

FROM 19 TO 21 NOVEMBER 1991, the Palais de Chaillot in Paris will host the fourth summit of heads-of-state and government of countries which have in common the use of French, otherwise known as la Francophonie. The first such gathering of French-speaking countries took place in Paris in 1986, the second in Quebec in 1987, and the third in Dakar, Senegal in 1989.

However, the idea of la Francophonie is not a new one. Léopold Sédar Senghor, President of Senegal, was the first to advance the idea of a "francophone Commonwealth" in 1962, together with Presidents Habib Bourguiba of Tunisia and Diori Hamani of Niger. In 1970, the Agency for Cultural and Technical Cooperation (ACCT) was created in Niamey, Niger. Its mandate was to promote multilateral cooperation between member states in the areas of education, training, culture, science and technology, and in doing so bringing the francophone nations of the world closer together. At the present time ACCT has thirty-two member states, seven associate members and two participating governments – Quebec and New Brunswick.

The idea of a "francophone commonwealth" was proposed again in 1975, this time by Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau. However, there was a stumbling block which prevented a summit being held: the participation of Quebec and the place it would occupy at such a meeting. In 1985, Prime Minister Brian Mulroney and Quebec Premier Pierre-Marc Johnson signed an agreement on the role the province would play at future summits. The accord divided summit affairs into one of two "baskets" – issues related to cooperation and development, and those of a political and economic nature. The government of Quebec could intervene in discussions on cooperation and development; but when the debate focussed on the world economic and political situation, Quebec would have the status of an interested observer.

Structure and Functions

There is more to la Francophonie than summit meetings. It embraces many individuals and organizations: the Association of Partially or Entirely French-speaking Universities, the International Association of French-speaking Parliamentarians, the International Association of Francophone Mayors, and the International Council of French-language Radio and Television.

Initially, the summits were organized into five networks or areas of activity: scientific information and technological development, culture and communications, language industries, energy, and agriculture. There are two bodies overseeing these various networks: the International Follow-up Committee, responsible for ensuring that the programmes adopted during the summit are implemented; and the International Preparatory Committee, which is responsible for preparing the next summit and to which subjects for future summit discussion must be submitted. Following the 1989 Dakar meeting, many of the functions of these separate bodies, as well as funding decisions, were integrated into the ACCT.

Since the first summit in 1986, over one hundred projects have been implemented. Most notable among them are the creation of an energy institute in Quebec City and Senghor University in Alexandria; the establishment of television stations TV 5 Canada and TV 5 Europe; the opening of a francophone African centre in Tunis for training students in book publishing and distribution; the first Francophone Games in Morocco in 1989; an international consortium for distance-learning; the establishment of a fund to provide schooling for francophone children; and the creation of a solidarity fund for Lebanon and a similar one for the victims of apartheid.

LA FRANCOPHONIE A MULTILATERAL ORGANIZATION WITH A FUTURE?

*The future of the Francophone "commonwealth"
may well ride on the success or failure of
its next summit meeting.*

Also at the 1989 Dakar summit, the decision was taken to add to the list of areas of concern to the francophone international community. These new fields of activity include education and training, the environment, legal and judicial cooperation, and the holding of ministerial-level conferences on problems common to all member governments. In the opinion of Jean-Louis Roy, Secretary-General of the ACCT, "La Francophonie must become more concrete in what it does" and work in closer cooperation with other international

organizations. Thus the ACCT has established new links with the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the Secretariat of the World Conference on the Environment and the UN Development Program.

Agenda For the Next Summit

The fourth summit of la Francophonie was to have taken place this fall in Kinshasa, Zaire. However, in January, Zaire decided to pass on its turn to hold the meeting. The new ambassador of the Republic of Zaire in Canada, Kaweta-Milombe Sampassa, has stated that the decision was forced by the political timetable and not because of reservations expressed by Canada about human rights violations in his country. Nevertheless, certain other countries such as Belgium which had expressed similar misgivings, were relieved that the summit was moved from Kinshasa. However, Zaire remains an active member of la Francophonie, and President Mobutu recently wrote to Ottawa to obtain Canadian assistance in creating a human rights commission in Zaire.

According to Jean-Louis Roy, the next summit is expected to concentrate on issues related to the environment, legal and judicial cooperation and the economy. For its part, Canada wants more emphasis put on political issues: human rights, establishment of the rule of law in Africa, economic development and the environment. At the Dakar meeting Canada submitted a resolution on fundamental human rights, which was adopted unanimously by the other member states. Canada is now proposing the creation of a division within the ACCT secretariat on democracy and human rights, and a declaration on democracy and development will be presented to the Paris summit for approval.

Future Challenges

La Francophonie is still in the process of consolidation. The Chaillot summit will be a test, for if la Francophonie fails as a french multilateral organization, Roy fears that the role of the french language in the world will quickly diminish. In *Le Droit* of May 1991, Roy stated:

Francophone Africa now has a choice in the alliances it makes. If it is ignored by the French-speaking nations of the North, it may well look elsewhere, to Japan or Germany for example, for the support, assistance and investment its economy needs.

And there are fresh challenges facing la Francophonie. Romania and Bulgaria have asked to be allowed to attend the Chaillot meeting, a prospect that makes certain African countries apprehensive about the redirection of money and resources away from their part of the world. It is also apparent that the whole question of human rights and the process of democratization in a number of African countries may also be a cause of friction. This, despite essentially unanimous agreement that it is up to the African countries themselves to make their own choices and decide how they wish to develop. □

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