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**QUÉBEC'S EXPERIENCES IN GLOBAL RELATIONS**

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The organizers of this conference on Foreign Relations of Constituent Units of Federations have asked me to give a paper on Québec's experience in global relations. I would like to congratulate the organizers on the theme they have chosen for this year's conference, which is particularly relevant and important, especially for Québec, given the recent Summit of the Americas.

Allow me before beginning to point out that the official expression used in this conference, "constituent units", or better still, federated States or members of federations, is preferable by far, from Québec's point of view, to "subnational governments", also used in the conference program, which implies an ambiguous view of nationhood.

I would like to begin with a brief history of Québec's international relations and then go on to sketch an outline of the 2001-2004 strategic plan the ministère des Relations internationales has just made public. This will give you a general idea of Québec government policy and action in international relations. I will conclude with a few personal reflections based on my own experience as a "practitioner" in international relations.

### **Brief history of Québec's international relations**

Before describing Québec's structured relations with the outside world, which began in the 1960s, I would like to point out that, already in the 19th century, at the very beginning of the federal regime, the Québec government, by virtue of its general powers, took steps to be represented abroad and to send experts on technical missions. The Executive Branch issued decrees or Orders-in-Council to this end. Thus, in 1872, immigration officers were appointed in Ireland, England and Scotland, and in 1875, following a federal-provincial agreement that abolished the provincial immigration agencies, Québec's officer in London joined the federal agency in that city. When the agreement came to an end in 1880, Québec did not renew it but continued over the next few years to maintain an immigration officer of its own in London. In 1882, the Québec government named its first agent-general abroad, Mr. Hector Fabre, who took up office in Paris. Mr. Fabre was a Canadian senator and a well-known businessman who was very active in Franco-Canadian financial circles. He later became the federal government's representative as well, with the title of commissioner, reporting to the High Commissioner in London. Needless to say, at the time, the imperial British government was responsible for Canadian diplomatic interests. Later, in the early 20th century, agents-general were appointed by Quebec in London and in Belgium. In the early 1930s, these offices were shut down as a result of the economic crisis. The beginning of the Second World War, however, brought about a renewal of interest in international relations, particularly trade relations, on the part of the Québec government. An agent-general was appointed in New York City in 1943, under the responsibility of the Minister of Industry and Commerce.

Québec's international relations really took off during the 1960s, coinciding of course, and not just by chance, with the Quiet Revolution, which brought about the rapid modernization of Québec society and Québec's economy. The Lesage government opened general delegations in Paris and London in 1961 and, in 1967, a law was passed creating the Department of Intergovernmental Affairs, the precursor of our present

ministère des Relations internationales, in order to coordinate the activities of Québec's government departments abroad around a coherent policy. In addition to trade relations, economic ties and tourism, the government began intensively developing intergovernmental cooperation abroad, mainly with a view to supporting its ambitious reform in education and creating a Department of Cultural Affairs. It was at this time that Québec entered into its first agreements with the French government, which enabled it, among other things, to set up its new system of college-level education based on Cegeps. With the adoption of the law passed in 1967, Québec's National Assembly enshrined the legal foundations and the legitimacy of the initiatives that continue to underlie Québec action abroad today, mainly by virtue of what is known as the Gérin-Lajoie doctrine, named after the Minister of Education of the time, and which I will describe at greater length further on.

As of that period, Québec's international relations developed both geographically and sectorally. At times, they developed more slowly because of budget cutbacks forced upon Québec by the Canadian or international economy, but, under every government since the 1960s, Québec's will to maintain and develop direct international relations remained strong. With an annual budget of about \$105 million, 540 employees at home and abroad and a network consisting of six general delegations, five delegations, six offices and other types of representation abroad, the Québec government, through its department of international relations, devotes considerable resources to foreign affairs. There is no comparison with the federal budget, of course, but I think I can safely say that Québec devotes greater and more varied resources more consistently to international relations than any other Canadian province.

### **The 2001-2004 Strategic Plan**

In order to broach more directly the theme of this paper on Québec's experience in global relations, allow me to describe the main thrusts of the strategic plan the Department has just made public. (I have brought a few copies of a summary of the plan and of the department's organization chart with me, by the way, and an English version will soon be

available, as well as a Spanish one. You can also consult the plan on the Department's Website at <http://www.mri.gouv.qc.ca>).

The 2001-2004 Strategic Plan fulfils the requirements of the National Assembly's *Public Administration Act*, which states that fundamental documents on the basic policies of government organizations will be public. It is part of a modernization process being carried out by the Québec public administration. This reform is designed to set up accountability mechanisms and orient government toward results-based management. It is important to point out that this is the first strategic plan to be made public by the Department. The Ministry published two other international policy statements in the past, one in 1985 and one in 1991. But these documents were different in nature and did not serve the same purpose. For the Department, the strategic planning undertaken here is a completely new and fundamentally developmental initiative.

As I have said previously, the Québec government celebrates in 2001 40 years of organized international activity. The 2001-2004 strategic plan reflects the fact that these years of sustained endeavour have made Québec a modest but credible and recognized actor on the international stage. It expresses a structured policy that is the fruit of the experience and expertise accumulated over four decades in international affairs. The strategic plan is the road map the Department will follow over the next three years.

Globalization has become a household word. It has perhaps even become somewhat of a cliché, inserted into every conversation. It nevertheless refers to a real and unavoidable phenomenon, whose impact, both on Québec's international policy and on the everyday life of the people of Québec, has not yet been fully measured. The strategic plan takes into account the realities of globalization. It endeavours to adapt the international activity of the Québec government to these realities, emphasizing the favourable circumstances created by the current international context as well as identifying the constraints and difficulties that will be encountered. Its primary goal is, of course, to define the role and responsibilities of the Department, but it is also based on a careful and on-going reading of Québec's international environment.

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The Department's role has undergone an in-depth transformation over the past 25 years, and the need to make the most of the means and resources it has at its disposal to carry out its mandate abroad has led it to recalibrate its action around four basic functions that define all its activities. These are the political function, the public affairs function, the integrative function and the management function

The first and most important of these functions is the *political function*, or, in a word, responsibility for the government's relations with foreign governments and international organizations..

A special effort will be made to strengthen Québec's relations with those countries and international organizations it considers priorities. The main goal is to ensure access to foreign entities and international organizations whose action impacts on Québec society, so that Québec's interests are taken into account in both bilateral and multilateral deliberations.

Plans for the integration of the Americas and the eventual creation of the FTAA (or ZLEA in French) are subjects of major importance for Québec. Quebec has been since the last war a strong advocate of Canadian relations with Latin America. It is essential that Québec make an original contribution, while maintaining extremely close ties with Latin America (where it has offices in Mexico and Argentina) and the Caribbean countries. There are now five hundred Quebec companies active in Latin America and the government wants to triple this number in ten years. Accent will also be put on the teaching of a third language (Spanish) in schools and an agency has been set up to encourage youth exchanges with that region.

However, Québec's main efforts in the Americas will be directed toward the United States. During ten years of free trade, Québec's exports to the U.S. have tripled while its exports to the provinces and territories of Canada have dropped by 5%. The United States

has thus taken Canada's place as Québec's main trading partner. At the same time, Québec has become the United States' seventh biggest trading partner.

The United States is the obvious and unavoidable partner for Québec. Québec must first endeavour to build strong ties with a number of American States, either bilaterally or within the framework of forums open to several states, like the Conference of New England Governors and Eastern Premiers, the Council of Great Lakes Governors. Québec is also the first non American member of the Council of State Governments.

It is also essential that Québec strengthen its image in the United States, particularly through energetic action on the part of its US network, which has been strengthened recently by the addition of new delegations in Boston, Chicago and Los Angeles, and an office in Miami. Moreover, since international affairs are of particular interest to university circles, the Québec government has decided to create a research chair on Québec studies in the United States and a research chair on the United States in Québec. It is also working on a major campaign to promote Québec and increase its visibility, to be launched in New York City in the fall of 2001.

The United States has numerous interests to promote in its relations with its neighbours to the north. Québec must live with this reality and adapt its action in consequence. It must take into account the place Washington accords it in defining its interests, for decisions that affect Québec may be taken at any time, for instance the soft wood lumber dispute. This means the Department must work constantly to promote its interests in Washington. One of the Department's objectives in the years to come will be to extend and enhance Québec's action in the United States.

Europe, along with the Americas, is the continent toward which Québec most naturally directs sustained action. Ties of all sorts bind Québec tightly to Europe and these ties have contributed, since the beginning, to the specific nature of Québec society in North America. Québec's future development will depend in part on the contribution and nature of its economic, cultural, social and political relations with Europe.

With the growing integration of European countries, the European Union is becoming a real world power. From the point of view of international relations, it must be admitted that a bilateral framework is no longer sufficient for developing relations with the countries of Europe. In fact, more and more national responsibilities are being delegated to Brussels, which means that Québec must ensure that it has access to European institutions. Bilateral relations with the institutions of the EU must be developed.

From Québec's perspective, France holds for obvious reasons a special status among the countries of Europe. The development of Québec's international policy may be attributed in large part to its direct link with France. The modern rebirth of Franco-Québec political relations has led to the creation, at almost every level, of strong bonds. Québec and France continue to share the same values of solidarity and plurality. Québec and France both recognize that they each have a strategic role to play among French-speaking communities around the world.

The quality of the Franco-Québec relationship opens the door to subjects of interest to many other countries. For instance, in 1998, the Groupe Franco-québécois sur la diversité culturelle was created, whose work has led to the development of action involving a large number of governments in Europe, among the world's French-speaking nations, and in Latin America. Franco-Québec relations must continue to develop around such issues.

Needless to say, Québec's ties with the nations of Europe are not limited to France. The United Kingdom, Belgium, Germany, Italy and Spain are all partners that, for a number of reasons, are included in our priorities.

But our efforts cannot be based solely on geographic or bilateral considerations. Multilateral concerns play a growing role in international relations between States.

Although Québec is not sovereign in international law and therefore not a member of the major international governmental organizations, it subscribes to international obligations

and standards when its interests and its fields of jurisdiction are involved. It also takes a stand on statements and action plans adopted, particularly at important international conferences. Indeed, Québec must act on commitments made in these areas, since prescriptive international activity is growing and implies increasingly specific obligations. Whether in the field of health, the environment, labour, human rights or any other field, international commitments must be reflected in the laws, policies and programs of the Québec government. Fully shouldering its responsibilities, the Québec government must also report to international organizations on the action it has taken with regard to commitments made. By agreeing to be bound by international instruments, Québec is also agreeing to define its future action.

This is why the government must ensure in particular with the federal government its presence at all stages of the negotiation and implementation of international agreements touching on areas that are of its responsibility . It is a matter of maintaining its credibility in the sectors under its jurisdiction, whether that jurisdiction be exclusive or shared. From this point of view, the strategic plan is designed to ensure that Québec's interests are taken into consideration in particular by the federal government in all international forums where matters under Québec's responsibility are discussed, and that Québec speak for itself when the government deems this necessary.

It is thanks to one to these international forums, the Organisation internationale de la Francophonie (OIF), that Québec has managed to affirm its international personality on the multilateral scene, as "participating government". The strategic plan therefore reasserts the government's commitment to La Francophonie. Québec will contribute to the success of the OIF by emphasizing the following points: protection and development of the French language, the right of cultures to exist and develop, aid to developing countries in order to master modern technology and the affirmation of democratic principles.

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The second function of the ministère des Relations internationales is the *public affairs function*. This function consists in promoting an accurate perception of Québec abroad

and sensitizing Québec public opinion to the bases and challenges of Québec's action abroad.

This is the first time that the Department has adopted an explicit and structured mission in public affairs. It has always been aware, of course, of the importance of promoting Québec's image abroad. In the past, however, all its activities in this area were based on traditional communications operations. Now, the Department's public affairs function will be rooted not only in a well-thought-out strategy, but also in a departmental unit, the Direction générale des Affaires publiques, created for that purpose in 1999.

The favourable image Québec projects abroad on the economic and cultural scene serves to actively promote its international interests. The dynamic character of our entrepreneurs and business people, and the extraordinary success of our artists, is eloquent proof of this fact. Conversely, a negative or erroneous image of Québec society projected abroad can do great harm and work against Québec's interests. Energetic action is called for.

This is why the MRI has created a number of tools, such as *Quebecnews.com* and *Quebechoy.com*. The international press operates overwhelmingly in English. It is essential that the international press and its representatives in Québec be able to access Québec's French-language press. These two Internet sites therefore provide English and Spanish translations of articles gleaned from the Québec press. The editorial policy is very strict: the articles must reflect Québec's French-language press in all its diversity.

Recently, the Department has also begun acquiring basic tools to help it carry out its public affairs action plans, including traditional resources such as publications that cover life in Québec. In addition, there is a program to welcome visiting journalists and a new International Distinguished Visitors Program. Moreover, Québec's representatives abroad have very specific tasks to carry out among target groups.

To the same end, the Department pays special attention to the work of the Association internationale des études québécoises (AIEQ), created in 1997. This association brings

together several hundred researchers specializing in Québec studies around the world. It has become a high-quality intermediary contributing to a better understanding of Québec among groups whose influence extends far beyond the academic world. The Department is also implementing a program in the United States called "Québec Studies", with the objective of promoting courses and research on Québec.

The public affairs function is not limited to information abroad. It is also concerned with information at home. The Department is responsible for informing Quebecers of government action abroad. The government's international policies are not known enough and the MRI must remedy this situation. For some years now, the Department has supported the main research centres operating in Québec whose work focuses on international issues. In this way, it hopes to promote a better understanding of the territories and institutions in which Québec is particularly interested. The Department also plans to develop Internet sites that will enable Quebecers wishing to learn more about Québec's international policy to easily find answers to their questions.

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The third function of the Ministry of International Relations involves the coordination of international action in all government departments and organizations. The strategic plan refers to this role as the Department's *integrative function*.

Today more than ever, almost all the government's departments and organizations engage in international activities. Some departments have mandates that lead them to draw up sustained plans of action aimed at the outside world. Among the main departments active in the international fields, there are in particular the ministries concerned with trade, industry, tourism promotion, culture, immigration as well as crown corporations such as Investment-Québec, which has a European office in Paris. Together, the responsibilities of all these bodies abroad generate a government presence on many fronts in a wide variety of sectors. It is up to the Ministry of International Relations to see that Québec acts in a coherent manner on the international stage and that its government partners work closely together.

The coordination for which the Department is responsible within Québec takes on a whole other dimension in Québec's network abroad. Heads of posts are responsible for the integration on site of all the government's international activities. Abroad, public servants appointed by sectoral departments report to the head of post, who is responsible for ensuring that Québec's action in general on his territory is coherent.

As for the rest, Québec's international activity is not restricted to government action. Québec's universities, cities, regions and NGOs are also very active abroad. In this area, the MRI is there to provide inspiration, encouragement, stimulation and assistance for any international action originating in Québec.

The Department's integrative function goes beyond coordination, however. The MRI also provides sectoral departments and organizations with expertise, resources and tools enabling them to successfully extend their mandate beyond Québec's borders. Not content to simply coordinate, the Department is ready to actively support its partners, including the international activities of the parliamentarians of the National Assembly. .

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The Department's fourth role is one of *management*. This function is of lesser interest here. Suffice it to say that human resources are the main focus of this function. A competent and motivated staff is the first imperative for meeting the many challenges facing the Department. Developing the competence of its employees and improving their working conditions is therefore a priority for the MRI. The Department intends to give its human resources their full value by putting particular emphasis on professional development and employee mobility. Most of the MRI's training programs are also open to the employees of other government departments.

As well, the Department is applying quantified indicators for the first time. Quantifying the results of actions taken by the Ministry is not an easy task. The difficulty resides in trying to measure results in a field as nuanced as that of international relations. Political relations between governments are often intangible to say the least and trying to quantify

them is rather difficult. Developing reliable tools for measuring these relations is a real challenge.

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While providing a detailed analysis of the role and functions of Québec's Ministry of International Relations, the strategic plan remains within the continuum of Québec's international action. This action is based on the principle according to which Québec must accept responsibility on the international stage for those areas that fall within its jurisdiction under the Constitution. This principle, which I have already referred to as the Gérin-Lajoie doctrine, is the cornerstone on which Québec's international activities have rested ever since the Quiet Revolution. None of the governments that have succeeded one another in Québec since the 1960s have questioned it. All have asserted the need for Québec to develop a strong international policy, well rooted in the application of this principle, while taking naturally into account the fundamental options of Canada's foreign policy and contributing to the realization of these options, for instance in participating in Canadian economic missions abroad or organizing its own missions.

In addition to providing a strong reaffirmation of the Gérin-Lajoie doctrine, the strategic plan is designed to bring Québec's international policy into line with the demands of globalization. The strategic plan is an expression of the MRI's reading of this new game: it describes the role that Québec could play and, in particular, states the prime objectives and the strategies that will enable the government to effectively present the interests of Québec society to the world's players. In summary, It expounds an informed, modern and innovative policy on international relations that meets not only the needs of modern Québec but also the requirements of a changing world.

## **Conclusion**

As I mentioned at the beginning of my paper, I would like to conclude on a more personal note based on my experience both at head office and abroad. During my years of service with the Québec government, and during my early years with the federal

government as well, I too often felt the mistrust aroused by Québec's desire to act abroad. There may well be failings on both sides, but I believe that the problem is caused in large part by the federal government's suspicion of Québec involvement in international affairs, when it should rather be rejoicing that a province has engaged and continues to engage in such activities, activities which, for Québec, arise primarily from its belief that it has specific responsibilities which must be extended beyond its borders if it is to develop in certain sectors. Québec nevertheless established ties and signed agreements, many hundreds, not only with federated states but also with federal and unitary states. But its international activities have too often been carried out in a climate of tension and in spite of negative or restrictive action by the Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs. Too often, either the provinces are consulted as a matter of principle but their comments are not taken into account, or, even when personal relations are good, ambassadors ignore Québec's representatives abroad or do their utmost to underplay their importance. And sometimes, even when Québec is not asking for special privileges, it is rebuffed because it is the only province to take an active interest in certain files. Of course, the federal government will argue that the current Québec government is trying to push major constitutional change, but, in fact, these difficulties have always existed, in varying degrees, for every Québec government since the 1960s.

In 1984, when the government changed in Ottawa, a less rigid vision prevailed and we were able to sign the 1985 agreement on Québec's participation in the Francophone Summit of Heads of State and Government on a mutually acceptable basis of representation. Federal-provincial consultations during the negotiations for the Free Trade Agreement with the U.S. and NAFTA were also successful. Despite certain *ad hoc* arrangements, particularly with respect to cultural diversity, Ottawa's attitude since 1995 has hardened once again. Take for example the Summit of the Americas, when both the party in power in Québec and the official opposition, the Liberal Party, voiced their disappointment in Ottawa's failure to consult. Yet Québec had suggested in 1999 that the two levels of government agree on the terms of Québec's presence and right to speak in international forums dealing with areas in which Québec has jurisdiction.

The Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs has always maintained that Ottawa alone can represent Canadian governments abroad to justify its refusal. The international system has undergone tremendous changes with the appearance of new actors, like the regions, the cities, the NGO, the multinationals and so on. So I think that it is time to review this rule of indivisibility in foreign relations, especially since other federations have adopted a position that differs from Ottawa's, even giving their member States a constitutional right to act for themselves on the international stage in their areas of jurisdiction. This is the case, in particular, in Belgium, where the Flemish and French communities and regions have had their areas of jurisdiction at home extended to the international arena, with recognition of the federal State's responsibilities for "hard core" foreign policy. Of course, the experience of other countries cannot necessarily be transposed to ours, but it seems to me that a broader vision and concerted action, even within the existing constitutional framework, would not harm the vitality of Canada's foreign relations. On the contrary. It could form part of the solution rather than the problem.

Thank you.