

This final decade of our century is already marked by extraordinary change and turmoil. We entered the 1990s on a wave of optimism as the Cold War ended and the Berlin Wall crumbled. The 12 members of the European Community (EC) were marching lock step toward political union, thereby eliminating, perhaps forever, the possibility of a European war. The most comprehensive assault on trade barriers ever, and the first to include developing countries -- the Uruguay Round under the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) -- was "this close" to a conclusion.

Today, a scant two years later, as chaos erupts in that great expanse of geography that once was the Soviet Union, our optimism is at home with a severe autumn cold.

Yugoslavia and Somalia present us daily with what have been termed serial horrors, screaming at us of the failure of governments and institutions to end the torment of tribal hatred. The "twelve," as members of the EC clubbily refer to themselves, have reverted to the traditional squabbling that has marked their relationships for centuries. And, the result of a related, long-building spat between the United States and France, the Uruguay Round appears headed for the shredder, dooming the developing world to the economic margin, and raising the spectre of an even longer and deeper global recession.

As a foreign minister participating in a daily battle to build the kind of global stability that will allow Canada and other countries to flourish, I sometimes feel the way the Atlanta Braves must have felt when they left Toronto last month: "Just wait till next year!"

There are some people who still believe that if we each look after our own little corner of the world, our own little plot of ground, we can all survive and life will go on at its historic, predictable pace. Undoubtedly, this theory holds true for small numbers of people living under glass somewhere near the South Pole. For the rest of us, the interdependence of the world is now a given.

Our prosperity, as Canadians, depends on our capacity to trade, to invest in our own and other countries, and to welcome here the investment of others. These, in turn, are tied by a Gordian knot to events and attitudes on the other side of the world.

Canadians cannot -- indeed no one can -- escape the major forces currently at play in the real world:

- unrestrained nationalism, rising xenophobia and racism;
- numerous actual or potential ethnic hostilities;