

Indeed aboriginal rights in Canada are recognized and affirmed even though a lot of progress is still needed. One provision states that the Charter shall be interpreted in a matter consistent with the preservation and enhancement of the multi-cultural heritage of Canadians. Finally, the Constitution urges Parliament and provincial legislatures to promote and develop Canada's regional energies.

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, the Constitution Act, 1982 is more than a constitutional document, it is to a great degree a statement of the features that make Canada unique. It is my conviction the constitutional recognition of vital components of our society will remain incomplete as long as we do not recognize in the Constitution the existence both of French-speaking Canadians centred in Quebec, and English-speaking Canadians centred in the rest of the country, but also present in Quebec. If those basic realities are not recognized, how can we understand or explain for instance the language provisions of the Charter or the special protection afforded Quebec by the Constitution civil code?

I believe that that part of the agreement dealing with Quebec's distinctive nature strikes a fair balance between the principle of equality between all provinces and the need to protect and strengthen Quebec's uniqueness and contribution to the Canadian identity. And the agreement reaches that goal while guaranteeing that nothing will infringe upon the rights of aboriginal people and our multi-cultural heritage.

Let me now refer, Mr. Speaker to immigration, an aspect of the agreement that is closely connected to the matter of a distinctive society, its survival and development.

Section 95 of the 1867 Constitutional Act gives Parliament and provincial legislatures concurrent powers to make laws in relation to Immigration, with federal laws taking precedence over conflicting provincial ones. In practice, it is essentially Parliament which has taken upon itself to legislate in this area, essentially through the Immigration Act. Throughout the years, however, the federal Government has signed administrative agreements for immigration with seven provinces to address their particular concerns. The most complete of the kind is the Cullen-Couture Agreement, signed with Quebec in 1978. Under this agreement, Quebec has considerable power to apply its own selection criteria to the choice of immigrants coming from abroad. The federal Government, however, continues to set the national standards and objectives in the area of immigration especially because of its authority to establish classes of immigrants.

• (1550)

[English]

Mr. Allmand: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I do not want to be too hard on the Hon. Member but I thought the resolution before the House today dealt with the rights of the Northwest Territories and Yukon and aboriginal rights provisions in the Accord and not the Accord generally. It seems to me that the Hon. Member is involved in debate on

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the entire Accord, but this resolution is restricted to only two very specific points.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): I am sure the Hon. Member is getting to the point.

[Translation]

Mr. Grisé: Mr. Speaker, I would like also to confirm to my colleague for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine East (Mr. Allmand) that, before integrating our aborigines to the Constitution, we must first adopt the Constitution.

As I was saying, Mr. Speaker, concerns vary from one province to the next. Quebec is concerned first and foremost with the implementation of an immigration policy which would favour the development of vigorous francophone communities and allow it to select every year a number of immigrants in proportion to its population.

British Columbia seems to be interested mostly in immigrants likely to create their own businesses. Other provinces have at present no objection to the federal Government assuming full responsibility in the area of immigration, but they wish to retain the possibility of signing such agreements in case of any change in their situation.

Although Quebec and the other provinces seem generally satisfied with the administrative agreements signed with the federal Government, Quebec wanted to have its agreement entrenched in the Constitution to prevent the federal Government from eventually cancelling the provision by using its own legislative powers.

Other provinces have also indicated that they would want to entrench any such agreements with the federal Government.

Mr. Speaker, all the provinces agree that the federal Government should continue to assume its general responsibility for setting national standards and objectives in the area of immigration, especially in terms of defining the various classes of immigrants, determining who is not eligible, and setting up comprehensive immigration quotas. The Government of Canada will retain the ultimate jurisdiction over family reunification and assisted relatives, matters of particular interest to Canadians who have recently settled in this country and to anyone who understands the importance of humanitarian reasons.

Mr. Speaker, the Accord signed on June 3 will enshrine in the Constitution an expanded version of the Cullen-Couture Agreement with Quebec, an agreement that has produced good results since it became effective ten years ago and whose principles have proved satisfactory for both parties.

The need to clarify the roles and responsibilities of the federal Government and the provinces with respect to immigration arises from the fact that Quebec wants to be responsible for protecting and promoting the distinct identity of its society. The Government of Canada shares this concern, aware that the existence of a Canadian French-speaking entity, concentrated in Quebec but also present in the other provinces and territories of this country, constitutes one of the fundamental characteristics of Canada.