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Dear Ambassador,

The Central European Association for Canadian Studies was astonished to receive the very saddening news that the Government of Canada had decided to abolish the Understanding Canada Program and thus cancel support for Canadian Studies activities around the world, our region included.

This Program and its predecessors had been in existence for well over thirty years, serving the best interests of Canada in several ways. **Firstly**, they helped spread knowledge about Canada to all corners of the world and implanted awareness of Canadian values and the unique Canadian model in faraway and sometimes troubled lands. **Secondly**, through their many publications, teaching and research activities, scholars participating in the Program brought a new perspective to the understanding of Canada in their own special fields, to the great benefit of Canada and Canadian scholarship. **Thirdly**, as demonstrated by a recent study prepared by the International Council for Canadian Studies, there was in fact a very considerable return for Canada on the financial investment in Canadian Studies made by the Government of Canada over the decades. **Finally**, universities and colleges around the world invested their own funds in elaborating and maintaining courses and research projects on Canada, supplementing, matching, and in most cases greatly surpassing the financial contribution made by the Canadian Government.

The decision to abolish support for Canadian Studies on a global scale would be misguided even if the Program had not been profitable from the financial point of view. When, during the Second World War, Winston Churchill was told that Britain should cut arts and humanities funding to support the war effort, he responded with the simple reply "Then what are we fighting for?" Churchill was right; no government policy is worth implementing or can be successful if it entails a world devoid of culture and scholarship. Having said this, it must also be stressed that the scope of Canadian Studies did change over time: particularly since the introduction of the Understanding Canada Program in 2008, and as a response to the specific priorities laid out by the Government of Canada, it has been opening up to new areas of teaching and research, including peace and security, democracy and rule of law, and managing diversity.

We would also like to point out that in abolishing the Understanding Canada Program, the Canadian Government has revealed its profound misunderstanding of the position of Canadian Studies abroad and of foreign Canadianists. With very few exceptions, the 7,000 scholars

involved internationally in Canadian Studies pursue this discipline at a certain cost to their careers. For obvious reasons, very few positions at universities outside Canada are advertised as being for Canadian Studies: instead they are for area studies (for example British and American Studies) or specific disciplines (political science, history, etc.). The vast majority of Canadianists are thus hired to teach and do research in areas other than Canadian Studies; the astonishing flowering of Canadian Studies round the world is due to their own personal commitment to the field and to Canada itself. In the light of this reality, the action of the Canadian Government in ending support for Canadian Studies seems particularly quixotic.

At the moment the Executive Committee and Advisory Board of the Central European Association for Canadian Studies are exploring the possibilities for continuing to pursue Canadian Studies and promote Canada in the Central European region in this difficult situation. We will do everything possible to maintain our membership of almost 300 university professors and students in the member countries of the CEACS – the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Romania and Bulgaria – and to continue helping them in their teaching, research and study activities. Though this is now a much more challenging task, we will still strive to bring a greater knowledge and understanding of Canada to this part of the world.

We are also, of course, committed to maintaining our good relationship and friendly cooperation with the Canadian Missions in the region. At the same time, we would ask you, as the Ambassador of Canada to the Czech Republic and Slovakia, to convey to the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs our firm conviction that it would be in the best interest of Canada for the Canadian Government to reconsider its decision and reinstate the Understanding Canada Program.

Yours sincerely,



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President
Central European Association
for Canadian Studies