

Government Orders

mously, certainly by the Quebec Liberal government, the Parti Québécois and the vast majority of Quebecers.

Of course, at that time, federal Liberals were against free trade. Over time, they finally understood, but I can tell you that it was a never-ending battle, particularly during the 1988 election, which was mostly based on free trade. Unions were also against it because they were supporting the NDP. But now, they have changed and are starting to understand that free trade with the United States is a good thing, that world market liberalization is a good thing for most businesses.

Quebec also supported the latest agreement, NAFTA, between Canada, the United States and Mexico. Once again, that demonstrates that Quebecers are very open to world markets. I will now talk about Quebec's openness towards the coming of new partners in NAFTA. Quebec, a growing society, has become a partner which is credible, efficient and well respected not only in North America but also in Europe. More and more businessmen and businesswomen in Quebec are active in international trade. Quebec needs a legal framework in order to develop its export industry. International trade is a challenge for business people in Quebec. There are numerous and daily challenges in the business sector but international trade is even more demanding.

● (1510)

There are some aspects to be considered. First, the financial soundness of the company. Before considering the export related costs, we have to assess all the costs in terms of prospecting and distribution network. For instance, as far as foreign accounts receivable are concerned, we have to take into consideration customs clearance and exchange rates.

Second, the control of production costs. Can the production be done within the timeframe without altering services provided to local customers who bring in our daily bread and butter?

Third, staff qualifications. Is the staff fully qualified to meet the demand? In terms of foreign languages, legal and technical vocabulary, business networks, financial support agencies, market, traveling, etc., can we train current staff? Should we hire qualified staff or people abroad?

Fourth, the marketing instruments. Before investing in marketing activities, a company should get some information on the way of doing things in the country with which it intends to do business.

Fifth, the expectations of customers. Check if the product or the service you wish to export meets the expectations of our new customers. International trade is a complex matter, hence the importance of trade agreements and mechanisms necessary to their implementation.

The role of governments. International governments, the 108 governments party to the agreement must first establish a framework for international trade; negotiate trade agreements furthering the access to new markets as well as preserving harmony and balance; eliminate barriers to international trade. The Uruguay Round satisfies those requirements to a great extent.

Sixth, business support. I believe the government should keep a close eye on the performance of businesses, their needs and the different matters that I have already mentioned, for example a certain guarantee concerning accounts receivable. When you export, collecting bills can be a difficult thing. The government should establish some sort of guarantee. That already exists for larger companies but it becomes very difficult and costly for small business, small and medium-sized firms. Governments should create a fund that would guarantee accounts receivable for small and medium-sized firms wishing to export.

There is also the issue of loans for the promotion of our products. It is often very difficult for small firms who have excellent products to export them if they do not have the necessary cash flow and it is often difficult to obtain it from the banks. Measures should be taken to ensure provision of funds for the promotion of our products. These funds would not constitute a gift but would rather be a loan guaranteed by the government or by independent insurance companies or others. Such a fund should definitely be set up to promote our products on foreign markets.

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There are also trade bureaus abroad that are dynamic and available, people who are very willing to help our small and medium-sized businesses wishing to export and to develop markets. Public servants often lack drive. There is a lot of diplomatic talk, but when the time comes to do business, it is considered inappropriate. But I believe that the best way to survive is to do business, especially in these very open markets. It will really be necessary to support our businesses, to at least give them the information they need about the culture and the economy of those countries, the way they do business, all kinds of information that is available to the staff of the Department of Foreign Affairs and that could be useful for small and medium-sized businesses.

Because it is important I want to focus on an area over which Quebec has been claiming exclusive control for a long time, manpower training. We shall have to really consult each other, to try to be as efficient as possible and to train highly advanced people in order to be able to produce, create, be productive, to have adequate manpower, etc.

This is a very important point. I read in *L'actualité* of September 15 an article I found interesting. I knew a little bit about it, because when I was chairman of the Committee on Science and Technology we toured Europe. I had been struck by the dynamism shown by the Germans in the area of training in