

Ottawa, Quebec near accord on francophone summit roles

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Ottawa and Quebec are close to signing an agreement allowing Quebec and other provinces to take part in a summit of francophone nations early next year, Premier Pierre Marc Johnson said yesterday.

The deal, details of which he said would be announced "within hours or days," ends 15 years of negotiations between the governments over the form and extent of Quebec's participation in a "francophone Commonwealth."

Federal External Affairs Minister Monique Vézina and Quebec External Relations Minister Lise Beaudoin presented details of the agreement to their respective cabinets yesterday.

The agreement reportedly grants Quebec special, but not independent, status within a Canadian delegation to the summit, which Mr. Johnson said will occur in Paris in February.

The Quebec representatives would take part directly in discussions involving culture and education, sectors they have jurisdiction over within the Canadian federation.

Under the agreement, Quebec would be excluded from discussions among leaders on economic policy and international affairs.

The existence of the deal was made public Wednesday by Gil Rémillard, a Quebec Liberal party candidate in Jean-Talon and former constitutional adviser to Prime Minister Brian Mulroney.

Mr. Rémillard revealed the agreement because he feared the parties would make it public during the election campaign, thereby boosting the Parti Québécois Government's image.

Reached in Ottawa, Michel Amar, an aide to Mrs. Vézina, said the agreement was not timed to coincide with the Quebec election.

Mr. Johnson said Mr. Rémillard's disclosure of the accord was politically gauche.

"It's not one of the best subtleties I've seen from that candidate," he told reporters after a speech to a group of 300 Quebec civil servants and members of the PQ.