

CANADA - FRANCE BILATERAL RELATIONS

The friendly relationship between Canada and France is deeply rooted in history and dates back more than 400 years to the earliest days of European exploration in Canada. Added to the ties of kinship which unite us is the painful experience of war. Twice during this century Canadian and French soldiers have fought side by side. The vitality of French culture throughout Canada is, above all, symbolic of our historical and natural bonds. Thus there exists great friendship for Canada in France and equally warm feelings for France in Canada.

However, until the early 1960s the relationship between France and Canada did not correspond to these historical and cultural links and it was not until the last fifteen years that an increasing range of exchanges in the cultural, political and economic fields have been established. The recent social and cultural changes in Quebec, an increased feeling of complementarity between French and Canadian interests in the international sphere and the desire of France to reach out and maintain a dialogue with all French-speaking Canadians, are reasons for this. Additionally, Canada's economic, political and cultural development has raised renewed French interest, allowing it to participate more fully in the development of the country and to make its interest better known in all regions of Canada. At the same time Canada, becoming more sure of its abilities, made known its economic presence in the world. It rediscovered Europe, and in particular France as a valuable economic partner.

Although these links have developed more strongly vis-à-vis Quebec, it is the wish of all Canadians to re-inforce bilateral ties. The importance which is attached to the visits of provincial premiers to France is proof of this. In the same way, before 1960, talks were warm but not substantial. During the 1960's, relations (between Canada and France) were strained at the same time that Franco-Quebec cooperation grew. But since this time the links have been rapidly reaffirmed.

Under the leadership of President Pompidou, this process was given an additional impetus. The visit to France of then Prime Minister Trudeau in 1974 consolidated the initiatives which had already been taken. Anxious to add new perspectives to the relationship, the two governments have shown a great willingness to increase the number of bilateral contacts and to expand into new fields of activity. The private meeting in December 1978 between President Giscard d'Estaing and former Prime Minister Trudeau can be seen in this light. The visit of Prime Minister Barre to Canada in February should erase all ambiguity on the French concept of non-interference in the internal affairs of Canada and of non-indifference towards the evolution of Quebec. To this concept is added the wish to enlarge, strengthen and deepen Franco-Canadian relations.

On either side of the Atlantic, there is a better awareness and appreciation of the other.

- the importance of France as an actor on the world stage, a role which has been steadily growing since the end of World War II,