

By Jennifer Campbell

OTTAWA — Canada should be looking toward the Middle East to expand and diversify its trading partners, says Bessma Momani, a senior fellow at the Centre for International Governance Innovation and Brookings Institution, who spoke in Ottawa last week on a panel about Canada's role in the Middle East. The panel was organized by the Carleton initiative for parliamentary and diplomatic engagement in association with the Arab ambassadors.

"There's a great advantage in complementary trade and I'd say it's something we should think about," Momani said. "We need to have a viable economy, and a viable economy today is not just trade with the United States and it's not in manufactured goods. It's in the knowledge sector.

"And what are the kinds of things wanted or required by the booming Middle East? Things like our construction services, our architectural firms, our engineering firms, urban planning — this is where the growth sectors are."

Momani also named the health-care industry and training in education — all sectors in which Canada has a comparative advantage. "It's the future of our society and the people who will be consuming those products are in the Middle East. The youngest, fastest-rising demographic of educated young people are in the Middle East."

She said Canada needs to be a destination for foreign direct investment and noted that the (Gulf Co-operation Council) alone has \$3.5 trillion in such investment expected by 2020.

"We have done nothing, nothing, to help this, not in trade, not in encouraging FDI and we've done a lot of damage to our own reputation perhaps on the political front that has not allowed that," Momani said, and noted that Australia, a country Canada often emulates and works with, has already had several rounds of free-trade negotiations, and has a net trade surplus with much of the Middle East where Canada does not.

"We have room to grow and it's incumbent on our government to do some of the trips we've seen recently — but more of them. We need a prime minister to go and engage and be active in the Middle East."

## **TWO VISITS TO OTTAWA**

Two historic visits took place in Ottawa in April. First, Diloram Tashmukhamedova, Speaker of Uzbekistan's Legislative Chamber, visited Toronto and Ottawa — the first time an Uzbek Speaker has visited the country. Then, Macedonian President Gjorge Ivanov visited both cities. Macedonian presidents have visited Toronto before but not Ottawa until this visit.

Ivanov came to Canada to mark the 50th anniversary of the First Independent Macedonian Church, an organization that's important to his people because many countries would have refused the Macedonian diaspora the right to set up their own church five decades ago.

The president also visited universities and colleges, including the Canadian Forces College and McMaster University. He lectured at the latter and called his country "the Canada of the Balkans" for its multiculturalism and human-rights work. There, he signed a memorandum of understanding for co-operation between McMaster and a university in Skopje.

In Ottawa, he met with members of the Canada-Macedonia parliamentary friendship group, as well as House of Commons Speaker Andrew Scheer and Senate Speaker Noel Kinsella. At Carleton University, he presented 130 books of Macedonian literature, dating from the 9th century.

Tashmukhamedova met with both Speakers as well, and with Mayor Jim Watson and Auditor-General Michael Ferguson.

The purpose of her visit, she said in an email interview, was to "further strengthen the co-operation with Canada in the inter-parliamentary, economic, investment, cultural and humanitarian spheres." She said Canada and Uzbekistan also share a concern about Afghanistan.

## **ANOTHER LEADER VISITING THIS WEEK**

Estonian President Toomas Hendrik Ilves is visiting Ottawa this week, the first official state visit of an Estonian head of state to Canada. In advance of his visit, Diplomatica asked him a few questions by email.

Of the visit, Ilves said he intended to express Estonia's support for the free-trade agreement being negotiated between the European Union and Canada (CETA) and its belief in strong transatlantic ties through security co-operation as well as trade.

"Personally, I have fond memories of Canada, where I have spent time in my youth, where I worked and lived for almost four years," he said. "We remain grateful to Canada for offering asylum to many of those Estonian refugees who fled the Soviet regime. There is still a vital and thriving Estonian community in Canada."

The president said he comes seeking "new possibilities of further co-operation in the fields of technology, education, culture and economy."

On the current economic crisis in the EU, he said he believes the worst is over.

"We are not yet quite out of the crisis, but the situation looks much better than it did a year ago," Ilves said. "The euro itself is in good shape — the problem is the imbalance between the countries that do follow the rules and those who don't."

He said the union needs to enforce the rules all member states have agreed to follow. "The situation in which those who do follow the rules keep bailing out those who do not is unsustainable in the long run."

Estonia adopted the euro two years ago, after joining the EU in 2004. Today, 64 per cent of the population supports the currency, in spite of the crisis and subsequent bailouts. Estonia's economy grew by eight per cent in 2011, 3.2 per cent in 2012 and is projected to see 3.6 per cent growth this year.

"At the same time, we retain a balanced budget; our national debt and budget deficit are the lowest in the EU," he said.

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