

Affairs has very recently completed a political and trade mission to Venezuela, bringing with him, I believe, people from the Canadian private sector to that country, where again he is seeking new commercial opportunities to exercise Canada's influence in that region. The honourable senator was really straining, I thought—possibly out of nostalgia for the job that he held on two different occasions over in the Pearson building—simply straining for something to criticize.

Senator MacEachen: I simply read the speech, that is all; perhaps one should not read it.

Senator Murray: The honourable senator should know that not everything is put into the Speech from the Throne.

Senator MacEachen: Not everything is mentioned in that speech, only the most important things. Africa has replaced the United States.

Senator Murray: Surely the honourable senator is not opposing what we have done and are doing in Africa. Surely he got to Africa once or twice during his own tour of duty as Secretary of State for External Affairs. There is much to be done in Africa.

I must say that the recent appointment of the Honourable David MacDonald as ambassador to Ethiopia is a very good sign, not just to the government of Ethiopia but to all of those in that region who look to Canada to play a leading role.

Senator MacEachen: Yes, we agree with you.

[*Translation*]

Senator Murray: Honourable senators, two years ago, the Mulroney government made a commitment to achieve national reconciliation. This commitment involves two elements. One is historical; the other is practical and related to the daily management of our federation and the many programs which require co-operation between the two levels of Government.

The historical objectives of national reconciliation to which our government has made a firm and lasting commitment remain to be achieved. These are the assent of Quebec to a constitutional agreement, as mentioned by the Leader of the Opposition earlier, and fulfillment of our constitutional commitment to the native people of Canada.

As Senator Cogger recalled the other day, these challenges do not date back only to 1982 or even to 1867, but to the very first days of our life together on Canadian soil.

In my opinion, the fight against regional disparities is also an essential element of national reconciliation. We have made a national commitment to eliminate these disparities to create equal opportunities throughout the country, to improve the standard of living in the disadvantaged regions and to achieve a more equitable distribution of economic development. We must not let economic disadvantages result in a feeling of resentment or regional alienation.

The spirit of consultation now prevails in our day-to-day federal-provincial relations. It is interesting to note that, during the last 24 months, there have been 32 meetings of first ministers, 467 meetings of ministers and 115 meetings of deputy ministers.

[Senator Murray.]

This commitment to consult comes from the fact that we recognize the provinces as full partners in Confederation and has brought about a renewal of harmonious federal-provincial relations. Thanks to this harmony and to a high level of mutual respect, there has been an impressive number of federal-provincial agreements. I have already mentioned the Atlantic, Western and Nova Scotia Accords.

A record 110 economic and regional development agreements have also been signed with the provinces, representing a total of \$4 billion.

I would also like to mention the creation of a yearly first ministers' economic conference, the elimination of major obstacles to the creation of a Francophone summit and the invitation made and accepted by provincial representatives to be present at GATT negotiations.

These agreements are proof positive that new channels of communication are being opened between the federal government and the provinces.

We shall therefore have to find solutions which will benefit everyone instead of exacerbating our differences.

● (1620)

[*English*]

The Leader of the Opposition mentioned Quebec. He must agree that there is an inherent instability for our country in a situation in which Quebec, a major partner in Confederation, the only province in which the majority of its population is French-speaking, does not assent to the Constitution agreed to by the federal Parliament and the other provinces. No one in this country should be complacent about the isolation of Quebec.

Quebec's refusal to participate in constitutional reform under the present circumstances is also a real impediment to future Constitution amendments, whether they relate to property rights, Senate reform or various jurisdictional issues that may need to be resolved or clarified.

The present Government of Quebec has enunciated five conditions which would allow Quebec to subscribe to the constitutional accord. In July the Prime Minister of Canada urged the premiers of the other nine provinces to undertake exploratory discussions, to ascertain whether formal negotiations would have a reasonable prospect of success. I want to say here that, of course, we are proceeding with very considerable prudence, for our part, on the part of Quebec and on the part of the other provinces. We must not get into formal negotiations and fail a third time. We believe—and our conviction is shared by the other partners in Confederation—that such a failure would be a disaster for the country.

Therefore, we have embarked with Quebec and the other provinces on an exploratory process to see whether there would be a reasonable chance of success in a formal negotiation. Such formal negotiation would be based on Quebec's five conditions, and that formal negotiation would be limited to the repatriation of Quebec and not involve other constitutional reforms. Once Quebec was on board, the federal government