

Bourassa will defer to Mulroney in Paris

AH

QUEBEC (CP) — Premier Robert Bourassa says that, to avoid a major crisis within the French-speaking world, he agreed to allow Prime Minister Brian Mulroney to be the only Canadian to speak at the opening of the forthcoming meeting of French-speaking nations.

"I have a responsibility as a francophone," Bourassa said in a weekend interview.

"Already, the Paris summit has been long delayed because of the notorious Paris-Ottawa-Quebec triangle. If I assumed a rigid and uncompromising attitude, maybe there would be no other summits. So I'm forced to show flexibility."

Delayed by disputes

It took 15 years to organize the summit, scheduled Feb. 15-17, because of disputes over Quebec's status. Former prime minister Pierre Trudeau refused to give Quebec a special role, while France declined to take part unless Quebec was included.

"I could have said to Mulroney: 'If I don't speak at the opening

ceremony, I'm not going; I'll send (Gil) Rémillard (minister of international relations). It would make great headlines, but we wouldn't have any possibility of having a summit in Quebec in two years."

Seeks next meeting

In the interview, Bourassa seemed resigned to speaking only at the end of the meeting.

"If the heads of state who speak at the beginning represent a continent, the federal position of wanting to represent francophones of America is understandable.

"If we have a formula that allows the Quebec premier to speak at the closing ceremony with a special role that could be linked to a second summit, it will be acceptable for Quebec."

Representatives of the 15 organizing countries are to meet today to set the length of the opening and closing ceremonies.

Bourassa said Quebec is a logical place for the next francophone summit, to be held at least a year after the one in Paris.