

Framework agreement is the key to closer relations

By Marcel Cadieux

One of the problems of diplomats is that they live abroad — and for long periods. Often they find it difficult to keep in touch with developments at home. Certainly, they read news bulletins and national publications, but they miss the atmosphere, the moods, that condition public opinion and go a long way to explain national decisions or reactions within the country.

The negotiations leading to and the signature of an agreement between the European Community and Canada furnish a good example. In Brussels, our task in the Mission to the European Communities is to keep tabs on what they may be up to and to try to figure out what this may mean for us. Also, like any other mission, we try to help in achieving the major objectives of our external policies — for instance, diversification and, in consequence, closer and better relations with Europe, with the Community. In our view, an agreement between Canada and the Community seemed a very desirable objective, particularly as it appeared to assist with what we believed, simple-mindedly perhaps, we had been, in the main, assigned to Brussels to do.

I was surprised at the reaction in certain quarters in Canada after what were, after all, speedy and successful negotiations. I thought that we had gained an important point and that opinion in the country would welcome such a move.

On July 6, I attended in Ottawa the signature of the agreement between the European Community and Canada. After the ceremony, there was a press conference. One journalist, with the general approval of his colleagues, asked the ministers what Canada, or for that matter the Community, had gained as a result of the agreement that they did not possess five minutes before. This question concerning the significance of the agreement is typical of a certain scepticism that I found had developed in Canada and elsewhere. I have in mind an article in the *The Economist* entitled "The Missing Link". It is fashion-

able these days to be critical, to take a so-called hard-boiled, dollars-and-cents approach to governmental decisions. There is, of course, no objection to seeking expert assessments of the results of governmental moves. But, if questions are being raised repeatedly, they may also suggest that the answers given have not been fully understood or accepted. (As a civil servant, I am bound to assume that the answers were full and totally effective.)

It occurs to me, however, that should there be any problem with the answers, it might be helpful if I were to attempt to outline the reasons why, from the vantage-point of Brussels, from the outlook of our Mission to the Communities, the agreement seems to be a good and useful thing, "a many-splendoured thing", as was originally said in quite another context.

No panacea

I should like first of all to make clear that no one in the Government claims that this agreement is a panacea, the "be-all and end-all", that it is in itself the goal of our policy. We see it as a means, an important one as I believe and shall try to show. But the signature of this agreement really marks the beginning of a process. As I suggest later, it is a key and it remains to be seen what we shall do with it, and how we shall furnish the house once the door has been opened. It is the product of our review of relations with our major partners after the decision to diversify our foreign relations. We noted that there were certain gaps in our relations with the European Community, and this agreement is the result of the effort to bridge them, as well as to go on from there to build a new and more intensive relationship.

Signature of agreement the beginning of a process

Mr. Cadieux is head of the Canadian Mission to the European Communities. He was formerly Ambassador to the United States and Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs. The views expressed are those of the author.