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WHY CANADA WILL REMAIN UNITED

Excerpts from an address by Stéphane Dion, President of the Privy Council and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, Washington, D.C., on October 15.

I am speaking to you as both a Quebecer and a Canadian who is very attached to both his identities and never wants to have to choose between them. I know that the vast majority of Quebecers feel the same.... A poll conducted last February showed that 21 per cent of Quebecers appear to define themselves as Quebecers only, but that the rest, who represent the vast majority, identify themselves as Quebecers and Canadians, striking their own balance between those two identities....

Nevertheless, many Quebecers who are attached to their Canadian identity responded in the affirmative to the question put to them by the government of Quebec, on October 30, 1995, namely: "Do you agree that Quebec should become sovereign after having made a formal offer to Canada for a new economic and political partnership...?" Quebecers rejected, by a majority of 50.6 per cent, the option that the secessionist leaders had put forward for the second time in 15 years. Quebec and all of Canada came very close to being plunged into a crisis whose outcome would have been very uncertain.

Many Quebecers who are attached to Canada voted as the secessionist leaders wanted in the referendum because they didn't think that they were voting for secession. They wanted to affirm their Quebec identity, but did not think that they would have to give up their Canadian identity....

A poll conducted at the very end of the referendum campaign showed that close to 80 per cent of Quebecers who were planning to vote YES believed that, if the YES side won, Quebec would automatically continue its use of the Canadian dollar; 90 per cent felt that Quebec's economic ties with Canada would remain unchanged; and 50 per cent believed



Stéphane Dion, Canada's Minister for Intergovernmental Affairs, speaks at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington.

they would continue to use a Canadian passport. More than 25 per cent believed that Quebec would continue to elect federal members of Parliament. Another poll showed that almost one in five YES voters thought that a sovereign Quebec could remain a province of Canada....

Those Quebecers who support secession must understand that this plan means they would lose their Canadian identity.... They must also realize that secession, once achieved, would likely be irreversible and therefore would affect not only their contemporaries, but future generations as well.

Secession is tempting only among francophone Quebec voters.... Non-francophone voters [approximately 15 per cent of the Quebec electorate] cast their ballots overwhelmingly for Canadian unity, seeing no reason to choose between Quebec and Canada. Francophones must be shown that Canada in no way threatens their

language and culture, but rather the contrary. The fact is that since the beginning of Confederation, in 1867, Quebec has never been as francophone as it is today. The proportion of Quebecers capable of expressing themselves in French has reached the unprecedented level of 94 per cent. In my Montreal constituency, while I must often speak in English to senior citizens of Greek, Italian or Jewish origin, their grandchildren automatically speak to me in French.

The advancement of French in Quebec is due in part to Canadian and Quebec language laws implemented in the 1960s and 1970s.... In 1977, Quebec legislation imposed French-only commercial signage. In 1988 the Supreme Court of Canada ruled that a policy of French predominance was completely justified in this area, but that other languages could not be banned. That is the policy that

(continued on page 2)