

We have been accustomed to thinking of Canada's multiculturalism exclusively in Canadian domestic terms - the variety it offers; the challenge of drawing the best qualities from different cultures; the tolerance it can teach us here at home. But there is an international dimension to Canada's multicultural character. It provides us direct access to the multitude of countries and societies from which Canadians come. Usually, that helps us understand those countries better, and we can apply that understanding in the exercise of Canada's historic international role as a moderating nation, and a leader in the practical pursuit of human rights. But it can also, in critical times, give us an influence that is not available to countries which lack our links of family and culture and language.

Sometimes those links can create problems, as, for example, when foreign disputes are imported into Canada. But more often, they create opportunities, and we should act on them. Take the case of the Baltic communities in Canada. There once was some fear that the presence in Canada of citizens with origins in Central and Eastern Europe would limit our ability to encourage glasnost or perestroika. The opposite is the case. Your communities can help Canada encourage those changes. Thousands of Canadian citizens speak Estonian, Latvian, Polish, Hungarian, Serbo-Croat, Slovak or Czech. They give Canada direct and personal connections with the activists of Solidarity, the nationalities of the Baltic States, or the faithful seeking to practise the principles of the Ukrainian Uniate Church, or of Judaism in the Soviet Union.

Those are not obstacles to Canadian foreign policy. They are considerable assets, if we have the imagination to make the most of them.

Tomorrow, as the Government continues our consideration of our response to the terrible events in China, I am convening a Roundtable of Canadian experts from outside the Government, who have direct experience in China. This will include Canadians of Chinese origin, as well as scholars, business persons, and others who have lived in that society we seek to influence.

We are taking the same approach to the different changes that are occurring in the Soviet Union and Eastern and Central Europe. The Prime Minister and I seek the advice of the business leaders who are actually pursuing joint ventures in the Soviet Union. I meet directly with families, like Ala Wolfson or Ivan Shumuk who are trying to bring Refusniks or former political prisoners to Canada. And we believe there is a creative constructive opportunity to make use of Canada's human links to Europe.