

QUEBECERS

OUR WAY OF BEING CANADIAN

Policy on Québec Affirmation
and Canadian Relations

SUMMARY DOCUMENT

QUEBECERS

OUR WAY OF BEING CANADIAN

Policy on Québec Affirmation
and Canadian Relations

SUMMARY DOCUMENT

This publication was produced
by the Secrétariat aux affaires intergouvernementales canadiennes
in collaboration with the Direction des communications.

Information on the Secrétariat aux affaires
intergouvernementales canadiennes may be obtained
by consulting its website: www.saic.gouv.qc.ca.

Direction des communications
Ministère du Conseil exécutif
1^{er} étage, secteur 400
875, Grande Allée Est
Québec (Québec) G1R 4Y8

Telephone: 418 643-2001
Fax: 418 643-3006
Website: www.mce.gouv.qc.ca

Legal deposit – June 2017
Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec

ISBN 978-2-550-77875-2 (print version)
ISBN 978-2-550-77876-9 (electronic version)

All rights reserved for all countries.
© Gouvernement du Québec – 2017

A WORD FROM THE PREMIER



We are the sum of everything we have received from our predecessors: the only predominantly French-speaking state in America, our culture and a civil-law based tradition, but also the talents and strengths of all the people who have chosen to settle in Québec. Our nation is, first and foremost, French-speaking, but it is also Nordic, maritime and creative. It has been enriched by the diversity and historic contribution of the First Nations and the Inuit, and by English-speaking Quebecers.

Quebecers took part in the building of Canada. We have helped shape the country through our values, our resilience, our accents and our worldview. This federation, although still perfectible, has made possible a cohabitation based on solidarity, cooperation and respect for diversity. Canada is part of our inheritance.

Today, a large majority of Quebecers believe that Québec progresses when it is united instead of divided; when it participates instead of withdrawing; and above all, when it builds bridges instead of walls between the partners in the Federation.

Building stronger bridges with our partners, especially the Aboriginal peoples, affirming our national character and its complete expression on the Canadian scene, stating our vision of a 21st century Canada that recognizes both individual and collective identities—these are the objectives of this *Policy on Québec Affirmation and Canadian Relations*.

Our heritage, distinctiveness within the Americas and diversity are a source of pride. We do not need to choose between an allegiance to Québec and a sense of belonging to Canada, since they both define who we are. To affirm one identity or belonging, there is no need to erase, diminish or reject another—in fact, it must be upheld with confidence, openness and optimism.

In this regard, novelist Amin Maalouf wrote that “Each of us should be encouraged to accept his own diversity, to see his identity as the sum of all his various affiliations [...].”

The 150th anniversary of the Federation provides an opportunity for all of us, Canadians of all backgrounds, to improve our understanding, knowledge, and acknowledgement of each other. As Quebecers, we can take our rightful place, in particular as one of the founding peoples of this country, while bringing in our differences, not to divide, but to help bring us closer together, because it enriches all of us.

We are Quebecers, and this is our way of being Canadian.

Philippe Couillard
Premier of Québec

A WORD FROM THE MINISTER



In the words of Robert Bourassa, which remain just as meaningful today, Québec is free to make its own choices and able to shape its own destiny and development. Québec has all the characteristics of, and recognizes itself as, a nation. It is a singular state within Canada. It has, over the last 150 years, experienced significant economic and social progress.

Québec, and Canada, are aware that their diversity gives them a substantial advantage. However, beyond the question of individual diversity, Canada must be able to name the national and collective identities that have always been part of its makeup.

Alliance to Québec and a sense of belonging to Canada are the foundations for the identity expressed by a large majority of Quebecers. Recognition for Québec's difference as a nation recalls the founding idea of our country, and brings us closer together rather than dividing us.

Promoting a form of federalism that is open to a plurality of ways of belonging increases, rather than dilutes, our strengths. It makes diversity, in all its forms, an advantage. It offers a way to accept the reality of Québec, to renew our relationship with the Aboriginal peoples, and to offer Canada to the world as a model of respectful collaboration.

The process we propose has several components.

First, we must affirm our identity as Quebecers. Québec's specificity is based on French as a common language, on a nation-to-nation relationship with the Aboriginal peoples, on the long-standing and dynamic presence of an English-speaking community that has contributed to Québec's advancement and possesses recognized rights, and on diversity, as immigrant communities have become part of Québec's historical narrative through interculturalism.

Next, we must reiterate our sense of belonging to Canada and ensure our continuing presence on the Canadian stage. We must make our voice heard, to ensure that we are better understood.

Québec's desire to play a more dynamic role in Canada will become apparent, first, in Québec government actions. The Government of Québec intends to ensure a stronger presence on the Canadian stage by using the structural and substantive means at its disposal. We will take our seat at every table, and

seek new tables where we can participate. We will also introduce new tools to better fill the space of Canadian relations.

We hope that Quebecers, and other Canadians, will begin to realize the strength of the links forged since the birth of the Canadian Federation, and that connections between individual citizens will multiply. The ties binding Quebecers to other Canadians are not just governmental or institutional—they also connect individuals and civil society, forming a foundation for a genuine dialogue about the future of our country.

In addition, we clearly announce our goal of breaking down the taboo surrounding discussions about our future relations within Canada. We must resume the discussion about the future of the Federation, including its constitutional aspects. In contrast to past attempts, we want to discuss, exchange and seek greater mutual understanding before considering any constitutional talks. Although it is clear that a constitutional guarantee in certain areas is a must, experience has shown that cooperation does not need to be based solely on constitutional negotiations.

Last, we want to agree on actual ways to strengthen our relationship. These include asymmetry, which must be seen in its true meaning as a way to encourage participation rather than to withdraw from the debate. By ensuring that Québec's specific characteristics are respected, differential treatment becomes a way to ensure equal treatment for all the provinces. Cooperation will encourage flexibility, not the imposition of a single model.

Québec calls on all citizens and federative partners to begin a new dialogue. We have received, as our inheritance, a country that is viewed with envy by the entire world, and that provided a fertile ground for our nation. The progress that we have made together, in Québec and in Canada, can only encourage us to define common goals. After 150 years within Canada, Quebecers know that for their children's future, hope resides in our shared willingness to better understand each other in order to better know and better acknowledge one another.

We are Quebecers, and this is our way of being Canadian.

Jean-Marc Fournier
Minister responsible for Canadian Relations
and the Canadian Francophonie

TABLE OF CONTENTS

FOREWORD	1
1. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND	3
A MEETING OF PEOPLES	3
EVOLUTION OF FEDERATIVE AND IDENTITY-BASED RELATIONSHIPS	3
NEW CONSIDERATION FOR THE PARTIES ABSENT IN 1867	4
CONSTITUTIONAL DEBATES, 1960 TO 1995	6
2. FROM 1995 TO THE PRESENT	9
POLITICAL AND LEGAL DEVELOPMENTS	9
SHIFTS IN IDENTITY AND CANADIAN RELATIONS	11
3. QUÉBEC'S VISION: A FORM OF FEDERALISM THAT RECOGNIZES COLLECTIVE DIVERSITY	13
RECOGNITION OF THE QUÉBEC NATION	14
RESPECT FOR QUÉBEC'S AREAS OF JURISDICTION	15
AUTONOMY	15
FLEXIBILITY AND ASYMMETRY	15
COOPERATION AND ADMINISTRATIVE AGREEMENTS	16
SHARED INSTITUTIONS	16
4. QUÉBEC AFFIRMATION AND PROACTIVE CANADIAN RELATIONS	17
AFFIRMATION STATEMENT	17
THE GOVERNMENT AFFIRMATION PROCESS	20
CONNECTIONS BETWEEN CITIZENS	23
CONCLUSION	25

FOREWORD

Since 1867, Québec has participated in the Canadian political project while affirming its unique identity. On the occasion of the 150th anniversary of the Federation, the government is presenting this *Policy on Québec Affirmation and Canadian Relations*, which defines and asserts Québec's plural and inclusive national identity. It outlines our vision of Québec within Canada and explains how it will be implemented.

This text is a summary of the full document, which readers can consult for a more detailed description of the Policy. It presents a historical overview that is not exhaustive but is designed to highlight, in a concise form, the main historical events that explain Québec's nationhood and the reality of its relations with Canada as a whole. The full document includes references to the sources on which it is based.

1. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

A MEETING OF PEOPLES

Québec and its institutions have roots that go deep into the history of North America, marked by the age-old presence of the Aboriginal peoples and by French and British colonization. The foundations for federalism and the cohabitation of Canada's peoples were laid well before the Federation itself emerged 150 years ago.

EVOLUTION OF FEDERATIVE AND IDENTITY-BASED RELATIONSHIPS

Ongoing discussions between 1864 and 1867 resulted in a federative compromise that gave Québec the political and legal autonomy it needed to safeguard its language, civil-law tradition and religion. Canada was one of the first modern states, if not the first, to devise a form of federalism that had, as one of its primary goals, the accommodation of different national, cultural and linguistic identities, rather than just territorial identities.

During the first half-century of the Federation, the supporters of a centralized model were unable to implement their vision. Québec and the other provinces, led by Ontario, lobbied effectively to ensure that their exclusive powers were respected.

In later years, the effects of the Great Depression of the 1930s led to calls for more vigorous intervention by the federal state in the economy. However, such centralized approach could not be reconciled with the defence of provincial autonomy which relies, among other things, on the idea of a compact. In other parts of Canada, several attempts were made to present Canada not as the result of a compact between free and autonomous provinces, but as a mere creation of the imperial Parliament.

In Québec, the idea that Canada resulted from a federative compromise designed, in particular, to preserve the specificity of the Québec nation, was still current, while the rest of Canada gradually moved in another direction. These competing visions of what Canada ought to be contributed, to a large degree, to the growing gap between Québec and the rest of Canada.

During the Quiet Revolution, the simultaneous development of the Québec and Canadian states led to significant growth in the field of intergovernmental relations and to increasing overlaps in the areas of jurisdiction of each order of government.

Given this situation, Québec used the idea of asymmetry to develop a state that would be able to meet its aspirations. The Government of Québec obtained the right to opt out of certain federal programs, while French-speaking Quebecers took on an increasingly important role in the economy. On the international stage, Québec based the legitimacy of its actions on the Gérin-Lajoie doctrine. In short, Québec was able to develop and achieve a considerable degree of autonomy and prosperity within a flexible federal system.

The growth of the Québec state occurred alongside a far-reaching redefinition of Québec's identity, as French Canadians became Quebecers. Québec's national identity, with its specificity and historical anchor, rich of its diversity, is resolutely affirming itself in Canada and North America.

NEW CONSIDERATION FOR THE PARTIES ABSENT IN 1867

The Aboriginal Peoples

The years leading up to the Federation mark the start of a dark period in Aboriginal history. The Aboriginal peoples were no longer considered to be strategic allies after the end of the colonial wars and the decline in the fur trade—instead they were treated as a population that, deprived of any autonomy, needed to be supervised.

The two centuries of assimilation that followed the *Royal Proclamation* of 1763 are seen in a new light today, and their underlying imperialism, colonialism and paternalism are condemned. This major shift in perspective began in the 1970s in the courts, when they ruled on the existence of Aboriginal rights.

Through these developments, Canada has seen an unprecedented political and social resurgence in its Aboriginal peoples. The Aboriginal question is increasingly seen as a key item on the agenda.

The Canadian Francophonie

In 1867, French-speaking Canadians living outside Québec did not receive the guarantees they needed to ensure their growth as a community and, in practical terms, were abandoned to their fate as a minority. They had no representatives at the negotiations leading up to the *Constitution Act, 1867* and, in the early decades of the 20th century, Francophone communities, especially in Ontario and Western Canada, were under strong pressure to assimilate.

In 1969, French, the minority language in Canada, was given official status when the federal parliament passed the *Official Languages Act*. After a century marked by numerous infringements of French-language rights, a new trend slowly began to emerge.

Today, bilingualism is a key component of Canada's identity. The provincial and territorial governments, as well as the federal government, recognize and affirm the Francophonie as an integral part of Canadian identity. Constitutional recognition for this linguistic duality has provided leverage for the growth of services in French. Therefore, despite a relative decline in the use of French in Canada, the future today is brighter than before.

CONSTITUTIONAL DEBATES, 1960 TO 1995

The decades from 1960 to 1990 saw numerous constitutional events. The federal government wanted to introduce a procedure to allow constitutional amendments to be made in Canada, ensuring the country's emancipation from the United Kingdom, while Québec demanded, unsuccessfully, a redefinition of the division of powers and recognition for its nationhood in the Constitution. In the spring of 1980, the government led by René Lévesque sought to obtain a mandate to negotiate a new form of sovereignty-association between Québec and Canada; it was rejected by 60% of the electorate in the referendum held on May 20, 1980.

Later on, the federal government once again attempted to reach an agreement with the provinces, before deciding to repatriate the Constitution unilaterally. Eight provinces were strongly opposed to this approach and some, including Québec, brought the matter before the courts. In September 1981, the Supreme Court of Canada ruled that the federal government's plan to unilaterally patriate the Constitution, although legally valid, could not be achieved on the basis of constitutional conventions. The parties were forced to resume their negotiations. Following an agreement in November 1981 between the Government of Canada and the governments of nine provinces, a new *Constitution Act* came into force on April 17, 1982, without Québec's assent. This event created a historic rift between Québec and Canada, and the growing gap between the two conceptions of federalism was thrown into stark relief.

On May 9, 1986, Québec's Minister of Canadian Intergovernmental Affairs, Gil Rémillard, revealed the conditions on which Québec would adhere to the *Constitution Act, 1982*. On April 30, 1987, an agreement in principle was signed by the federal prime minister and the provincial premiers. Despite this unanimous agreement, two provincial legislative assemblies, in Manitoba and Newfoundland, were unable to ratify the proposal within the deadline.

In the spring of 1991, the report by the Bélanger-Campeau Commission defined two possible ways forward for Québec: renewed federalism or sovereignty. At the same time, the Beaudoin-Dobbie Committee made a series of recommendations that went on to form the basis for the Charlottetown Accord, including recognition for Québec as a distinct society, while highlighting the importance of French-speaking minorities throughout Canada and of the English-speaking minority in Québec, an elected Senate, and a stronger Canadian economic union. The Charlottetown Accord was submitted for approval in a referendum held on October 26, 1992, and rejected by 57% of the electorate in Québec and 54% in the rest of Canada.

On September 7, 1995, Québec Premier Jacques Parizeau tabled Bill 1, *An Act respecting the future of Québec*, in the National Assembly. It proposed that Québec should democratically become a sovereign country and authorized the National Assembly to proclaim Québec's sovereignty. On October 30, 1995, electors in Québec were asked to vote, in a referendum, on the following question: "Do you agree that Québec should become sovereign after having made a formal offer to Canada for a new economic and political partnership within the scope of the bill respecting the future of Québec and of the agreement signed on June 12, 1995?". In the final result, 50.58% of the electorate answered "No" and 49.42% "Yes".

Today, more than twenty-five years have elapsed since the failure of the Meech Lake Accord, and Québec has still not formally agreed to the constitutional order established in 1982. The five conditions set out in the Accord as the prior conditions for Québec's adhesion were directly related to the original vision for the federative compromise and were intended to reintroduce, into the *Constitution Act, 1982*, the spirit of the Federation of 1867. They offer a clear illustration of the constitutional guarantees required to ensure suitable recognition for the Québec nation.

2. FROM 1995 TO THE PRESENT

POLITICAL AND LEGAL DEVELOPMENTS

Despite the constitutional *status quo*, over the last twenty years some of the principles underlying the Meech Lake Accord have been implemented to varying degrees in case law and in political actions.

- The courts have taken note of Québec's specificity on many different occasions, and the House of Commons has politically recognized the Québec nation.
- The Supreme Court of Canada has confirmed constitutional protection for three judges from Québec at the country's highest court. It has also clarified Québec's veto in the area of constitutional amendments.
- The governments of Québec and Canada have signed an innovative and exemplary intergovernmental agreement on immigration, which is extremely important for Quebecers and forms the basis for Québec's model for integration, interculturalism.
- The governments of Québec and Canada have also agreed that Québec can opt out, with reasonable compensation, from some pan-Canadian financial initiatives that would constitute infringements of its areas of jurisdiction. These include the agreement on workforce training and the agreement on parental leave.

However, if constitutional negotiations resume, Québec's basic conditions remain the same.

- Constitutional recognition for the Québec nation will always be of key importance for the Government of Québec.
- Québec's involvement in the appointment of the three Québec judges to the Supreme Court is imperative in a federal system in which the Supreme Court is the final arbiter of federative disputes.
- Québec, because of its nationhood, must have a veto on major constitutional amendments that change the operation of our political system.
- The agreement on immigration must be given constitutional status, as originally intended.
- The "federal spending power" in areas of exclusive provincial jurisdiction must be defined in the Constitution, since it generates tension in the federative relationship.

Until the constitutional dialogue resumes, Québec remains open to the idea of moving forward on each of the above issues separately, within a flexible framework that does not require multilateral constitutional negotiations. With regard, for example, to the "federal spending power" or Québec's involvement in the appointment of Supreme Court judges from Québec, any agreement that allows progress to be made in a manner consistent with Québec's demands will be welcomed, bearing in mind it will constitute a step towards future and necessary constitutional changes.

SHIFTS IN IDENTITY AND CANADIAN RELATIONS

Diversity and Coexistence in Québec

In the area of language, Québec is a predominantly French-speaking society, yet diversified. Statistics Canada's 2011 National Household Survey found that 78.1% of Québec residents reported French as their mother tongue, compared with 7.7% for English and 12.3% for a language other than French or English. In terms of linguistic knowledge, 94.4% of Quebecers reported a knowledge of French and 47.3%, a knowledge of English.

Today, Québec's pluralistic and dynamic identity is enriched by contributions from people of all origins while remaining closely attached to the continuity of its distinct, French-speaking character and to the historic contribution of Aboriginal peoples and Québec's English-speaking community.

It is this dynamics that has enabled the emergence of a unique pluralistic model of integration and coexistence: interculturalism.

The model of interculturalism developed in Québec, based on the principle of reciprocity, aims to strike a balance between openness to diversity and the continuity and vitality of Québec's distinct and French-speaking identity.

Today it is essential that interculturalism, as a form of integration that favours living together, be formally recognized. This is why Québec intends to present an official policy on interculturalism.

A Multiple Sense of Belonging

A vast majority of Quebecers feel a strong attachment to Québec, based on a national identity forged over a period of more than 400 years and that is increasingly recognized elsewhere in Canada. Despite the tearing episodes of the Meech Lake and Charlottetown Accords and of the referendum on sovereignty that followed in 1995, Quebecers also retain an attachment to Canada, and this has in fact increased significantly among young people in recent years. Many people feel both an allegiance to Québec and a sense of belonging to Canada. For a majority of Quebecers, this multiple sense of belonging is not seen as a contradiction but as something to be valued.

Solitudes and Solidarities, Ties that Bind Québec to Canada

The Québec-Canada relationship has often been referred to as the two solitudes. Although this is still true in some areas, the situation today is more nuanced, as the number of common ties that help build a shared identity increases. These ties are especially strong at the economic and intergovernmental levels. In addition, there are many bridges today between Québec and Canada in all spheres of civil society, including the business, union, community and political sectors.

These common ties, and the desire of Quebecers to maintain both their allegiance to Québec and their sense of belonging to Canada, suggest that remaining solitudes will continue to draw closer together. Based on these ties of solidarity, which open up a space for dialogue and mutual recognition, many Quebecers believe that the Federation ought to continue to develop through partnership rather than confrontation.

3. QUÉBEC'S VISION: A FORM OF FEDERALISM THAT RECOGNIZES COLLECTIVE DIVERSITY

Current issues worldwide have led to identity withdrawal and increasing tensions in many countries. Globalization and the dynamics of economic integration are used, among other aspects, to back a growing number of specific demands. Canada has all the necessary attributes to face and deal with the challenges of the 21st century, and Québec can make a positive and significant contribution to the direction it will take in the future.

On several occasions during the last 150 years, the Government of Québec has stated a vision of federalism that makes it possible for it to affirm its national identity and therefore to assume the consequences of its own choices while participating in Canada. This vision is supported by history, and also by contemporary political thought, which sees federalism as the best way to manage the cohabitation of various national communities within a single state. This requires a federation that welcomes all dimensions of diversity, both by respecting individual diversity and recognizing collective diversity.

Québec itself already recognizes collective diversity, and this is reflected in the inclusive vision for the Québec nation. For the Government of Québec, the Québec nation is not just a society that is predominantly French-speaking. The Québec nation includes all the people living in Québec, and in particular Québec's English-speaking community, which has certain specific rights and prerogatives, and eleven recognized Aboriginal nations. It spans a wide range of cultural diversity, nourishing the nation and the shared historical narrative through interculturalism.

The Québec vision of federalism is based on a certain number of principles:

- Recognition of the Québec nation;
- Respect for Québec's areas of jurisdiction;
- Autonomy;
- Flexibility and asymmetry;
- Cooperation and administrative agreements;
- Shared institutions.

RECOGNITION OF THE QUÉBEC NATION

The affirmation of Québec's nationhood appears as the main guiding principle in Québec's political and constitutional history. In the rest of Canada, it is frequently thought that the country is necessarily formed by a single nation and that this is an essential condition for maintaining Canadian unity. This univocal vision of Canada triumphed at the patriation of the Constitution in 1982, increasing the distance between Quebecers and the Canada to which they were and are still attached.

Work is needed to re-establish what Quebecers have called for since 1867: mutual recognition for the nations that make up Canada. This is the vision that led to the foundation of the country and that for many years helped to strengthen, rather than weaken, its unity. It is possible and even advisable for Canada to provide suitable recognition for the Québec nation and the Aboriginal nations without calling into question its unity or its ability to develop.

RESPECT FOR QUÉBEC'S AREAS OF JURISDICTION

As a nation, Québec will always be concerned about the ongoing survival of its language and culture. A viable state, with its own institutions, strengthens the ability of the Québec nation to achieve its full potential, and this is why Québec has always claimed the autonomy needed to maintain its state. Its autonomy is founded on the legislative powers granted to it in the Constitution and on the financial means it needs to exercise those powers.

AUTONOMY

The reality of the Québec nation entails specific responsibilities for the Québec state in areas connected to identity and the areas of jurisdiction assigned by the Constitution. The importance Québec places on the ability to exercise its responsibilities without interference explains why it sometimes demands more freedom to act than its federative partners. This freedom is inherent in the existence of the Québec nation within the Canadian constitutional framework. In no case is Québec demanding powers or extra financial resources that are not available to the other provinces—it is simply ensuring the ongoing viability of its national identity.

FLEXIBILITY AND ASYMMETRY

Recognition of the Québec nation should help promote the idea of a flexible, asymmetric form of federalism in Canada. By taking into account the reality of a minority nation, asymmetry offers a way to establish balance and fairness, rather than an unfair privilege. It is also essential for Québec, as often as necessary, to explain and reiterate that recognition for the Québec nation gives it the tools it needs to preserve its specific characteristics. Asymmetric federalism makes it possible to pursue shared objectives while respecting Québec's priorities and methods. It is not a tool used to dissociate Québec from the other provinces, but a flexible approach that facilitates Québec's involvement in shared projects.

COOPERATION AND ADMINISTRATIVE AGREEMENTS

In recent years, Canadian relations have been influenced by the emergence of intergovernmental practices in which federal and provincial powers are increasingly interwoven. In this area, a growing number of intergovernmental agreements allow the two orders of government to coordinate their actions and cooperate effectively on issues affecting their respective interests.

Today, it is necessary to reinvent the methods used to work towards joint solutions, for example in connection with environmental protection or land management.

SHARED INSTITUTIONS

The reform of federal institutions must be discussed. Consideration for Québec's reality as a nation and for the point of view of all the federative partners must be a key objective.

To guarantee the independence and neutrality of the Supreme Court of Canada as part of the Canadian federal framework, the process for appointing judges should provide for the formal participation of the provinces. In addition, it is vitally important for the appointment process to specifically ensure protection for the specificity of Québec's civil-law tradition and to grant Québec with a specific role in this regard.

Various scenarios have been proposed for the Senate, ranging from *status quo* to abolition. Québec has always believed that consideration for the interests of the provinces and regions should be at the heart of federal governance. The Senate was expected to play this role, but has been unable to do so. Québec is in favour of a forum that reflects the collective diversity of Canada, the national diversity of Québec, the First Nations and the Inuit, and the community diversity of the Acadians and the Canadian Francophonie.

4. QUÉBEC AFFIRMATION AND PROACTIVE CANADIAN RELATIONS

Québec wishes to use the 150th anniversary of the Federation to renew its relationship with all citizens and with its Canadian partners by focusing on an approach to federalism that recognizes a plurality of ways of belonging. This approach is based on values that are widely shared in Canada—democracy, openness and respect—and also on the promotion of all dimensions of diversity, whether individual or collective. Its primary goal is to re-establish the conditions needed to define a shared understanding of the principles that should govern our country.

To ensure the establishment of this shared understanding over time, the Government of Québec believes that a clear statement is needed to reiterate who we are as Quebecers and to express our desire to play our role in Canada to the full while affirming our difference.

AFFIRMATION STATEMENT

Québec is free to make its own choices and able to shape its own destiny and development. It has chosen to be part of Canada, and this choice is far more profound and significant for Quebecers than a mere cost-benefit calculation. Being part of Canada generates major economic benefits, but the choice to be part of Canada also relates to a sense of belonging.

Quebecers are attached to their Canadian citizenship, which is viewed with envy around the world. They can see signs of their history throughout Canada, and can note the progress of their shared venture and the hopes for a better world built on cooperation and solidarity. In addition, Québec has been able to grow and develop its national identity within the Canadian federal framework.

In short, the identity of a vast majority of Quebecers is based on an allegiance to Québec and a sense of belonging to Canada, and is deeply rooted in our nation's history. Canada is a richly diverse country, and must today recognize all dimensions of diversity and welcome national differences.

Quebecers, fortified by a deeply-held national identity that they hope to see rightfully recognized, have chosen to build the future alongside other Canadians.

WHO WE ARE AS QUEBECERS

- Québec is free to make its own choices and able to shape its own destiny and development.
- Québec has all the characteristics of, and recognizes itself as, a nation.
- The Québec nation is predominantly French-speaking.
- The Québec nation also includes an English-speaking community that has specific rights and prerogatives.
- The Québec nation recognizes eleven Aboriginal nations throughout Québec.
- The Québec nation is enriched by a significant cultural diversity that nourishes its shared historical narrative through interculturalism.
- The model of interculturalism developed in Québec aims to strike a balance between openness to diversity and the continuity of Québec's distinct and French-speaking identity.

Québec's specific identity is based on certain fundamental elements, including:

- its unique character;
- its use of French as the language of the majority and the official language;
- its civil-law tradition;
- its own political, cultural, economic, educational and social institutions.

A RECIPROCAL WILLINGNESS TO COOPERATE

- Canada must take Québec’s affirmation into consideration, along with its consequences. Canada must recognize Québec if Quebecers are to see themselves better reflected in Canada.
- Québec intends to exercise leadership within Canada and will play an active role in the development of a constructive, harmonious and mutually beneficial relationship between all the partners in the Canadian Federation, within bilateral or multilateral frameworks.
- Québec will work alongside other governments in Canada to ensure the promotion, protection, continuation and vitality of French throughout the country.
- Québec will support the Aboriginal nations to ensure that their place is recognized.

THE PRINCIPLES UNDERLYING QUÉBEC’S PARTICIPATION IN CANADA

- Québec will support the principles of federalism, including equality between the two orders of government and respect for the division of powers.
- Québec will ensure that it retains its fiscal autonomy in order to discharge its responsibilities, and will ensure that it receives its fair share of federal government expenditure, including, where appropriate, in the form of unconditional financial compensation or the transfer of tax points.
- Where necessary, Québec will give priority to asymmetry as a way to achieve genuine equality and to ensure the progress of the Federation, while respecting areas of jurisdiction and collective aspirations.
- Québec will seek cooperation and will uphold its interests in the most suitable way, bilaterally or multilaterally, or through direct dialogue with civil society.
- Québec will help shape shared institutions, including the Senate and Supreme Court, to ensure that they consider its nationhood. Québec will continue to argue that these institutions belong to the Federation and not to the federal government.

- Québec will continue to conduct its own international relations, within its jurisdiction, to complement Canada's actions. It will take steps to participate fully in the negotiation of international treaties when its interests are at stake.
- Québec will use all relevant tribunes to promote its vision of Canada in which a plurality of ways of belonging is supported on the basis of openness, mutual recognition and respect for individual and collective diversity.
- Québec will seek to extend the Canadian Francophone space.

THE GOVERNMENT AFFIRMATION PROCESS

Canada's 150th anniversary provides an opportunity to resume a meaningful dialogue on the evolution of federalism. However, the approach preferred in the past, when constitutional changes of fundamental importance for the country were negotiated behind closed doors, is no longer appropriate. The dialogue must recognize the profound changes that have transformed Québec and Canada since the Meech Lake Accord, and re-establish the bond of trust that has been placed under strain in recent decades.

To strengthen trust between the federative partners, the Government of Québec intends to renew the conditions for dialogue, which must now include not only governments, but also civil society, the Aboriginal peoples and French-speakers in Canada.

The Constitution, and any negotiations to amend the Constitution, should be seen as the end-point rather than the starting-point of the dialogue. However, such a complex process cannot be held to a schedule—there will still be work to be done after the 150th anniversary.

The Government of Québec

To achieve its objectives, the Government of Québec intends to use all the means at its disposal. In concrete terms, Québec's desire to play a more dynamic role in Canada will be reflected, first, in Québec's government structures.

Canadian relations will now be coordinated by the Secrétariat du Québec aux relations canadiennes (or SQRC, the Québec Secretariat for Canadian Relations), which will succeed the Secrétariat aux affaires intergouvernementales canadiennes (or SAIC, the Secretariat for Canadian Intergovernmental Affairs) and play a more prominent role as a strategic advisor in the area of Canadian relations in order to promote and defend Québec's interests with its federative partners. In addition, the SQRC will work actively to create additional bridges and possibilities for dialogue with Canadian society at all levels. The SQRC will implement a new structure for strategic monitoring, reflection and action, and will seek new input from all government departments.

The government, under the SQRC's coordination, will ensure that each of its departments has a unit for Canadian relations, under the authority of their respective deputy minister. With the assistance of this network, the SQRC will coordinate the defence and promotion of Québec's interests with its federative partners and with other stakeholders in Québec and elsewhere in Canada. The network will help the SQRC determine the possibilities and opportunities for alliances with federative partners on matters of shared strategic interest.

Canadian Relations

In its relations with the federal government, the Government of Québec intends to participate actively in intergovernmental forums and to play a leading role in the development of a constructive, harmonious and mutually-beneficial relationship. The Government of Québec is committed to also participate fully in the definition and implementation of joint priorities with the federal government, provided its areas of jurisdiction are respected.

Québec's relations within Canada are not limited to its federal-provincial relations, but also include a long tradition of relations with the other provinces and territories. Québec intends to actively continue its collaboration with its partners, with the ongoing objective of maintaining and developing beneficial relationships within the Federation. It will multiply its alliances, where suitable, to advance not only its own interests, but also those of Canada as a whole.

In the view of the Government of Québec, Canada's plurinational status must be a recognized reality not only with respect to the Québec nation, but also with respect to the Aboriginal nations of Canada.

In addition, the Government of Québec is now more than ever determined to promote the Francophonie to help gain recognition for the rights of the 2.6 million Francophones and Francophiles outside Québec. More specifically, it plans to support actions to promote the immigration of French-speakers, an essential component in the growth of the country's French-speaking population.

Civil Society

Québec intends to increase its presence on the Canadian stage to make its voice heard and ensure that its concerns are better understood. This will be achieved through active involvement in the university sector, with business and social groups, on traditional and social media, and in all places where Québec's voice must be heard to project the vision and goals of its government.

The teams of the SQRC and the units responsible for Canadian relations in government departments will monitor the flow of information and engage in strategic planning to enhance Québec's presence. All Québec government departments and bodies will be called on to make a contribution.

Québec will use all relevant tribunes to promote its vision of Canada in which a plurality of ways of belonging is supported through openness, mutual recognition and respect for individual and collective diversity.

CONNECTIONS BETWEEN CITIZENS

The links between Quebecers and other Canadians are deep, long-standing and durable. They occur not just between governments and institutions, but unite individuals and civil society as a whole. These links came into being over time and outline a history that contrasts with the string of political and constitutional disagreements that have marked governmental relations between Québec and Canada. They reflect thousands of interactions that occur every day in the worlds of business, commerce and charity work, through union and social solidarity organizations, in the fight against climate change, in classrooms across the country where a love of French is instilled, and during the trips made by Quebecers who travel or live in other parts of Canada, just like the Canadians who come to discover or settle in Québec.

This will be the basis for a genuine dialogue about the future of our country. The Government of Québec hopes to see an increase in the interactions between Quebecers and other Canadians. They already occur on their own, and must be encouraged. The Government of Québec will facilitate this trend.

Young people are a good example. The constitutional episodes of the years 1970 to 1980 and 1990 left a long-lasting mark on Québec-Canada relations, but do not necessarily resonate with or have the same meaning for young people as they do for older generations. This is reflected in recent surveys on young Quebecers' attachment to and identification with Canada, which have increased significantly in recent years. Globalization, increased mobility, and the information and communication revolution, are all realities that change the ways in which we see the world, travel and do business. Young Quebecers live at the centre of this upheaval and, as a result, are agents for change and open-mindedness.

In their own way, young Quebecers are reinventing Québec, Canada and the world. It is their turn to prepare the future. The Government of Québec hopes to increase the opportunities for discussion and cooperation, allowing young Quebecers to express their identity throughout Canada through intercultural exchanges, school exchange programs, research internships, language and cultural immersion programs, and mobility programs for students and young entrepreneurs hoping to enter neighbouring markets. An increase in these exchanges will raise the profile of Québec and the French language, support mutual understanding, and strengthen a shared sense of belonging.

CONCLUSION

Today, Québec can offer a clear definition of the place it intends to occupy in Canada. Its affirmation states what we are and specifies the elements on which it is founded and the conditions needed for it to achieve its full potential.

The identity of a vast majority of Quebecers, deeply rooted in the history of our nation, combines an allegiance to Québec with a sense of belonging to Canada. It also includes a desire to cooperate with other Canadians on defining projects for the future. Québec progresses when it builds bridges with its partners in the Federation rather than putting up walls. This is the spirit that will guide its participation in Canada's future.

The Canadian federal model, which can still be improved, holds great promise for the future, because it is rooted in the very idea of a plurinational state and a willingness to live together while respecting diversity. Any process designed to allow Québec's full adhesion to the constitutional order must, however, be realistic and prudent, and must be seen as the end-point of a dialogue to strengthen the trust, still all too fragile, between the federative partners.

Québec hopes to participate fully in the dialogue about our joint future, while reminding our federative partners of the essence of Québec's difference. A new government structure will be created and proactive diplomacy will be deployed to ensure that Québec's vision is genuinely heard and understood.

Our actions will support the affirmation of our nationhood and our sense of belonging to Canada. We must make our voice heard, in order to be better understood.

We are Quebecers, and this is our way of being Canadian.

