

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen:

Thank you, Mr. Monod, for your very kind introduction. I can assure you that whatever pleasure you may derive from my presence here is greatly exceeded by my own pleasure at being here. The Canada-France Chamber of Commerce is a cornerstone of the new spirit of cooperation between our two countries, a spirit that sprang directly from the visit to Canada last month of your Prime Minister, Mr. Fabius.

I know that Mr. Fabius was preceded by some of the members of this Chamber of Commerce, who made an extended visit to Canada -- extended in distance, at least, since you went from one coast to the other and stopped in a total of nine cities. And your initiative is one of a great many that are now taking place between France and Canada. I had the honour of meeting yesterday with Mr. Jean Pineau, the co-chairman of the Canada-France Businessmen's Group that has been looking into areas in which we can expand our bilateral relations, and I am extremely encouraged by the report he has given me.

On the Canadian side, I am the second Cabinet Minister to visit Paris within the past week. My colleague Robert de Cotret, the President of the Treasury Board, was here last week, conferring with people from the business community, and I believe he managed to meet with some of you.

It is not by chance that all this activity is taking place. Our two Prime Ministers, in their meetings last month, took the explicit decision to give what Mr. Fabius described as a "new impulse to our relations" -- political, cultural and, of course, commercial.

The importance of that decision cannot be overstated. I would like to recall the words of my Prime Minister, Mr. Mulroney, at the state dinner honouring Prime Minister Fabius. "It is not enough to say that history and culture have forged indestructible bonds between us," Mr. Mulroney said. "We must give those traditional bonds life and translate them into realities of State".

And he continued: "Our two countries must walk together down the road to the growth that awaits us. This road must inevitably lead us through technological, scientific and economic exchange ... We will not achieve our common culture without an economic foundation and economic expansion. In this perspective, it is imperative that we strengthen our commercial relations."

I would like to explore with you today some of the avenues that I see towards strengthening our commercial relations. Before I do so, however, it may be appropriate to