

□ THE FRANCOPHONE SUMMIT: A REALITY IN THE MAKING □

by Ferry de Kerckhove,
Deputy Director
Political and Strategic Analysis Division
Department of External Affairs

Despite their many differences, the concept of the emerging Francophonie is best understood through the drawing of a parallel with the much better known Commonwealth. As is particularly well known in Canada, the Commonwealth is a unique voluntary association linking 49 independent nations across the globe, bringing together developed and developing countries, old states and new, tiny island nations and continental landmasses, representing a total of one billion people.

The centerpiece of the Commonwealth is the biennial Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting, which is a club characterized by friendly informality, and which has provided moral and practical leadership on some of the major issues of the day — South Africa, international economic order, etc. The next "CHOGM" is to take place in Vancouver in October of this year.

Canada has always been one of the Commonwealth's strongest supporters. It considers it as a model of multilateralism at work, cutting across the traditional regional and interest blocs, an ideal instrument with which to expand North-South dialogue and broaden international understanding and consensus. It also enables Canada to deepen its bilateral relations with 48 countries and to reinforce its foreign policy aims as a whole.

There is much of this in Francophonie, and in Canada's approach to it as well, but in an often very different way.

Francophonie has been perceived for a long time exclusively from a linguistic point of view. Even today Francophonie escapes a ready-made definition and a precise geographic delimitation.

Francophonie
has been perceived for a long
time exclusively
from a linguistic
point of view.
Francophonie
is first a community of individuals and
people using the
French language
to varying
degrees.

Francophonie is first a community of individuals and people using the French language to varying degrees, and it has to be appreciated that this community has pre-existed any attempt to unify its diverse components under one single banner.

The question arose in the minds of many leaders of that community as to

the potential usefulness of such a community to engineer common activities aimed at fostering the cultural and economic growth of its individual members.

This explains the emergence of both private (over 200 of them) and governmental, national and international institutions involved in the pursuit of a dialogue and cooperation between francophones from countries all over the world — although not necessarily from all francophone countries of the world.

But Francophonie was also becoming characterized by the quest by the leaders of Francophone countries for a political framework for its member states.

Founded on a heritage more cultural than political in nature, Francophonie is more a matter of values permeating a culture or of a language as a unifying force. French is not only the communication medium of Francophonie, but its catalyst. Francophonie is now a community of countries which base the pursuit of common objectives on the use of a common language.

These definitions highlight a complex reality. There are over 40 countries which use the French language on a regular basis both domestically and in the international area. Most of these are members of the Paris-based Agency for Cultural and Technical Cooperation, founded in 1970, which includes Québec and New Brunswick as "participating governments" and whose purpose is to foster mutual cooperation in the fields of culture, education, science and technology. Altogether, the member countries account for 250 million people, from Europe, Africa, America, and Oceania, i.e. the North,