

Canada's developing relations with the Europe of "Eighteen"

By Jean-Yves Grenon

"Canada, a largely European country" —
Count Sforzo G. Sforza, Assistant Secretary-
General of the Council of Europe

Ever since our country began to make a real effort to diversify its contacts within the framework of the "Third Option", Canadians, particularly those in the business world, have been learning more and more about the European "Nine", with whom Ottawa has, in fact, undertaken to negotiate a general agreement of major economic importance. However, we know little or nothing about the "other" Europe, the 18 democratic states making up the Council of Europe, which has its headquarters in Strasbourg, despite the fact that it is the oldest postwar European body and organizes joint programs in many fields — excluding defence — that affect man and his environment. With its 18 member countries, the Council of Europe covers a larger area — from Ankara to Reykjavik, with 320 million inhabitants — and has a wider sphere of activity than any other European political organization. It took Canada a long time to recognize the value of seeking ties with this large group of countries, but we now seem ready to move quickly.

First organization

The Council of Europe was born in 1949 of Western Europe's general desire for stronger ties, and even for a United States of Europe, which was called for as early as 1946 by Winston Churchill in his Zurich speech. The historic Congress of Europe, held at The Hague in 1948 under the auspices of the so-called "federalist" movements, expressed similar sentiments. In response to a proposal by France and Belgium, a ten-nation study committee met in Paris late in 1948. The French and the Belgians advocated a formula based on progressive integration and a deliberative assembly, while the British would go no further than to suggest some kind of more or less continuing diplomatic conference. They eventually arrived at a compromise by creating a European organization that

was called not the European Union but the Council of Europe, and was based on a consultative assembly and a ministerial committee. Symbolically, Strasbourg, at the very heart of war-ravaged Europe, was chosen as the headquarters. The constitutive Statute, negotiated in the form of a treaty, was signed in London on May 5, 1949, by representatives of the ten founding members — France, Britain, Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, Italy, Ireland, Denmark, Norway and Sweden —, which were followed by Greece, Turkey, Iceland, the Federal Republic of Germany, Austria, Cyprus, Switzerland and Malta. The Statute aims at closer union in order to safeguard those ideals and principles that are the heritage of all Europeans. The first European organization had been born, and the European flame burned brighter than ever. That first assembly was later to inspire the creation of other parliamentary assemblies, such as those of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC), the European Economic Community (EEC) and the Western European Union (WEU). Internal developments in Spain and Portugal suggest that both countries will soon meet the requirements for membership of the Council.

As Counsellor at the embassies of Canada in Belgium and Luxembourg since 1972, Jean-Yves Grenon has often represented Canada at the Council of Europe in Strasbourg. He joined the Department of External Affairs in 1953, and has served in Italy, Chile, Venezuela and Senegal. In Ottawa, he was Chief of the Treaty Section and Director of the Division of African Affairs (francophone and Maghreb). During the academic year 1971-72, he was seconded to the University of Montreal as a Foreign Service Visitor. The views expressed in this article are those of Mr. Grenon.