



Visit by Canadian Elected Representative Joe Comartin to Poland



July 19-27 , 2006

Visit by Canadian Elected Representative

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Canadian Federal parliamentary representative, Mr. Joe Comartin, MP for Windsor-Tecumseh, visited Poland from July 19 to 27, 2006, at the invitation of the Mayor of Lublin, Mr. Andrzej Pruszkowski. He was accompanied by the coordinator of the visit, Mr. Jerzy Barycki, President of the Polish-Canadian Business and Professional Association of Windsor. The invitation of the Member of Parliament to Poland was a result of the growing cooperation between Lublin and Windsor. The cities are linked by a partnership agreement, signed in the year 2000, and their collaboration is considered by the Canadian and Polish Embassies to be one of the most active of its kind in recent years.

SOLIDARITY changed the face of Poland, of Europe and of the world. The Polish nation has a special kind of recognition in Europe and in the world as a whole. Poland entered Europe as a free and democratic country. However, the process of change goes on and requires a longer period of time. For example, although the national rate of unemployment recently dropped from 18 to 16 percent, this figure remains very high. Strength is seen in Polish exports, which show continuous growth. In the first five months of this year, exports of goods were valued at €34 billion, which is 23.3 percent more than during the same period in 2005 (*Gazeta Wyborcza*, July 19, 2006). Since the last parliamentary elections, Poland is governed by a coalition of the Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (Law and Justice), Samoobrona (Self-Defense) and Liga Polskich Rodzin (League of Polish Families) Parties. Jarosław Kaczyński recently became the new premier. Poland is a full member of NATO and gives active, military support to its allies. Poland is also a full member of the European Union. It should be treated by other nations, particularly by Canada and the U.S.A., in the same way that other members of the EU are treated. Accordingly, the discrimination with regard to visas for Polish citizens, entering Canada and the U.S.A., defies understanding, in that it imposes a limit on cooperation. We heard this opinion expressed many times during our recent visit to Poland. Canada is able to change this and Canada's Polonia can play a major role in the process.

Therefore, it was most fortunate that Mr. Joe Comartin, a Federal representative of Canada, traveled for the first time to Poland, as a result of the initiative by the Mayor of Lublin. Joe Comartin is carrying out the functions of an elected representative (MP) in Windsor for a third term and is active, not only at a local level, but also internationally. He recently took part in the G-8 Meeting in Moscow. He is the Parliamentary Deputy House Leader of the New Democrats Party, the Justice Critic and the Public Safety Critic. Recently, on June 20, 2006, a group of elected representatives in the Canadian Parliament formed a group of friends of Poland, called the Canada-Poland Parliamentary Friendship Group. It presently consists of a dozen or so elected representatives and senators from different political parties. The responsibility of the group is to advise the Canadian Government on Polish issues. The Chair of the group is Borys Wrzesnewskyj, MP (Etobicoke Centre), with Joe Comartin and Peter Golding, MP (Edmonton Centre-East) as his Deputies. The inaugural meeting took place in Parliament on May 10, 2006, with the participation of representatives Borys Wrzesnewskyj, Joe Comartin and the Hon. Andrew Telegi, MP (Kitchener-Waterloo). As well, the Ambassador to Canada of the Republic of Poland, Dr. Piotr Ogrodziński, the Chair of the KPK Council, Władysław Lizoń, and Jerzy Barycki.

On August 2, 2006, at the Headquarters of the KPK in Toronto, the Chair of the KPK Council, Mr. Władysław Lizoń, organized a meeting of elected representative Joe Comartin with the Polonia media, on the subject of his recent visit to Poland. The present account complements the media coverage, by providing a chronology of the main meetings and by presenting some of the issues, raised in them.

On July 19, 2006, the guests from Canada were received at the airport in Warszawa by the organizer and interpreter, Ms. Agnieszka Małyska, of the Promotions Office of the City of Lublin. Elected Representative Comartin first went to the Parliament of the Republic of Poland for a meeting with Representative Artur Zawisza.

After a discussion of Polish-Canadian interactions up to that date, the Chair expressed his hope for expanded cooperation between Poland and Canada. He emphasized that the requirement of Canadian visas for citizens of Poland is a big obstacle to the growth of this cooperation and that this issue should be resolved urgently. After the meetings in the Parliament, en route for Lublin, we stopped for supper in Kazimierz Dolny, at the well known *Dom Restauracyjny* of Barbara and Cezary Sarzyński. This was the first exposure of the Canadian MP to traditional Polish cooking and hospitality. The restaurant has witnessed some famous guests, which recently included four premiers from neighbouring countries. During the course of a conversation about Canadian wines, Mr. Sarzyński offered to organize a mini-festival of Polish food and Canadian wines. However, a basic condition of this proposal was the introduction of Canadian wines in Poland, but more on this subject is yet to come below.

On July 20, we began an intense program in Lublin with a meeting with representatives of the Lublin City Council, including: Dr. Janusz Mazurek, the Deputy Mayor of Lublin, Zbigniew Wojciechowski, the Vice Chair of the Lublin City Council, Piotr Semeniuk, Director of the Promotions Office of the City of Lublin, as well as Ouassamah Tamim, the Trade Commissioner at the Canadian Embassy. Next there was the main meeting on potential opportunities for scientific and economic cooperation, which involved representatives from city government, all of the institutions of higher education and the related businesses. Consul Tamim described the current status of Polish-Canadian cooperation. An interesting and constructive discussion followed. Great interest was shown in creating programs of student exchange and also scientific exchange. The speakers emphasized that there are many possibilities for Polish-Canadian cooperation, but there are also difficulties, because of Canada's visa requirements. At the end of the meeting, there was the signing of an agreement between the Lublin Community, represented by Professor Jan Oleszczuk, and the Polish-Canadian Business and Professional Association of Windsor, represented by Jerzy Barycki. The signed agreement is yet another example of the deepening of existing contacts and the formation of new ones between our twin cities. The local media were present at the signing and already the very next day, an interview with the Canadian MP was published in a local newspaper (*Kurier Lubelski*, July 22, 2006). After a dinner, hosted by the Lublin City Council, which was represented by Mr. Zbigniew Wojciechowski, there was a tour of the city. The guests were able to pass through a tunnel, extending beneath the Coronation Tribunal, where there were observation points with models, which displayed different stages in the development of this Fourteenth-Century town. Next year will mark the six hundred and ninetieth anniversary of the bestowal of the rights of a city upon Lublin. This very busy day came to an end with a reception, hosted by the Mayor of Lublin, Mr. Andrzej Pruszkowski, a strong advocate of international cooperation with Lublin and the surrounding region.

The atmosphere of the meeting was very warm, not only on account of an extended heat wave in Poland – according to the press, in Warszawa, this July was the hottest in 227 years (*Gazeta Wyborcza*, July 26, 2006) – but also because of changes in the Government of the Republic of Poland in the post of Premier. The parliamentary debate continued during the course of our meeting and so Representative Zawisza kept an eye on the television reports, since he shortly afterwards had to deliver a speech. After a short conversation and an explanation of the rules of operation of the Polish parliamentary system, the guests were taken to the Parliament. The next meeting was with individuals from the Polish-Canadian Parliamentary Group (the entire group consists of 27 people), with Representative Andrzej Ćwierz as Chair. The next day, July 21, we visited the shocking Museum of Nazi Germany's Camp of Concentration and Extermination, at Majdanek. After that, there was a meeting in the Office of the Marshal with Mr. Stanisław Gogacz, Vice Marshal of the Lublin Voivodeship. The conversation focused on the possibility of collaboration in health, agriculture, clean energy sources and science. In the afternoon, there was a pleasant turn of events, in the form of a meeting with students from Canada, who were learning about the history, culture and language of Poland at the Catholic University of Lublin (KUL).

We were also able to meet with the Rector of KUL, Father Professor Stanisław Wilk and his colleagues. They were interested in the exchange of students and professors. A special concert by the Folk Dance Group UNCS also was organized for the guests from Canada. The beautiful performances of dance and song by the young people were brought to an end by supper with representatives of the group with its legendary founder, Stanisław Leszczyński, the Deputy Mayor of Lublin, the Vice President of the Polish Community, Professor Jan Mazur, as well as students from an international course for the dance instructors of Polonia folk groups. During supper, we met representatives of Polonia folk groups from Toronto, Calgary and Edmonton. The same afternoon, we gave a television interview for *Lublin Panorama*.

The day of July 22 was reserved for a visit to Lwów, the twin city of Lublin. This added trip provided an opportunity to see Ukraine. In Lwów, we were received by the Deputy Mayor, Vasyl Kosiv, and representatives of the City Administration. They were young, well educated individuals, who knew foreign languages and were eager to enter into international cooperation. They told us of their plans to create a mecca of tourism in their city. They are currently at the stage of looking for investors. After sightseeing in this beautiful city, we returned to Lublin.

On July 23, before we left Lublin, we had a pleasant surprise, in the form of a visit to a pearl of architecture in the Lublin region, the Zamoyski Palace Museum, in Kozłówka. It is noteworthy that Captain Zamoyski accompanied the Premier of the Republic of Poland, General W. Sikorski, on April 4, 1941, in the meetings with the Government of Canada, about organizing a Recruitment Centre of the Polish Army in Windsor (*PI & SM, document A XII.1/49c*). After travelling to Warszawa, the Canadian MP visited the Old City. The next day, July 24, was reserved for seeing the Museum of the Warszawa Uprising and the Warszawa Ghetto, which made a big impression on him.

On July 25, after a meeting in the Canadian Embassy with the Consul, Gregory Cooney, there was a dinner to celebrate the visit by elected representative Comartin to Poland. It was hosted by Michael Ward, the senior trade adviser at the embassy. Celebrating the event with him were individuals from the embassy, several resorts and economic agencies in Poland, as well as Representative Andrzej Ćwierz. A pleasant surprise was provided by the appearance of Mr. Roman Jankowiak, the Senior Trade Commissioner, Trade Commissioner's Office in Montreal, who had arrived from Canada. During the course of the conversation, we learned more about the plans for economic cooperation between Poland and Canada. Later that same day, Representative Andrzej Ćwierz invited us to supper, which was yet another occasion for an exchange of opinions and for getting better acquainted.

During the next to the last day, July 26, there was an interesting meeting with Robert Mielżyński, the owner of Mielżyński Ltd., a former wine producer and currently an importer of wines to Poland. He brings into Poland wines from several European countries and in 2007 he plans to import Canadian wines into Poland. This was promising information for Mr. Sarzyński, of Kazimierz Dolny, who as I noted earlier is interested in the promotion of Canadian wines. Canada produces very good wines and is competitive with other countries, from which wines are imported to Poland. A good example is the unique "ice wine", made in our region of Essex. This sweet alcoholic beverage is well known around the world as a new kind of wine and is served primarily with dessert.

The last day, Thursday, July 27, had a very intense schedule. It also formed the climax of part of the visit by the Canadian MP to Poland. A meeting with the Marshal of the Senate of the Republic of Poland took place at 09:00 a.m. in the Senate. Marshal Bogdan Borusewicz emphasized that the visa issue is one of the most urgent matters, in need of attention. He also noted that Poles are full members of the European Union with all related rights and there is no danger of their travelling to Canada for work. It is more economical for them to find employment in the EU countries. The citizens of Poland expect from Canada similar treatment in the matter of visas to that, accorded to citizens of the EU community of nations. The Marshal was also interested in matters, concerning Polonia, and said he would like to visit our country.

We anticipate that Mr. Comartin soon will present to the Canada-Poland Friendship Group a report on his visit to Poland. The support of this group for Polish-Canadian matters is very essential, not only on the issue of removal of the visa requirement for Polish citizens, visiting Canada, but also on many others, which featured in the conversations of the representative in Poland. No doubt some more time is needed to evaluate the "Polish meetings". However, it seems safe to say that all of the meetings with city, voivodeship and federal government authorities will be helpful in finding solutions to fundamental problems and also the development of cooperation between Canada, Polonia and Poland. In closing, I offer sincere words of gratitude to all individuals, who provided help in organizing this visit. I offer particular thanks to the Promotions Office of the City of Lublin and the Secretariat of the KPK in Toronto.

Jerzy Barycki, Windsor, August 7, 2006,

Translated by Frank Simpson, Windsor, September 12, 2006

Related Publications (as of 26 August 2006)

Print Documents

- Barycki, Jerzy, 2006a. Wizyta posła kanadyjskiego w Polsce (Visit of Canadian Elected Representative to Poland). *Czas-Zwiazkowiec*, Nr. 33, 17-24 sierpnia, 2006, str.17
- Barycki, Jerzy, 2006b. Wizyta posła kanadyjskiego w Polsce (Visit of Canadian Elected Representative to Poland). *Goniec*, Nr. 33, rok IV, 18-24 sierpnia, 2006, str.12
- Barycki, Jerzy, 2006c. Poseł kanadyjski Joe Comartin w Polsce (Canadian Elected Representative Joe Comartin in Poland). *Gazeta*, Nr. 159, 18-20 sierpnia 2006, str.12 I 15
- Klusek,Wojciech, 2006. Wiadomosci: Kandyjskie wizy, Rozmowa dnia (The News: Canadian Visas, the Conversation of the Day). *Kurier Lubelski*, 21 lipca 2006, str. 2,5

Web Documents

- Barycki, J., 2006a. Joe Comartin, MP Windsor-Tecumseh, visits Poland (accessed on September 12, 2006).
<http://www.poloniawindsor.ca/>
- Barycki, J., 2006b. Wizyta w Polsce posła kanadyjskiego Joe Comartina (Visit to Poland of Canadian Elected Representative Joe Comartin (accessed on September 12, 2006).
<http://www.wspolnota-polska.org.pl/Swiat>

Explanations of Photographs

01. Representatives A. Zawisza (left) and J. Comartin (right) at Parliament of Republic of Poland.
02. Meeting with Polish-Canadian Parliamentary Group in Parliament of Republic of Poland.
03. Information plaque about twin city of Windsor in City Hall, Lublin. J. Comartin (left) and J.Barycki (right).
04. Signing of agreement between Lublin Community and Polish-Canadian Business and Professional Association of Windsor. From right: J. Barycki, Professor J. Oleszczuk, P. Semeniuk and J. Comartin.
05. Meeting with Mayor of Lublin. From left: J. Barycki, Dr. J. Mazurek., A. Pruszkowski, J. Comartin, Professor A. Sitko-Lutek, W. Lutek.
06. Meeting with Administration of City of Lwów. From left: R. Vefymenko, O. Prostyk, Deputy Mayor of Lwów, V. Kosiv, J. Comartin, J. Barycki.
07. Meeting in Canadian Embassy. From left: O. Tamim, J. Barycki, J. Comartin, G. Cooney.
08. Meeting with Marshal of Senate of Republic of Poland. From left: J. Comartin, Marshal of Senate of Republic of Poland B. Borusewicz, J. Barycki.

