

Mr. Mayor, Mr. Lavoie, ladies and gentlemen:

It was with great pleasure that I accepted your invitation. The federal government is proud to be associated with a group as dynamic and innovative as yours. I am pleased to note that the Forum économique de la région de Québec has about 400 participants from 25 different economic sectors. The Chambre de commerce et d'industrie du Québec métropolitain indeed is well aware that for regional development to be successful, the largest possible number of players must be brought together.

In this regard, the federal government has always played a facilitating role for regional development - a role of support for development projects throughout the province of Quebec, but of course also in the greater Quebec City region. You are in a position to know that the regional development concept has changed over the years. Thus, certain factors explain the repositioning of the Federal Office of Regional Development - Quebec [FORD-Q] and are leading us, as a government, to review our approach to regional development.

The global economy is now fully integrated. Geographical distance, an issue long at the heart of the regional development debate, is no longer a negative factor. Trade globalization is therefore forcing us to change the traditional view of regional development and to integrate it into the broader framework of a barrier-free market.

The developing countries are rapidly becoming serious competitors in certain areas. The global market's balance of economic powers is changing.

The new global economy will be knowledge-based. Successful economic development now depends on technological innovation, training and ideas.

In this context, the Federal Office's strategic renewal aims at a single major objective: helping our regional entrepreneurs attain their full development potential in the context of the new global economy.

This direction is based on two simple facts: for more than 15 years SMEs [small and medium-sized enterprises], have created, in Quebec and in Canada as a whole, about 80 per cent of new jobs each year. Furthermore, in order to survive and prosper, SMEs must latch on to the globalization of markets.

Last March, FORD-Q accordingly moved to target its initiatives more specifically on the development of SMEs and to direct its interventions to certain active niches: technological innovation, development of markets, implementation of projects to stimulate regional development and support for entrepreneurship.