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**Australian Parliamentary Delegation
to Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina**

SPEECH

Monday, 1 December 2008

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Questioner
Speaker Georganas, Steve, MP

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Mr GEORGANAS (Hindmarsh) (9.14 pm)—I too rise to speak on the report of the Australian Parliamentary Delegation to Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. I would like to add to the remarks of my colleague opposite, the member for Berowra, and say how privileged I was to be part of this delegation. It was my very first official delegation representing the Parliament of Australia. The delegation visited Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina from 29 September to 8 October 2008. The visit provided an opportunity for the Australian parliament to renew and develop contacts with the Croatian parliament. We also met with the Croatian President, the Prime Minister of Croatia and many local Croatian authorities. We travelled throughout the country and we gained a good understanding of Croatia's priorities—where they are, where they want to be. Other features of the delegation's work in Croatia included a meeting with the United Nations agencies in Zagreb. We also met with the European Commission, the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe and representatives in Zagreb, as well as making visits to Vukovar, Split and Dubrovnik.

The delegation visited Bosnia and Herzegovina from 5 October to 8 October 2008. As the member for Berowra said, it was the very first official parliamentary delegation to visit Bosnia. The delegation established contact at an official level and quickly came to appreciate the very complex culture and economic situation faced by Bosnia and Herzegovina. The delegation has commenced a relationship that may realise successful bilateral exchanges in times to come. We met many interesting people—officials and politicians—and all of these people expressed how they had gone through a terrible situation in the early nineties but how they have left all that behind and are trying to make their lives far more fruitful to ensure that they can get on with their lives peacefully in a unified way. One of their aspirations is to join the EU, so we heard all about the EU and what they are trying to achieve. Certain criteria have been set up for them to achieve and they are working very hard towards achieving those goals.

The delegation expresses its sincere thanks to those involved in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina for making the visit such a beneficial and memorable one. The delegation recorded its appreciation in the report to its Croatian hosts and the parliament of Bosnia and Herzegovina and related bodies for the hospitality and the courtesy extended to us during our visit. I also join the member for Berowra in thanking my fellow members of the delegation: the leader, the Hon. John Hogg, and the deputy leader, the Hon. Philip Ruddock, who both did a sterling job in representing the delegation and the Australian parliament. Also with us on the delegation were Senator Steve Fielding, Senator Mark Furner, Senator Annette Hurley and Senator Barnaby Joyce and their spouses.

I would also like to take the opportunity to thank the secretary to the delegation, Mr Christopher Reid, who did an outstanding job, and the adviser to the President of the Senate, Ms Julia Clifford, for their cooperation and support and their preparation and hard work during the trip, which ensured that everything went smoothly. I would also like to record my thanks to the Parliamentary Relations Office, in particular, to Andrew Templeton for his administrative assistance prior to our departure from Australia and, as was mentioned earlier, to HRG travel staff for assisting with the travel itineraries. We had excellent support. It was provided in an excellent manner throughout the delegation's visit. The Australian Ambassador to Croatia, Tracey Reid, was fantastic and so was the Australian Ambassador to Austria, who ensured that our stay in the countries of Bosnia and Croatia went smoothly.

It was very unfortunate that Britt Lapthorne disappeared. The tragedy had taken place before we got there, but we did meet with her parents and with Croatian authorities to discuss the issue. It was a very sad occurrence. Unlike other members, I was unable to go to the memorial but, certainly, if I had been in Melbourne, I would have attended. I would like to thank all those involved. (*Time expired*)