

# Minorités linguistiques et société Linguistic Minorities and Society



## Language, Federalism and Canadian Diplomacy

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Number 20, 2023

Numéro anniversaire  
Anniversary Issue

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1094900ar>  
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1094900ar>

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### Publisher(s)

Institut canadien de recherche sur les minorités linguistiques / Canadian  
Institute for Research on Linguistic Minorities

ISSN

1927-8632 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

### Cite this article

Fraser, G. (2023). Language, Federalism and Canadian Diplomacy. *Minorités linguistiques et société / Linguistic Minorities and Society*, (20).  
<https://doi.org/10.7202/1094900ar>

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# Language, Federalism and Canadian Diplomacy

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## Abstract

Canadian diplomacy has greatly shaped Canada's debates over language and vice versa. How has the history of Canadian diplomacy reflected the bilingual and bicultural nature of the country? Or, conversely, how have Canada's debates over language and Quebec nationalism affected Canadian diplomacy? The answers are complex. Francophone diplomats played a key role in pushing for Canadian autonomy from Britain at the 1926 Imperial Conference. As Robert Talbot explained, "Canadian foreign policy was being shaped with French-Canadian and modern Anglo-Canadian priorities in mind." This role was less prominent over the following three decades but, with the election of the Quebec Liberals in 1960, federal diplomacy became directly challenged by Quebec's international ambitions. This tension reached a crisis point with the Montreal 1967 visit of General Charles De Gaulle, President of France, and again during the Quebec referendums of 1980 and 1995.

**Keywords:** language; nationalism; federalism; Canadian; diplomacy

## Résumé

D'une façon surprenante, la diplomatie canadienne a joué un rôle important dans les débats canadiens sur la langue et le fédéralisme, et vice-versa. Comment a l'histoire de la diplomatie canadienne réfléchi le caractère bilingue et biculturelle du pays? Ou, dit autrement, comment les débats canadiens sur la langue et le nationalisme québécois ont-ils affecté la diplomatie canadienne? Les réponses sont complexes. Les diplomates francophones ont joué un rôle clé en se faisant les promoteurs de l'autonomie canadienne à la Conférence impériale de 1926. Comme l'a expliqué Robert Talbot, « la politique étrangère du Canada était déterminée par les priorités des Canadiens français et d'Anglo-Canadiens modérés ». Ce rôle a été moins visible pendant les trois décennies suivantes, mais à la suite de l'élection des libéraux au Québec en 1960, la diplomatie canadienne s'est directement heurtée aux ambitions internationales du Québec. La tension entre les deux a atteint un point critique avec la visite à Montréal en 1967 du président de la France, Charles de Gaulle, et à nouveau lors des référendums de 1980 et de 1995 au Québec.

**Mots-clés:** langue; fédéralisme; Canadien; diplomatie; nationalisme

It is interesting to consider the degree to which Canadian diplomacy has echoed Canada's debates over language and the relationship between Ottawa and Quebec, and how Canada's language and constitutional debates have shaped Canadian diplomacy.

American diplomat Paul Kreutzer (n.d.) has proposed ten principles for diplomatic operations: national interest, credibility, clarity, comprehensiveness, understanding, perceptiveness, circumspection, confidence-building, decisiveness and perseverance and eight attributes of a diplomat: a remover of obstacles, an achiever of objectives, an effective cross-cultural communicator, a reliable representative, a proactive learner, an illuminating analyst, a principled decisionmaker and a positive team-builder.

I would argue that there are two key functions of Canadian diplomacy: to advance Canada's interests in a complex global environment, and to project the nature of the country in a world that often mistakes us for second-rate Americans.

How has the nature of Canada shaped Canadian diplomacy and the role of Canadian diplomats? In his 1963 book *The Canadian Diplomat*, Marcel Cadieux wrote:

Because of the country's dualistic and federal nature, because of its relations with England and the United States, and because of its rank as a middle power, (Canada's) diplomatic representatives...are men of compromise, of the effective solution instead of grand sensational projects.

Kelly, 2019, p. 154

How does Canada's dualistic and federal nature shape the country? First, we have two legal systems (common law and civil law) and two official languages. Because Canada is a federation, some of the main issues that diplomats are dealing with fall under provincial jurisdiction.

I would argue that language skills and, in particular, knowledge of Canada's two official languages are critical for interpreting national interests and key to understanding and perceptiveness; they also important play an important role in cross-cultural communication and reliably representing the country as a whole.

How has the history of Canadian diplomacy reflected the bilingual and bicultural nature of the country? Or, conversely, how has Canada's debate over language and Quebec nationalism affected Canadian diplomacy?

To answer the first question: not well. In 1937, when Laurent Beaudry, an acting under-secretary of External Affairs, tried to work in French, Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King viewed him as unstable (Granatstein, 1982, p. 6). Marcel Cadieux, who joined External Affairs in 1941, called Ottawa "the toughest of my foreign postings" (as cited in Laurendeau, 1990, p. 308, my translation). Two decades later, he told André Laurendeau that when he and his few French-speaking colleagues left the office on Friday to drive to Montreal, they would be reminded by a supervisor, only half in jest, to come back. "I remember one Monday morning when we stayed in the car for half an hour looking at the Parliament Buildings and wondering if we should take the road back to Quebec." Work was in English, and when he joined the department Cadieux's English was rudimentary. Years later, he told an unhappy Francophone officer posted abroad "if you want to affirm a principle, you can always write in French. If you want readers, it is necessary to write in English" (as cited in Kelly, 2019, p.127). I am afraid that sixty years on this advice still applies.

Nevertheless, Francophone Quebecers played an important role in promoting Canada's autonomy from Britain at the 1926 Imperial Conference, where the Canadian delegation was led by Prime Minister Mackenzie King and his minister of Justice, confidant and Quebec lieutenant, Ernest Lapointe, and included Henri Bourassa. As scholar Robert Talbot (2014) related, when they arrived in London:

King and Lapointe met with Bourassa at the Ritz Hotel to discuss the upcoming conference. Bourassa commended King and Lapointe for their ongoing assertion of Canadian autonomy, and all three agreed that they should continue to make common cause with the Irish Free State and South Africa.

p. 632

As Talbot (2014) explained, the terms were unveiled in the Balfour Declaration of November 18, 1926, which made clear that the Commonwealth was a free association of equal nations and stipulated that governors general were representatives of the Crown, and not of the British Government (p. 633).

This was an important turning point in Canadian autonomy and foreign relations. Talbot recounted that:

as Canada's representative to the League of Nations, Senator Raoul Dandurand, explained in 1926, "Je ne consens pas à être le sujet des sujets du roi. J'entends être le sujet direct du roi, tout comme les citoyens de Londres."<sup>1</sup>

In one heated exchange, when Canada's vote on several League Council items had not been officially recorded owing to its being part of the British Empire, Dandurand banged his fist on his desk and shouted that Canada was not "under anybody's wing and Canada should appear like any other member."

Talbot (2014) writes that in 1917:

Canadians had had virtually no say in the conduct of Canada's international affairs, resulting in the full-scale imposition of conscription in the name of imperial solidarity and collective security. Less than a decade later, Canadian foreign policy was being shaped with French-Canadian and moderate Anglo-Canadian priorities in mind.

p. 643

The Balfour Report was not without controversy. The *Toronto Mail and Empire* bemoaned the undermining of the connection to the British Empire, while *Le Devoir* called it "la grande Charte des Dominions"<sup>2</sup> and reprinted the entire document in French.

This laid the groundwork for the Statute of Westminster in 1931, which clarified the powers of Canada's Parliament. As Norman Hillmer affirmed (2015), "the Statute of Westminster offered a clear path to legal independence, but it did not make Canada independent" (p. 182). The Constitution could only be amended with British consent and the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council remained the final court of appeal.

Whereas French Canadians like Lapointe and Dandurand had played key roles in developing a place for Canada abroad, French Canadians at home were in a clearly subordinate position. French only appeared on stamps in 1927 (commemorating the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Confederation) and on the currency in 1937. French could be spoken in the House of Commons, but there was no simultaneous interpretation until 1958. Ottawa operated in English.

And how did Canadians perceive the nature of their country? For many, if not most English-speaking Canadians, Canada was a British country with a French-speaking minority—one that would inevitably disappear eventually, but that would have to be managed in the meantime. But its Britishness was not proof of a spirit of tolerance. “In English Canada today, while the old spirit can be re-awakened, the day has gone when every valiant Protestant soul could flame with anti-French and anti-papal zeal,” wrote Arthur M. Lower in 1958 in a section entitled Hatred as a virtue: Canada as a melting-pot of belief and prejudice: “Today, no responsible federal statesman of any party would ground his policies on inflammatory appeals to race and religion: in the eighteen-fifties, he would and did” (p. 274).

Canada was deeply divided between French and English, most dramatically during the conscription crises—first during World War I and again during World War II.

F. R. Scott (1938), a law professor at McGill and one of the founders of the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF), predecessor of the New Democratic Party, argued that these divisions were built into the decision to choose a federal system rather than a unitary state:

The choice was due to the insistence of the French Canadians upon the preservation of their own laws, customs and traditions, and also to the strong local patriotism of the Maritime Provinces, which were sceptical of the wisdom of confederation... Racial divisions and sectional feelings thus became embedded in the governmental structure.

p. 75

During this period, Scott was worried about the potential for fascism in Quebec, attacking what he called the “theo-pluto-bureaucracy,” or the provincial trinity of the Liberal Party machine, the Roman Catholic Church and St. James Street, the financial centre of Canada before the rise of Toronto and Bay Street (1986, p. 15.).

\* \* \*

During a period of gradual growth within the Canadian diplomatic corps and in the federal public service as a whole, Francophones were in a distinct minority: 22 percent in 1918, and less than 13 percent in 1946 (Kelly, 2019, p. 25). The French-speaking part of Canada’s identity was overshadowed by the English-speaking majority. As Granatstein put it, “This cultural blindness in Ottawa has to be seen as an unconscious expression of the English-Canadian view of Quebec as a land of happy (if slightly disloyal) peasants, notaries and priests” (1986, p. 6). And, regarding External Affairs, Kelly concluded that “the department was distinctly anglophilic” (2019, p. 25). Indeed, while Ernest Lapointe played an important role in foreign policy, Louis St. Laurent was the first Francophone secretary of state for External Affairs in 1946, and there was not another one until Paul Martin Sr. in 1963, and Jean Chrétien for two and a half months in 1984.

Marcel Cadieux, who had joined the department in 1941, worked tirelessly to attract French Canadians to the diplomatic corps. In 1947, he gave a lecture to Université de Montréal law students and subsequently toured Quebec universities with representatives of the Civil Service

Commission. In 1949, he published a book about the department, explaining the nature of diplomacy to French-speaking students. He did not shy away from describing the linguistic realities of the department. “For French Canadians, the knowledge of English is an absolute necessity,” he wrote (p. 62), adding later of the French-speaking diplomat “he must almost think in English” (p. 82).

But during the 1940s and 1950s, Ottawa had a monopoly on foreign policy and international diplomacy. The situation changed in 1960, with the election of the Quebec Liberal government of Jean Lesage. Lesage was a former federal Liberal cabinet minister who moved to Quebec politics and led the Quebec Liberal Party to a victory that ushered in what became known as the Quiet Revolution. The cabinet included men like popular TV journalist René Lévesque and lawyer Paul Gérin-Lajoie.

The period that followed World War II had not been without conflict with Ottawa—Union Nationale Premier Maurice Duplessis, a conservative nationalist, refused federal funding for the Trans-Canada Highway and for Quebec universities, but his preoccupations were provincial; he was not concerned with international affairs.

Quebecers who were interested in international affairs found Canadian embassies abroad unhelpful if not hostile. In 1956, Gérard Pelletier—a journalist and activist who ran for office as a federal Liberal in 1965 with Jean Marchand and Pierre Trudeau—insisted on speaking French at Canada House in London and was redirected to the French Embassy (Fraser, 2006, p. 105).

The Lesage government ushered in sweeping changes and Quebec began building a modern state. In October 1961, Jean Lesage opened the Quebec delegation in Paris, referring to “l’état du Québec”<sup>3</sup> and saying that the delegation would be “the prolongation of the action we have undertaken in Quebec itself” (“le prolongement de l’action que nous avons entreprise dans le Québec même.” as cited in Bernier, 1996, p. 37).

However, the Diefenbaker government had little interest in Quebec, French Canadians or in diplomacy with French-speaking countries and, as Kelly points out, recruitment from Quebec was dwindling as other institutions, like Radio-Canada and the Quebec government, were expanding opportunities for Francophones. Cadieux found this deeply frustrating. “The idea of Ottawa must constantly be kept alive among students,” he wrote a friend. “All the more so since in Quebec there is an extremely strange nationalist, indeed separatist revival” (as cited in Kelly, 2019, p. 126).

This set the stage for two major speeches by Paul Gérin-Lajoie in 1965, laying out what became known as the Gérin-Lajoie Doctrine, which stipulated that Quebec could act on the international stage in every area of provincial jurisdiction. Claude Morin, a senior public servant, was a driving force behind the implementation of the policy. (He later became a key minister in Lévesque’s Parti Québécois government.) Morin explained to his federal colleagues that with the Gérin-Lajoie Doctrine, Quebec was serving notice to Canada about the kind of constitution it wanted: one which allowed the province to negotiate and sign international agreements in areas of its jurisdiction. “This right was crucial since international relations, once narrowly defined, now encompassed all aspects of social life,” observed Kelly. “What became known as the Gérin-Lajoie Doctrine—that provincial responsibility at home was also provincial responsibility abroad—was a bold constitutional gambit” (Kelly, 2019, p. 195-196).

Canada’s internal tensions were playing out in the area of foreign policy. This was actually more of a threat than arguments about the creation of the Quebec pension plan or disagreements about jurisdiction over Indigenous issues in northern Quebec. As Eldon Black (1996) put it, “the Quiet Revolution and Quebec’s drive for an international personality created day-to-day concerns about Canada’s constitutional future” (p. 15).

Ottawa was not amused. Paul Martin issued a statement saying “Canada has only one international personality in the community of sovereign states” (as cited in Kelly, 2019, p. 196). This started an intense process of negotiations between Quebec City and Ottawa. As Kelly put it:

At the end of 1965, both the Lesage and Pearson governments got what they wanted most: for Quebec City, the strengthening of the direct relationship with Paris; for Ottawa, the preservation of its exclusive authority to sign agreements that were binding in international law.

p. 204-205

Behind the public statements by politicians, there was private animosity between public servants and advisors. Gérin-Lajoie’s speeches on the new policy position were written by André Patry, whom Marcel Cadieux had refused to hire at External Affairs and who had written a report for the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism that was never published. In this report he called Cadieux “authoritarian and intransigent” adding that he was “very intelligent but deeply emotional, he acts on impulse...allowing his anger and invective full expression” (as cited in Kelly, 2019, p. 195).

One matter that surfaces in different reports is the concern of public servants that their political leaders would back down from the positions that had been taken publicly—and the tensions that existed between public servants.

Claude Morin was very concerned that Jean Lesage might not support the Gérin-Lajoie Doctrine and tried desperately and unsuccessfully to reach him before reporters did. “Surprise!” writes Morin. “He declared himself to be in complete agreement with the position of his minister. It went without saying” (Morin, 1991, p. 106). And, as will be described later, Cadieux was worried that the federal government would not respond strongly to General Charles de Gaulle’s “*Vive le Québec libre*” speech in 1967, an incident to be subsequently discussed in greater detail.

What was at stake was two-fold: the capacities of the new, expanded Quebec state, and the legitimacy of the federal government in representing Quebec. For, as sociolinguist Monica Heller put it, Quebec nationalism was challenging the legitimacy of the Canadian state (Heller, 2002, quoted in Fraser, 2006, p. 26) and Quebec, with the support of France, was pushing the boundaries of the traditional role of Canadian provinces.

At the same time, Ottawa (the House of Commons, the public service and the diplomatic corps) was seen to be unwelcoming and unfriendly to Francophones. In 1962, when Conservatives lost their majority with the election of 26, largely unilingual, *créditistes* from small-town and rural Quebec, the new MPs raised the language issue every day. Why were the orders of the day, the menu of the parliamentary restaurant, the announcements at Union Station all English only? Why were the security guards unable to greet them and their constituents in French? Why were there no Francophone vice-presidents of the Canadian National Railway? The list went on and on (Fraser, 2006, p. 28-29).

According to Claude Morin, there were a number of factors leading Quebec to engage in international relations: a desire for openness to the world, concrete needs, the preservation of its constitutional jurisdiction, cultural specificity, the fact that Canada was poorly represented abroad by the federal government, and support from France (Bernier, 1996, p. 18). As a result, in 1965 Quebec signed an education agreement with France. (Black, p. 7)

Ottawa responded to the actions of Quebec in a number of different ways; notably, it pushed back against Quebec’s arguments and worked to make the federal government more welcoming for Francophones.

Led by Marcel Cadieux, who became undersecretary of state for External Affairs—the most senior position in the department—in 1964, there was an effort to hire more French-speaking diplomats. This involved internal pressure and changing the entrance exam. While not entirely successful, the first large contingent of Quebecers was hired in 1966 (Bartleman, 2004, p. 12).

The hiring of this cohort coincided with the publication of a study for the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism by Gilles Lalande (1969), which found an underrepresentation of Francophones:

It may very well be that the primary consequence of this underrepresentation and under-participation of French Canadians in the Department (of External Affairs), both of which are partly the reflections of a somewhat peculiar conception of biculturalism on the part of the English-speaking elite, has been to impair from the very beginning the projection abroad of a bilingual and bicultural Canada.

p. 165

Prior to this, the number of French-speaking recruits remained relatively small, and a number of senior diplomats, like Jean Chapdelaine and Claude Roquet, left the federal diplomatic corps to join Quebec's *Ministère des affaires internationales*.

As Kelly explained:

During the 1963 campaign, Pearson promised that he would visit Paris, London, and Washington shortly after the election, implying that France was as important to Canada as Britain and the United States were. The Liberals were responding to the growing threat of separatism in Quebec and the widely perceived failure of the Diefenbaker government to deal appropriately with French-Canadian issues... In Quebec, Jean-Marc Léger was writing articles in *Le Devoir* arguing that, since the English-speaking federal government was incapable of interacting credibly with the French-speaking world, it was incumbent upon Quebec to do so directly. As a result, from 1963 on, the Pearson government tried to inject more French into Canada's foreign policy, including closer relations with the countries of Francophone Europe (especially France), more development assistance to French-speaking Africa, and support for what would become known as La Francophonie.

B. Kelly, personal communication, January 10, 2022

Around the same time, one of Pearson's first acts on becoming prime minister in June 1963 was to create a Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism. In an interim report in 1965, the commissioners stated that, without fully realizing it, Canada was passing through the greatest crisis in its history.

A year later, in 1966, Pearson announced his government's policy on bilingualism in the public service. In summary, every public servant should be able to use English or French in the knowledge they would be understood, and the public should be able to communicate with the government in either English or French (Fraser, 2006, p. 102).

But the most dramatic incident in the tensions between the federal and Quebec governments came in July 1967. French president Charles De Gaulle was invited to the monumental exhibition undertaken as part of Canada's centennial celebration of Confederation, Expo 67, but instead of flying from Paris to Montreal, he came up the St. Lawrence in a French battleship, landed in Quebec City, and was driven in an open car from Quebec City to Montreal, cheered by crowds



along the way. At Montreal's City Hall, in an impromptu speech to thousands, he uttered the famous words "*Vive le Québec libre!*".

Pearson could not believe his ears:

This was the slogan of separatists dedicated to the dismemberment of that Canada whose independence de Gaulle had wished to see assured only a few years before, when he had proposed a toast to my health in Paris. This was a reflection on and almost an insult to the federal government.

Munro and Inglis, 1975, p. 267

Frank Scott, the former Dean of law at McGill and member of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism, was angry and vented his anger to Michael Pitfield, then senior advisor to Pearson. "Canada could not let his remarks pass without looking like a nonentity, an amorphous mass" (as cited in Fraser, 2021, p. 182), he wrote in his journal:

Should the Ottawa visit be cancelled? I said it would be better to rebuke de Gaulle, perhaps at the Canadian Pavilion at Expo, but still leave the invitation to Ottawa open; then he would have to decide for himself whether to finish his visit, accepting the rebuke, or to withdraw in a huff looking like a demoted politician. To him the choice.

as cited in Fraser, 2021, p. 182

Like Scott, Cadieux wanted a strong reaction from Ottawa. He was in disagreement with Jules Léger, the Canadian ambassador in Paris, and with Paul Martin, his minister, who both wanted a more moderate response to General de Gaulle's "*Vive le Québec libre*" speech and was relieved when Lester Pearson took a tough, uncompromising position.

In a television address and in a statement in the House of Commons, Pearson told de Gaulle his speech was unacceptable and the government issued a statement saying that Canada and Quebec were already free, and that 100,000 Canadians had died in two World Wars to free France. De Gaulle flew back to France, cancelling the trip to Ottawa, and later prophesied that Quebec would become independent (Black, 1996, p. 18).

As Granatstein put it, "the separatists were emboldened, and French-English relations, hitherto caught up in the euphoria of the Centennial (of Canada's Confederation) and Expo 67, were badly bruised" (1986, p. 274). It resulted in a firm response from the Pearson government, a series of initiatives by the French government dealing directly with Quebec, years of tension between Paris, Ottawa and Quebec City—and a veritable flood of books on the subject.

For several years, these tensions delayed the creation of an international organization of French-speaking states, the Organisation internationale de la francophonie (OIF).

It took a fair amount of water passing under the bridge before the deadlock was broken: the departure of Charles de Gaulle, Pierre Trudeau, and René Lévesque; the death of Marcel Cadieux in 1981, and the resignation of Claude Morin from the Parti Québécois cabinet in 1982.

The turning point came after the election of Brian Mulroney as prime minister of Canada in 1984. Mulroney had won a sweeping victory, in part because of his success in Quebec. After winning the televised debate with John Turner, he toured the Lac St-Jean region, drawing larger crowds at every stop. As thousands gathered to greet him on the Grande Allée in Quebec City, Gary Ouellet, one of his old friends and advisors, told a journalist about the key to his victory in the French-

language debate. “I knew we had won the debate when Brian uttered the two most beautiful words in the French language,” he said with a grin. “*Chez nous*” (as cited in Fraser, 1989, p. 33).

Mulroney capitalized on the lingering anger in Quebec over the patriation of the constitution without the Quebec government’s agreement. During that campaign, in a speech delivered in Sept-Îles, he promised to make it possible for Quebec to sign the constitution “with honour and enthusiasm.” (Mulroney, 1984) Upon his election, he was determined to break the cycle of hostility in the Ottawa-Paris-Quebec City triangle. As Mulroney recounts in his memoirs, he “spent part of the fall of 1985 negotiating a formula by which Quebec, New Brunswick and Canada could participate in the first Sommet de la francophonie in Paris” (Mulroney, 2007, p. 413). In February 1986 that first summit took place.

After Mulroney’s speech in the Palace of Versailles, French President François Mitterand leaned over and whispered “you see, Bree-an, what we have done. The Francophonie is now the equivalent of the British Commonwealth” (Mulroney, 2007, p. 415). Of course, this is not entirely true. Like the Commonwealth, it is a network, largely comprised of former colonies. In principle, it is understandable that countries that were colonized by France, like Senegal, should have the same kind of network of support as countries that were colonized by Britain, like Ghana.

Once Canada settled its disagreement with France and joined the organization, the controversy dissipated—only re-emerging during former Governor-General Michaëlle Jean’s mandate as OIF secretary-general, which generated embarrassing headlines about her expenses (Champagne, 2018). Similarly, the Commonwealth countries continue to meet with a minimum of acrimonious debate. Both organizations exist largely as frameworks for the distribution of aid, expertise and technology between wealthy and developing members. However, to a much greater extent than is the case for Britain and the Commonwealth, the Francophonie exists as an instrument for French diplomacy and as a network for French aid and cultural support. Canada has not made an effort to challenge French hegemony in the organization.

According to its website, the Francophonie is a network, a forum for discussion, an organization, “dedicated since 1970 to promoting the French language and political, educational, economic and cultural cooperation among the 88 member countries of the Organisation internationale de la Francophonie (OIF) [International Organisation of La Francophonie].”<sup>4</sup>

The discord that marked the Ottawa-Paris-Quebec City triangle for almost two decades no longer exists. However, whereas relations between Canada and France improved with the agreement over the Francophonie, international pressures over Quebec did not end.

In 1982, Gilles Loiselle, Quebec’s delegate general in London, played a key role in fighting Ottawa’s plan to patriate the constitution. Robert Sheppard and Michael Valpy (1982) described him as “a dapper ex-journalist and adroit political operator” who was “suavely skilled” (p. 187, p. 207). A former Radio-Canada correspondent in Paris, he very skillfully—but ultimately unsuccessfully—mobilized British members of Parliament to oppose the plan by Pierre Trudeau to amend and patriate the British North America Act. He identified about 250 parliamentarians who might be swayed and contacted them personally between October 1980 and November 1981 (Sheppard & Valpy, 1982, p. 215). Pierre Trudeau responded by saying that if the British MPs did not like his constitutional resolution, they would have to “hold their noses” and vote for it (Sheppard & Valpy, 1982, p. 221).

The issue was resolved when nine premiers and the federal government agreed on a constitutional package in November 1981—without Quebec. That settled it—but the bitterness created in Quebec meant that tensions would persist.

Brian Mulroney tried to end these tensions with the Meech Lake Accord, an agreement that would have recognized Quebec as a distinct society. When the accord failed in 1990, support for Quebec independence surged. Lucien Bouchard, a prominent Quebec lawyer and old friend of Mulroney's whom he had named ambassador to Paris before appointing him to cabinet, contributed to that failure with his dramatic resignation from the federal cabinet and brought the independence movement to Ottawa with the creation of the Bloc Québécois. Originally a disparate group of nationalist Quebec MPs united by their support of the Meech Lake Accord, the Bloc gradually became committed to Quebec independence under the leadership of Bouchard and his successor.

With the election of the *indépendantiste* Parti Québécois led by Jacques Parizeau in 1994, tensions between Quebec City and Ottawa resumed in earnest. Parizeau was determined to have a referendum, and winning international support for Quebec independence following a successful referendum was a crucial part of his strategy. He counted on quick recognition from France.

Prime Minister Jean Chrétien reacted by naming two Quebecers to key foreign policy positions: his nephew Raymond Chrétien, a career diplomat, as ambassador to Washington, and André Ouellet, as minister of Foreign Affairs. He needed a Quebec minister in the House of Commons responding to Bouchard—who was leader of the opposition. As Chrétien related in his memoirs, “at that stage I preferred to have a Francophone in that prestigious position if we had to fight the separatists in another referendum in Quebec” (2007, p. 26). In addition, he wanted to send a clear message to Washington that Canada was represented by a Quebecer who obviously spoke for the Prime Minister.

Since 1967, Canada's foreign policy has been driven in part by the desire to limit the impact of the Quebec independence movement in foreign capitals, and to counter what Ottawa saw as hostile intentions by France towards Canada in its flirtation with the Quebec government and the independence movement.

Relations with France got off on the wrong foot following Chrétien's election. During a visit by Quebec premier Jacques Parizeau to Paris in 1995, Canada's ambassador to France, former Conservative cabinet minister Benoît Bouchard, set off a minor diplomatic row when he called the president of the French National Assembly, Philippe Séguin, who was sympathetic to the cause of Quebec independence “a loose cannon.” (Winsor, 2001) Chrétien himself did not improve relations when he dismissed presidential candidate Jacques Chirac's comments about Quebec, described below, by suggesting that Chirac had as much chance of becoming president as the Parti Québécois did of winning its referendum.

While Canada had an amateur diplomat as its ambassador in Paris, Quebec had a professional one, veteran Claude Roquet, who had left External Affairs in the mid-70s because he felt he had little future there as a Francophone and joined Quebec's fledgling para-diplomatic service. He proved very effective in mobilizing French political support for Quebec. Chirac—who did later become president—made it clear that France would recognize Quebec's independence should Quebecers vote for independence in a referendum, a gesture that irritated Chrétien.

However, once Chirac became president, Chrétien did not have the luxury of a lingering quarrel. His chief of staff, Jean Pelletier, was a close friend of Chirac when they were both mayors, and he set to work reconciling the two men. It was somewhat successful as demonstrated by the fact that, two years after the 1995 referendum, Chirac delayed the issuing of a stamp commemorating the 30th anniversary of de Gaulle's “*Vive le Québec libre*” speech at Chrétien's request and then called Quebec independence “totally buried in Quebec.” (cited in Fraser, 2005, p. 175)

At the time, Quebec was seeking to open an office in Washington, and External Affairs responded by appointing someone in the Canadian Embassy responsible for representing the provinces and conveying the clear message that Canada spoke with one voice. Canadian diplomats in Washington

worked hard during the 1995 referendum to maintain the American position in favour of a united Canada; whereas, Quebec representatives in the United States worked to develop a network of allies.

Following the very narrow defeat of the 1995 referendum on Quebec independence, Parizeau resigned and Lucien Bouchard became Quebec premier. Chrétien responded by naming Stéphane Dion as federal Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, who aggressively challenged Bouchard, point for point.

In the fall of 1999, Dion organized an international conference on federalism at Mont Tremblant. Seven Bloc Québécois members of Parliament came to the conference and swarmed international delegates with their criticisms of Canadian federalism, and Lucien Bouchard used his role as host premier to deliver a scathing attack on Ottawa. The following day, President Bill Clinton gave a brilliant improvised speech in defense of federalism. *Toronto Star* columnist Chantal Hébert compared the dynamic at Mont Tremblant to that of the 1995 referendum: Jean Chrétien uttered platitudes, the federalists greatly underestimated the sovereignists, and Bill Clinton came to the rescue (Fraser, 2000, p. 23-24).

When the federal Liberals won more votes in Quebec than the Bloc Québécois in the federal election of November 2000, Bouchard resigned and was replaced by Bernard Landry, who served as premier from 2002 to 2003. But not all of the relations were conflictual. On the international front, Quebec's minister of International Affairs, Louise Beaudoin, worked with Sheila Copps, Minister for Canadian Heritage on the adoption of the UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity in 2001. However, feeling that she had been misled, Beaudoin accused the federal government of lying for not permitting Quebec premier Bernard Landry to participate in the Summit of the Americas, an international gathering that brings together leaders of countries in the Organization of American States.

In the almost two decades since the defeat of Landry's Parti Québécois—with the exception of Pauline Marois' brief tenure as premier from 2012–2014—the sovereignty movement has been in decline and, as a result, tensions between Ottawa and Quebec City on the international scene have diminished significantly.

However, at the same time there has been a decrease in Francophone recruits to Global Affairs Canada, and fewer Francophones have been promoted than their Anglophone counterparts. In a study of internal documents released under *Access to Information Act*, *Le Devoir* found that 74 percent of Anglophone candidates were promoted when they represented 68 percent of the candidates (Proulx, 2021). After examining the documents obtained by *Le Devoir*, Professor Jean-François Savard of the École nationale d'administration publique in Quebec City concluded that the Francophones who were most successful in the competitions were those who were most fluent in English, such as those who had grown up in a minority language community.

Thus, as debates over language and national unity slipped into the background, so did the role of Francophones in Canadian diplomacy. And, although the debate has re-emerged in Canada over Quebec's amendments to its language legislation, this has yet to echo on the international stage.

## Notes

[1] “Je ne consens pas à être le sujet des sujets du roi. J'entends être le sujet direct du roi, tout comme les citoyens de Londres.” [“I do not consent to being the subject of the King's subjects. I

expect to be the direct subject of the king, just as the citizens of London are.”] (as cited in Talbot, 2014, p. 634).

[2] “la grande Charte des Dominions” [“the Magna Carta of the Dominions”]. Talbot, p. 634

[3] “L’état du Québec” [“the state of Quebec”] (as cited in Bernier, 1996, p. 37).

[4] (<https://www.francophonie.org/francophonie-brief-1763>)

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