

Ottawa, ^{2/3} province agree on Quebec's Paris summit role

Gazette News Services

QUEBEC — Premier Pierre Marc Johnson announced yesterday that Quebec and Ottawa have reached an agreement ending a decade-long dispute over the province's participation in a summit meeting of francophone nations.

The premier, accompanied by International Relations Minister Louise Beaudoin, made the announcement at a 5:45 a.m. news conference before flying off to Gaspé to continue his election campaign.

The accord, which follows four months of intense negotiations between Quebec, Ottawa and Paris, will allow the province to participate in summit talks on matters under provincial jurisdiction, particularly cultural and technical co-operation.

And the Quebec premier will be an official participant in the summit.

However, Quebec will defer to Ottawa on discussion of matters of federal jurisdiction, in particular foreign relations.

Johnson expressed satisfaction with the accord, which he finalized by phone with Prime Minister Brian Mulroney Thursday afternoon.

"Never before has the federal government accepted the legitimacy of Quebec's presence at such a summit," he told reporters.

"Quebec isn't sovereign, this accord doesn't state that Quebec is sovereign, but there are elements here so that we have enough guarantees about our role.

"This is an extremely important step for Quebec."

He said Quebec never expected to be discussing such things as the situation in Vietnam and did not mind

being left out of talks on international matters.

He would not say who compromised and how the governments came to an agreement.

Quebec and Ottawa have been squabbling for years over Quebec's role in an eventual summit of French-speaking nations.

Quebec had wanted to be a full participant in the meeting, while Ottawa wanted the province to be part of the Canadian delegation.

The French government refused to take part in a summit until Quebec was satisfied, so no such meeting has ever been held.

Now that the situation is resolved, a conference may be held in Paris as early as January or February.

That the accord was in the works had been announced earlier in the week by Gil Rémillard, a Liberal

candidate in Québec City and a former constitutional adviser to Mulroney.

Rémillard's announcement irked both Ottawa and Quebec, who had not put the finishing touches on it.

Johnson said yesterday that Rémillard had not had a hand in working out the agreement.

In Ottawa, the agreement was announced yesterday by Prime Minister Mulroney who denied the deal was intended to be a pre-election boost for Premier Johnson.

"We are not intervening in the Quebec election," Mulroney told reporters who asked him about aid his party received from Parti Québécois members and supporters during the 1984 federal election campaign.

"I have maintained impeccable neutrality as a Québécois and as a Canadian," Mulroney said.

Claude Morin, a former Quebec intergovernmental affairs minister, praised the agreement as "honorable, practical and respectful."

At the summit, Quebec's premier will be at the table with Mulroney, but its delegation will have a sign identifying it as "Quebec-Canada." The delegation will be allowed to have a Quebec flag in front of it.

Mulroney said the governments are trying to bring about a "kind of francophone Commonwealth" and added that he will discuss the meeting with French President François Mitterrand later this month in Brussels.

The prime minister said he wants to emphasize trade and commercial issues at the summit, to enhance trade between France and Canada.

About 20 countries are expected to take part in the summit.