

The painful birth of an agency to link French-speaking states

by Louis Sabourin

The Second General Conference of the Agency for Cultural and Technical Co-operation (AGECOOP), which took place in Ottawa and Quebec City from October 1 to 16, 1971, has once more revealed the paradoxical image of this new international organization. On the one hand, official statements testify that the Agency is now on its way and that "family quarrels" have been settled; on the other, the meetings have shown that with the limited budget allotted to it the Agency would not be able to play, as soon as was hoped, a major role in a French-speaking community organized in such a manner and that some nations, such as Algeria, Morocco, Guinea, Zaire and Congo (Brazzaville), still refuse to join. Behind the scenes there was even talk of a need to change the Agency's name.

During the discussions on what was diplomatically called "the fiscal outlook for the next two years", as well as on the Agency's activities, particularly those of the Ecole internationale de Bordeaux (Bordeaux International School) and the educational television programs, there was always the fear that the conflict between Quebec and Ottawa would crop up again. No such thing happened. Only a few days before the conference, the Canadian Secretary of State for External Affairs, Mitchell Sharp, and the Quebec Minister of Cultural Affairs, François Cloutier, agreed on a formula which would allow Quebec to participate in the Agency. The mere title of this agreement will take away the breath of any jurist: "Terms and conditions under which the Government of Quebec is admitted as a participating government to the institutions, activities and programs of the Agency for Cultural and Technical Co-operation, agreed upon on October 1, 1971, between the Government of Canada and the Government of Quebec".

In my view, this is a text in which the political flavour outweighs the legal content. These terms and conditions prove that the governments of Messrs Trudeau

and Bourassa have given a very "liberal" interpretation to the Agency's Charter. But could we, in fact, have expected anything else? This text takes its place alongside the Convention and the Charter which brought the Agency into being. The negotiations which led to the concluding of this agreement between Quebec and Ottawa resemble, *mutatis mutandis*, the discussions held before and after Niamey: more or less public conversations during which each of the two large silent partners, France and Canada, made eyes at Quebec, sought to convince Belgium, "paid their respects" to the other members and tried to exert direct influence on a secretariat which wants to do big things with very limited means.

To understand fully the meaning and scope of the agreement between Canada and Quebec, one must first of all understand the atmosphere surrounding the creation of the Agency and its earliest activities.

Pioneers of agency

It is usually pointed out, and justifiably so, that the idea of a French-speaking community was first proposed by President Senghor; two other African leaders, Presidents Bourguiba and Houphouët-Boigny, soon gave their support to this project. On a visit to Paris in 1961, Paul Gérin-Lajoie also spoke of the need to "structure" the French-speaking community. History will undoubtedly record that the Agency was established mainly through the work of two men: President

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