You initiated the Ilinden picnics, which, with time, became the largest gathering of Macedonians in the World. You assisted in the foundation of this very cathedral. The new generation of Canadian Macedonians continue to build on that strength by organizing annual events such as the October 11th Banquet, the Mirka Ginova Night and the Gotse Delchev Evening; supporting and sponsoring hockey, soccer and softball teams; organizing Macedonian cultural and educational establishments; lobbying for the Macedonian cause in Canada and throughout the World.

We are proud that our accomplishments are acknowledged by the presence of the Prime Minister of Canada. And we are especially honoured because this is not just any Prime Minister of Canada. It is THE Prime Minister that recognized the historic and constitutional name of the Republic of Macedonia. And for that reason Mr. Prime Minister, from the bottom of my heart, and I am sure that goes for everyone here, all Canadian Macedonians, as well as Macedonians worldwide, we proudly say...Thank You Mr. Harper...

The recognition of Macedonia's name is an indication of your high moral values, as well as those of your Government.

Many Prime Ministers before you knew about the wrongdoings towards our aboriginal population, but said nothing. It was you, Mr. Harper, as leader of this government that apologized for the wrongdoings towards Canada's native peoples. When I watched the formal apology on television, I felt very emotional. The apology and supporting investigative reports about the wrongdoings were shown on TV throughout the day. As I watched, my thoughts went to the land of my birth, Macedonia, and the villages of my parent's birth in the part of Macedonia under Greece. One question kept coming to my mind: when will Greece have a Prime Minister with the high moral values and courage to finally apologize to the Macedonian people for the continuous ethnic and cultural assimilation perpetrated since 1912? The more I asked that question, the more it felt like a hallucination. Is it possible for a country that has spent nearly a century in denying a people its identity to finally stop the negation and apologize?

Prime Minister Harper, as ethnic Macedonians and Canadians of Macedonian origin, we are proud that our two countries and peoples have always been on the same side during major World conflicts. There is one small difference however – Canadian soldiers have fought on Macedonian soil, while no Macedonian soldier has had to fight on Canadian soil. However, the fact that Macedonian Canadians have fought for the Canadian army in the First and Second World Wars, evens out the score. And let's be proud of the fact that several Macedonian officers, who are present with us this evening, are being trained in Camp Borden, here in Canada. And we are very proud of that fact.

Another similarity between Canada and Macedonia is the fact that, although they are not major military powers, in the field of culture they are both super powers, both living by Gotse Delchev's motto: "I understand the World only as a field for cultural cooperation among nations".

That is why we encourage both our countries and governments to follow Gotse's guiding principle through increased trade and cultural contacts. As a highly industrialized country, Canada can help with investments in Macedonia. One way of increasing the level of cooperation would be the opening of a Canadian Embassy in Macedonia. And finally, Mr. Harper, Canada should finish the name recognition issue by recognizing Macedonia's name, not only in bilateral relations, but also in all international organizations, such as the UN and NATO.

Dear friends, as Canadian Macedonians we are honoured and pleased that thousands of Macedonians have chosen Canada as their country. We are part of the great multicultural mosaic that is Canada. We are proud to continually contribute towards keeping Canada the best and most liveable country in the World. Greece and Bulgaria, two of Macedonia's neighbours, ought to learn a lesson from Canada. Canadian multiculturalism is the world's first and most comprehensive official inclusive policy for all of its citizens. It assists with integration but also with language retention and pride of one's culture and heritage.

That is why it is my pleasure and honour to present to you our friend, the Honourable Jason Kenney, Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism.

Speech by The Honourable Jason Kenney, Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism

February 07, 2009

Thank you. Thank you. Dobro vecher dame i gospoda.

Reverend fathers, Ambassador, Consul General, Members of Parliament from Macedonia and Canada, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen.

It is a great honour to be with you here tonight on this historic evening along with Canada's Prime Minister as we honour this 50th anniversary of the United Macedonians Association of Canada. Chestito i za mnogu godini.

Thank you in particular to Sveti Clement parish for having welcomed us here tonight and a broader thank you to the Macedonian Orthodox Church for all that it has done for this community. During the dark and difficult days of the communist oppression in Macedonia the Orthodox Church here in Canada and throughout the Diaspora provided a support for the community and support for those who dreamed one day of having a free, independent and democratic country and we acknowledge that leadership. This is indeed an historic night.

I'm told that this is the second time only that a Canadian Prime Minister has visited the Macedonian Canadian community, the first time in two decades since a previous Conservative Prime Minister Brian Mulroney visited the Macedonian Seniors Centre here in Toronto. And this is indeed a reflection of the esteem in which the government of Canada and Prime Minister Harper's government in particular holds this community, a community many of whose members came to this country seeking freedom, fleeing a country where there was no freedom. And you brought to this country your hopes and dreams and aspirations for your children and grandchildren that they could grow up in a free and democratic country and now we are delighted that Macedonia and all of the other former countries of communist east and central and southern Europe are free, democratic and independent nations.

Tonight it's my real pleasure to introduce to you our country's leader and our Prime Minister, a man who has put Canada back on the map of the world stage as a champion of principles, freedom, democracy and human rights. He is also a man who has put Canada on the map as a champion of freedom, democracy and human rights and he is a man who is providing strong leadership to our country during these difficult and uncertain economic times.

Before I introduce him I should also point out he has the good wisdom to have selected as one of his senior advisors on the economy a proud Canadian of Macedonian origin Jasmine Ignetsky. Jasmine stand up!

And so friends please join with me in welcoming to the podium, in welcoming to Canada's Macedonian community Canada's leader, the Prime Minister of this country the Right Honourable Stephen Harper.

Speech by The Right Honourable Stephen Harper, Prime Minister of Canada

February 07, 2009

Thank you very much. Thank you very much everybody for that tremendous welcome. Merci beaucoup. I really do appreciate it. Thank you, as well Jason, for the kind introduction. Minister Kenney, as you know, is working every day overseeing Canada's immigration department and our multiculturalism policy and I know he is doing a tremendous job so let's all give him a big round of applause.

I'd like to say thank you to Dragi and to the entire United Macedonians Organization of Canada for inviting me to share briefly in this special evening.

Greetings to my colleague, Member of Parliament, Paul Callendra, and also to our counterparts from the Ambassador, Consul General and the Parliament of the Republic of Macedonia.

Father Boseovski, honoured dignitaries, respected guests, ladies and gentlemen.

First of all, as I say, thank you Dragi and the United Macedonians Organization of Canada for inviting me to share in this special night. For half a century, this Organization has worked to enrich the lives of Canadians of Macedonian descent, uniting your community and keeping alive your proud heritage and traditions. So it is with great pleasure that I offer my congratulations on the occasion of this Organization's 50th anniversary. I should mention Dragi, this organization was founded two days before my birth.

Since the early 19th century, Canada has been the home to a vibrant Macedonian Diaspora. Early immigrants left all they knew behind in search of a better life for their children and found both opportunity and prosperity on our shores.

And Canada, in turn, has been enriched by the contributions of Macedonian Canadians. As devoted family- and community-conscious neighbours, as enthusiastic participants in the democratic process, as hardworking entrepreneurs, dedicated and accomplished professionals, each and every day, Macedonian Canadians are helping to build a stronger, better country for all of us. Not to mention padding out the front lines of a few of NHL teams in the process!

But seriously, ladies and gentlemen, the same values that guide community members here in Canada are also inspiring your friends and loved ones living in Macedonia. Since Macedonia declared its independence in 1991, the country has made great strides in democratic and economic progress. And although there have been, and will yet be, challenges, along the way, Macedonia is already proving itself an important member of the European family.

I know that you will all keep a close watch, all of you, on developments in Macedonia, just as you continue to contribute each and every day to building a stronger Canada. One of our great strengths as Canadians is that we learn from our history; we are not enslaved by it. We put old arguments behind us and focus on the challenges and opportunities that lie before us.

And I know Macedonian-Canadians, through their hard work and commitment to Community, will always be at the forefront of the effort to move this country forward.

Once again, I want to thank the United Macedonians Organization of Canada for the

opportunity to join you in tonight's celebration, and I wish you 50 more years of success! Thank you.

Thank you very much. Merci beaucoup. Blagodaram. And before I leave the stage I want to present on behalf of all of you, I want to present Dragi with a certificate marking the 50th anniversary of this organization's founding and all of its achievements here in Canada.

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Presentation to Mr. Harper: This is a depiction of a battle won by Alexander of Macedon in a country, which, today is called Afghanistan.

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Dragi Stojkovski: The Macedonian Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski planned to honour us with his presence tonight. Unfortunately, he was forced to choose between this event and a very important Euro-Atlantic conference in Munich. Keeping in mind Macedonia's desire to join NATO and the EU, we understand his decision to travel there. In fact, today the Macedonian Prime Minister met with Canadian defense minister Peter McKay at the 45th Munich Security Conference. It's been speculated that Peter McKay may be the new head of NATO. We hope that Mr. Mckay would support Macedonia's rightful place in NATO.

Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski sent us the following greeting:

Your Excellency, Mr. Stephen Harper, Prime Minister of Canada,
Distinguished representatives of the Canadian Government,
Distinguished President of the "United Macedonians" organization, Mr. Dragi Stojkovski.

Your Excellencies,
Brothers and sisters from the Macedonian Diaspora in Toronto and Canada,

Please allow me in my personal name and on behalf of the Government of the Republic of Macedonia, to extend my greetings to all of you present tonight at the traditional solemn academy "Goce's night" and at the same time to congratulate you on the great jubilee, 50 years of the establishment of the "United Macedonians" organization.

In this period when we are marking the 137th anniversary of the birth of the Apostle of the Macedonian revolution Goce Delchev and the 50th anniversary of the foundation of the "United Macedonians" organization, this all-Macedonian gathering is taking place, being a proof of the strong and permanent tie of the Macedonian emigrants with their roots and their homeland, the Republic of Macedonia. It is precisely your long tradition that is evidence that, neither the distance, nor the many years of living and working in Canada, have separated the Macedonian emigrants from their identity, cultural tradition and customs.

You have always been and remained the greatest ambassadors and promoters of the Republic of Macedonia and therefore, your integration and enhancement of the links with the birth country, by being involved in the reform, economic and political processes of the country holds special importance for the Government of the Republic of Macedonia.

In this occasion, I would also like to extend regards to my colleague, the Prime Minister of Canada, Stephen Harper, as well as the other guests from the Government of Canada present at this solemn academy, and at the same time to convey my personal gratitude and the gratitude of the Macedonian people to the Prime Minister Harper and the state of Canada for the overall support this friendly country provides to us in the field of the European and Euro-Atlantic integrations, as well as for the recognition of our Constitutional name, the Republic of Macedonia. For a small country like ours, this support and friendship is of a great importance for us and we attach a special attention and priority to it. Canada is a country with which we had an excellent cooperation in the past period in many fields and good mutual relations, and I hope that in the forthcoming period we will have an opportunity with the Prime Minister Harper to exchange in person opinions towards further intensification and deepening of the relations and cooperation between our two countries.

Conveying once more my regards to everybody present at this gathering, I would like to express my great respect and recognition to the members of the Macedonian Diaspora in Canada, for your persistence in the cherishing, developing and affirmation of the Macedonian national, cultural, linguistic and spiritual identity. It is one of the main pillars of the existence of the Macedonian nation and sovereignty of our country.

I would like to congratulate you the jubilee of your organization and long live the tradition of holding such gatherings.

Nikola GRUEVSKI
President of the Government
of the Republic of Macedonia