

This indicates, as our guest Secretary Serra has pointed out in the past, that the "NAFTA has a bright future because of the complementary elements of our economies."

It is important to note that these Quebec enterprises are all manufacturing companies that either directly sell their products to Mexico -- like SR Telecom and Bombardier -- or that have concluded service contracts with their Mexican counterparts -- like Atelier Montréal Facilities. They have the common desire to take advantage of the market opportunities that are already opening in Mexico almost a full year before the NAFTA is due to come in effect.

Trade liberalization leads to new opportunities for Canadian exporters of goods and services. That is why trade liberalization has been and continues to be a primary objective of the Government of Canada.

We achieved freer trade with our most important trading partner, the United States, through the Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement more than four years ago. Now we have extended those provisions -- together with some improvements -- to Mexico, our largest trading partner in Latin America. And our overall goal is to further liberalize trade worldwide. That is what we have been working toward in the Uruguay Round of Multilateral Trade Negotiations in Geneva.

That is also Mexico's goal, and no one is better equipped to handle that daunting task than Secretary Serra.

Not only has he led his country to a successful conclusion of the NAFTA, but he is also in charge of the trade negotiations with Colombia and Venezuela (the Group of Three), as well as chairing ministerial meetings in the GATT. A former university professor of economics, Secretary Serra worked for several years in Mexico's Secretariat of Finance before becoming Secretary of Trade and Industry.

As former Minister of Finance, I must admit that a solid grounding in the economic realities of one's country is useful indeed when negotiating complex trade agreements.

Secretary Serra has been at the helm of Mexico's foreign trade for over four years now. As colleagues in charge of negotiations of the NAFTA for our respective countries, we have faced each other many times during the 14 months leading to a successful agreement.

Let me tell you that during the course of the NAFTA negotiations, I have come to appreciate and respect Secretary Serra's strong negotiating skills as well as his sense of humour. That reminds me of the third ministerial meeting, in Zacatecas.