

# OLD FRIENDS AND NEW BORDERS

photo: courtesy of Guy Gendron



Guy Gendron in Paris: "Canada is seen here as something better than an ally—a brother."

Guy Gendron is the European correspondent for Radio-Canada's "Le Téléjournal." Gendron, 47, has been a television reporter since 1979, with postings in Sherbrooke, QC, Regina, Toronto, Ottawa, Washington, D.C. and, since 2001, in Paris. As the European Union undergoes its historic expansion, *Canada World View* asked Gendron for his observations about the future of Canada's relationship with Europe.

It's something I wasn't expecting when I arrived in Paris three years ago. I had known, of course, about the historic ties linking France and Canada—Quebec in particular—but I had not realized just how much they had become forward-looking bonds of friendship.

My last interview reminded me of this again. It was with a woman born during World War II to unknown parents, one of the 200,000 supposed "Children of the Boches" or children of German occupiers that France had ignored—for the luckiest of them—and most often despised. "It's really because you're from Canada that I accepted the interview," she told me, before adding "because in your country, you are still compassionate."

Obviously, no country has a monopoly on "compassion," but how many times when travelling across Europe have I encountered this same "prejudice" that plays in our favour? Lacking a colonial past and ambitions of domination, with a history of selfless solidarity illustrated by its participation in the two major wars of the last century, Canada is seen here as something better than an ally—a brother.

As Europe pushes its borders toward the East with its enlargement from 15

to 25 member countries, what does this represent for Canada? First—and this is cause for celebration—it is the result of what so many of our soldiers sacrificed their lives for. Canada's Ambassador to the EU, Jeremy Kinsman, is in a good position to talk about this. He began his diplomatic career in 1968 in Brussels. He remembers that era's builders of the European dream, whom he rubbed shoulders with every day, people who were 40 or 50 years old, witnesses to or actors in the horrors of the war that had torn their continent apart. They had vowed, as had others, "never again."

"They succeeded," Mr. Kinsman told me in an admiring tone a few days before the 10 new members joined the Union. "People say that with enlargement comes the end of the Cold War. That's true. But above all, it's the end of the wars of the 20th century in Europe."

One can readily suppose that it will take a number of years before the large European family learns to operate with 25 members. Not to mention that there is already talk of lengthening the list, pushing still farther to the East. Isn't Europe risking isolation by becoming preoccupied with managing the internal

tensions that will surely crop up? Undoubtedly so, especially since, with its 20 official languages, the EU will have a hard time speaking with a single voice!

And from a trade perspective, in creating a bloc of 450 million inhabitants, isn't Europe running the risk of withdrawing into itself to better manage the economic integration of its new members, which are on average twice as poor? Perhaps, but Canada would be mistaken if it didn't also see this opportunity. Think of what Italy, Spain or Ireland was like before they joined the Union. Those who believed in them at the time and invested in them are today reaping the rewards of prosperity.

Does the future hold the same fate for Lithuania and Poland? There are no guarantees, of course. But the opportunity is there and our friendships in "old Europe" may open many doors, especially as we benefit from that favourable prejudice that continues to be applied to us.

Former prime minister Jean Chrétien often liked to say when promoting Canada abroad that "we are North Americans but we are not Americans." And in Europe, particularly these days, that's a considerable asset. ♣