

However, we must realize that there are still obstacles to entering into beneficial partnerships. Not the least of these is overlapping or duplication between organizations.

The federal government has made known its position on this matter a number of times during the past 15 months. Our position can be summarized as follows: let efficiency and co-operation take the place of empty talk and duplication. It is our job to both streamline and improve the operation of programs and services. If there are cumbersome elements in the system, they will be done away with. We are determined to pursue this course in the coming months and years. We plan to increase greatly the initiatives for co-operation and harmonization.

In closing, let me say that the federal government intends to continue its efforts to create a prosperous economic and fiscal climate to promote the vitality of SMEs. My colleague the Honourable Paul Martin, Minister of Finance, is committed to promoting SME development, as his budget will show.

Let me again thank you for your kind invitation. Our course of action is completely in line with the current economic necessities and the needs of our regional economies. I am convinced that our approach is opening up some very stimulating prospects for the Quebec City region: let's take advantage of them together!

Thank you.