



**Report of the Canadian Parliamentary Delegation  
to the Francophone Conference of the National Assembly of  
Hungary**

**Canadian Branch of the Assemblée parlementaire de la  
Francophonie (APF)**

**Budapest, Hungary  
October 30 and 31, 2008**

# Report

The parliamentary delegation of the Canadian Branch of the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie (APF) that attended the Euro-Atlantic Francophone Conference of the National Assembly of Hungary on October 30 and 31, 2008, has the honour to present its report. Composed of the Honourable Rose-Marie Losier-Cool, Senator, the delegation was accompanied by Mr. Eric Janse, Clerk Assistant and Director General, International and Interparliamentary Affairs Directorate, Parliament of Canada.

The following countries sent parliamentarians to participate in the conference: Belgium, Canada, France, Hungary and Switzerland.

## Context

The conference was organized in the context of 2008 being the Parliamentary Francophone Year in Hungary and on the occasion of the 15th anniversary of the Hungarian Parliament's participation in the Francophonie as an associate branch of the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie. While there are only 60,000 francophones in Hungary (out of a population of 10 million), Hungary takes its implication in the Francophonie and the APF very seriously. For example, the delegation heard that many in the country believe that Hungary's acceptance and membership into NATO was in large part facilitated by its participation in the Francophonie. To this end, the Speaker of the Hungarian National Assembly, Ms. Katalin Szili, invited a number of francophone parliaments to participate in this commemorative conference. Two main conference themes were identified by the conference organizers, namely "The role of Francophone parliaments in the strengthening of democracy" and "The influence of the French language and civilization on society in an era of globalization".

## Thursday, October 30, 2008

Prior to the opening of the conference, the delegation benefited from a briefing at the Canadian embassy by Canada's ambassador to Hungary and Slovenia, Mr. Pierre Guimond. Thereafter, both Senator Losier-Cool and Mr. Janse made a joint presentation on the subject of "Canadian parliamentary diplomacy in French" to an audience at the embassy. This was in the context of a monthly noon hour seminar series the embassy organizes on the theme of "French, the language of diplomacy". Many in the audience were employees of the Hungarian Department of Foreign Affairs who were eager to improve their French language skills given that Hungary assumes the presidency of the European Union in 2011. The Canadian embassy, through their noon hour seminars and other means, is assisting to prepare Hungarian public servants to work in French during this period.

## Friday, October 31, 2008

The conference was held in the historic National Assembly of Hungary. The proceedings were officially opened with a speech by **Speaker Szili**. In welcoming the delegates she reiterated the reason for the conference, namely, to celebrate the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the formal inclusion of Hungary in the Francophonie. She noted that the

meeting affords an opportunity to review progress made to date on a number of issues and to look forward to what are the challenges lying ahead. Speaker Szili indicated that the principles of the Francophonie were also the principles of Hungary, notably, dialogue, democracy, human rights and solidarity. She noted how proud Hungary was to belong to the rich diversity of cultures ranging from Europe to Africa to the Americas represented by the Francophonie. She described the influence that French culture had on Hungary as well as some influential Hungarian writers and artists that studied in France and enriched the Francophonie. In closing, she wished the delegates at the conference fruitful discussions on how to continue to share and advance the principles of the Francophonie.

The next speaker was **Ms. Rozsa Hoffmann, Chair of the Hungarian Branch of the APF and Chair of the Hungary-France Friendship Group**, who outlined the history of the Parliament of Hungary's involvement with the APF as well as the role the association plays in reinforcing bilateral relations, democratization and improving the standards of living for all citizens but especially women and youth. She noted that the conference was just one way that the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Hungary's inclusion in the Francophonie would be celebrated, other events include upcoming scheduled official visits to both France and to Switzerland. Mme Hoffmann described the role that parliamentarians must play in ensuring that the elements contained in Francophonie Summit declarations are implemented, citing for example the need for fair elections and the fight against terrorism. While she noted that there are many difficult challenges facing the members of the Francophonie, by working together and using French as the language of democracy, progress can be made and solutions can be found.

**Mr. André Bugnon, Speaker of the Swiss National Council** spoke next and began by noting that relations between Switzerland and Hungary go back for a long time and that the Swiss have a particular respect for the long struggle that Hungary undertook in its quest for freedom of speech. He outlined how there is a continuous need to reinforce democratic principles and cited the increasingly multicultural nature of Swiss society as an example. He noted that French is an important integration tool and that multilingualism contributes to harmony, unity and the consolidation of democracy.

**Senator Losier-Cool** spoke next and commenced her intervention by describing the bilingual nature of Canada as enshrined in the constitution. She went on to outline how Canadians have great faith in parliamentary democracy as a system of governance and as a result, federal parliamentarians promote its use on the international scene. Canada's participation in the Francophonie is a key component of its foreign policy as it gives privileged access to 55 countries and governments. She noted that in conjunction with the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of Quebec City, Canada recently hosted the 12<sup>th</sup> Summit of the Francophonie. Given the impact of globalization and its impact on citizens, it is increasingly important for parliaments and parliamentarians, and not just governments, to address international challenges (for example the current world economic crisis). It is for this reason that the Parliament of Canada is active in a range of international parliamentary associations such as the APF.

The Senator went on to describe the work of the Network of Women Parliamentarians of the APF that she has chaired since 2007. She described the various seminars that have been held to exchange experience and knowledge between women parliamentarians

and to seek solutions to numerous problems including reproductive health and the fight against rape and female genital mutilation. She also outlined other means by which Canadian parliamentarians promote democracy including official visits and events hosted by the Speakers of the Senate and the House of Commons as well as election observation missions. She also noted the Parliamentary Officers' Study Program at the Parliament of Canada that offers an opportunity for staff from other parliaments to learn about the various procedural, administrative and research services provided at the Parliament of Canada. She concluded by indicating that parliamentary diplomacy will continue to give Canada a method to share its experiences but also to learn from other jurisdictions and that the use of the French language to do so will facilitate the process.

**Mr. Robert del Picchia, French Senator and Chair of the France-Hungary Friendship Group**, was next to make an address and he reminded the delegates of the slogan of the European Union, "United in diversity". He explained that exchanges between parliamentarians is a manner to reinforce democracy. For example, he noted that at meetings of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) some 150 countries are represented. Close to 50 of those countries also belong to the APF so it is a very useful network that can be called upon when certain resolutions come before the IPU assembly for debate. He went on to describe how the member states of the Francophonie come to the defence of their fellow members whose systems may come under attack. He cited active and vigilant election observation missions as an example. He closed by stating that parliamentarians have rights but also responsibilities including the ongoing need to keep their own governments to account for their actions.

**Ms. Claude Greff, member of the French National Assembly** spoke next and like the previous intervenors, congratulated Hungary for its active participation over the last 15 years in the Francophonie and specifically in the APF. Turning to the theme of globalization, she noted that this was especially important given the current economic crisis and the ongoing threat to smaller cultures that "Americanization" poses. To this end, she noted that while in the past French was often the language used by the elites, including diplomats, this is no longer the case. Internationally the French language is a living, working language that affords an opportunity for people from many countries and many continents to work together in an era of globalization. This sense of solidarity and cooperation is one of the strengths of the Francophonie and allows it to collectively seek solutions to global challenges.

**Mr. Freddy Deghilage from the Parliament of the French Community of Belgium** concluded the first part of the conference. He noted that the Francophonie is in perpetual evolution. To its advantage, it is rich in diversity and as such can act as a mobilizing agent. For example, the APF has both national and subnational members which permits participation by those who have a very close and direct implication with citizens. He stressed that it is not necessary to have French as a first language in order to seek the advantages of the Francophonie. Globalization offers an opportunity to the Francophonie by testing its ability to adapt and to contribute to the collective well being.

The second part of the conference witnessed interventions by a number of academics involved with the Francophonie in one capacity or another. For example, a Hungarian

professor of law noted that the legal – judicial sector is another sector of cooperation for the international francophone community. He noted that often international courts use as methodology the English-based common law system which differs from the French-based civil code system. Cooperation between francophone legal specialists can decrease the possibility of this reality having negative consequences.

Another academic stressed the need for extensive language schools in order to promote reconciliation and problem solving between ethnic groups, nations and countries. Yet another indicated that the Francophonie has a large geographic base and represents significant global power but nonetheless has its challenges. The increased use of “Franglais” was cited as was the dominance of English in the I.T. sector. To counterbalance, he noted that an international association of French I.T. specialists exists within the Francophonie.

One of the highlights of the presentations was when one university professor invited two of her students to briefly say a few words to the assembly. This led to two moving interventions on how these two young people say their lives enriched by their use of French and the importance of preserving and promoting the language.

The remainder of the conference was dedicated to debate and spontaneous interventions. For example, one Hungarian Member of the European Union (EU) Parliament made the case that the use of French at that institution was in constant need of bolstering. This sentiment was echoed by a French Senator who supported the notion of maintaining and reinforcing the use of French at the EU Parliament. This in turn led to a discussion about the feasibility of creating a section of the APF at the EU Parliament. It was noted that this would pose a financial challenge at a time when there are already multiple demands on available funds. TV-5 Monde was cited as an example of an important resource for the Francophonie and the need to continue to fund it accordingly was raised. Finally, one Hungarian intervenor noted that English is often heavily dominant in the military but that it remains desirable to maintain the use of French as well, especially at the officer level. He noted the special French language training being undertaken by the military also in anticipation of Hungary assuming the EU Presidency in 2011.

The conference ended with agreement that this should be just the beginning of an ongoing dialogue between Hungary and other members of the Francophonie. Supporting democracy and adapting to globalization are but two of the challenges facing the Francophonie. Working together will afford opportunities to seek mutually beneficial solutions.

That evening the delegation was invited to the embassy-organized presentation of the recently released film *Infiniment Québec* by Jean-Claude Labrecque. Senator Losier-Cool made some introductory remarks to the audience that had gathered at the Institut Français de Budapest.

The delegation would like to thank Speaker Szili for having invited the Parliament of Canada to participate in this conference that offered an opportunity to strengthen both the bilateral parliamentary relations between Canada and Hungary but also to bolster the linkages between active members of the APF.

The delegation also wishes to express special thanks to Ambassador Pierre Guimond and the staff of the Embassy of Canada in Budapest for their assistance in organizing a successful program.

Respectfully submitted,

Rose-Marie Losier-Cool, Senator  
Member of the Canadian Branch of the  
*Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie (APF)*

## Travel Cost

<b>ASSOCIATION</b>	Canadian Branch of the <i>Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie (APF)</i>
<b>ACTIVITY</b>	Francophone Conference of the National Assembly of Hungary
<b>DESTINATION</b>	Budapest, Hungary
<b>DATES</b>	October 30 and 31, 2008
<b>DELEGATION</b>	
SENATE	Hon. Rose-Marie Losier-Cool
HOUSE OF COMMONS	
STAFF	Eric Janse
<b>TRANSPORTATION</b>	<b>\$6,442.99</b>
<b>ACCOMMODATION</b>	<b>\$ 959.15</b>
<b>HOSPITALITY</b>	<b>\$ 0.00</b>
<b>PER DIEMS</b>	<b>\$ 625.72</b>
<b>OFFICIAL GIFTS</b>	<b>\$ 28.00</b>
<b>MISCELLANEOUS</b>	<b>\$ 52.58</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$8,108.44</b>