



Report

**Visit of the Honourable Andrew Scheer, M.P.,
Speaker of the House of Commons,
and a Parliamentary Delegation,
Paris, France,**

September 9-11, 2013

The Honourable Andrew Scheer, M.P., Speaker of the House of Commons, led a parliamentary delegation that visited France from September 9 to 11, 2013.

The delegation has the honour to present its

Report

The Canadian delegation comprised the following members:

- The Honourable Andrew Scheer, M.P., Speaker of the House of Commons;
- Mrs. Jillian Scheer;
- The Honourable Judy Sgro, P.C., M.P.;
- Mr. Jacques Gourde, M.P.;
- Ms. Anne-Marie Day, M.P.;
- Ms. Kenzie Potter, Chief of Staff, Office of the Speaker; and
- Mr. Simon Larouche, Delegation Secretary.

Context

France is a presidential republic with an estimated population of 63.4 million. Executive powers are vested in the president of the Republic, elected by direct universal suffrage for a maximum of two consecutive five-year terms. The president appoints the prime minister, who in turn forms a cabinet. Legislative powers are exercised by the bicameral Parliament, made up of the Senate (348 senators) and the National Assembly (577 members).

The current government is led by President François Hollande. His May 2012 election was followed by the Socialists winning a majority in the National Assembly in June 2012 and was preceded by a majority by the left in the Senate during elections in September 2011. Since that time, major political tensions have developed in France, resulting in the Social government's plummeting popularity. France's gross domestic product makes that country the world's fifth largest economy. However, France is currently experiencing a significant economic downturn that began in 2011, with virtually zero growth in 2012 (0.03%), 10.23% unemployment and a public debt level that is still out of control despite special tax policies.

Although relations between Canada and France are harmonious, there have been a few areas of divergence recently, including the creation of a "North America" electoral district during the Republic's 2012 legislative election and France's claim over an extended area of continental shelf off Saint-Pierre-et-Miquelon. If France had initially supported with enthusiasm the Canada-EU free trade agreement, one has to wonder if France is not now indisposed with certain areas of the negotiations, for example Canadian beef exports, pharmaceutical patents for generic drugs, access to public markets in Canada and dairy quotas.

The delegation's visit was in the context of trade negotiations, and its primary goal was to reinforce ties between the two countries. The specific objectives of this mission were to build effective relationships with the President of the National Assembly, Claude Bartolone; open a France-Canada parliamentary dialogue with French Senators and Members; and learn about French perspectives on the economy, bilateral and multilateral trade, and agricultural issues. In addition to providing the delegates with an opportunity to discuss France's political situation, the visit gave them a better understanding of how the French parliamentary system works.

Meetings

During its visit to Paris, the delegation met with the following people:

- Mr. Jean-Pierre Bel, President of the Senate;
- Mr. Claude Bartolone, President of the National Assembly;
- Ms. Nicole Bricq, Minister of Foreign Trade;
- Mr. Alain Vidalès, Deputy Minister for Parliamentary Relations; and
- Mr. Guillaume Garot, Deputy Minister of Agrifood.

Meeting with Mr. Jean-Pierre Bel, President of the Senate

The delegation met with the President of the Senate and three senators from the mainstream parties represented. The parliamentarians began by discussing the similarities and differences between the Canadian and French parliamentary agendas, the impact of a parliamentary prorogation, the use of omnibus bills, and the relationships between both countries' upper and lower chambers. The discussion then turned to the legitimacy of the French Senate and the election of senators. President Bel explained the political aspect of his parliamentary role in contrast to a speaker in a Westminster-style parliamentary institution. The senators in attendance spoke about their day-to-day work split between the Senate and their respective electoral districts. The Canadian delegation then asked President Bel about the government's plans to introduce legislation bringing an end to the practice of politicians holding multiple elected offices concurrently. The French parliamentarians then in turn asked the delegation about the Canadian parliament's possible withdrawal from the Inter-Parliamentary Union and how seriously this was being considered. Speaker Scheer presented the Canadian position while emphasizing how limited his role is in the decision-making process. President Bel then detailed France's position on Syria and the possible use of chemical weapons. The Canadian delegates shared a range of views on the issue.

Meeting with the Honourable Claude Bartolone, President of the French National Assembly

The Honourable Claude Bartolone welcomed the delegates on the steps of the National Assembly and then led them to his office. Accompanied by French parliamentarians and National Assembly officials, President Bartolone highlighted the numerous points France and Canada had in common, such as respect for

human rights. He also referred to both countries' foreign policy initiatives, such as Canada's recent involvement in Mali. He said that he was pleased to welcome Speaker Scheer and the Canadian delegation despite the troubled international situation, referring to the Syrian regime's possible use of chemical weapons. This led to a lengthy discussion about whether France has a duty to intervene. The Syrian regime's intentions and France's role in global affairs were also discussed. The discussion turned to relations between the two countries, the upcoming D-Day commemorations, and economic opportunities between both countries. The Speaker and the President both spoke about the importance of the trade negotiations underway between Canada and the European Union.

Meeting with Ms. Nicole Bricq, Minister of Foreign Trade

Following the customary greetings, Minister Bricq began by presenting the key components of her government's international trade policies and the various initiatives to improve youth employment and the efficiency of French companies. She also highlighted the importance of Canadian investment in France's economy. In answer to a question from the Speaker, she outlined the process for negotiating and ratifying the free trade agreement between Canada and the European Union. The Ambassador of Canada, the Honourable Lawrence Cannon, remarked that the Canadian government was confident that an agreement would be reached soon. The Minister pointed out that a number of compromises were needed from both sides and that there were no guarantees that the negotiations would be successful. The discussion turned to the role of French businesses in Canada and major economic development projects in Western Canada.

Meeting with Mr. Alain Vidalès, Deputy Minister for Parliamentary Relations

Accompanied by his chief of staff and political staff, the Minister said he was delighted to meet the speaker of a legislative assembly of a country with such a long democratic tradition. He detailed his key role as the government's interlocutor with Parliament, a role similar to that of the government house leader in Canada. He then went on to discuss the various parliamentary reforms being considered by the French parliament and the need to revitalize parliamentary democracy. Speaker Scheer asked the Minister about his government's legislative and political priorities such as the proposal to reform pension financing, the ban on elected officials from holding multiple offices, youth unemployment and possible military intervention in Syria.

Meeting with Mr. Guillaume Garot, Deputy Minister of Agrifood

The Minister started off by stressing the importance of the trade negotiations underway between Canada and the European Union. He said that the outcome of such an economic agreement would serve as a model for future negotiations; however, such an agreement will not be signed at any cost. The Minister added that balanced concessions will be needed from both sides and that public opinion in both countries needs to understand the agreement. In response, Speaker Scheer agreed that a good agreement needs to benefit both Canada and European Union countries. The Minister then expressed interest in visiting

Canada to gain a better understanding of Canada's agri-food industry, particularly the dairy industry's supply management system.

Other activities

The delegation attended a luncheon at the official residence of the Canadian Ambassador, the Honourable Lawrence Cannon, in the company of Canadian and French business representatives. The delegates also met with members of the France–Canada Interparliamentary Association and then attended question period. The delegation also visited Sarthe, a department with a strong agricultural base. Lastly, the delegates were given a guided tour of the Palace of Versailles, where Parliament meets in “congress” (a joint meeting of both chambers of the French parliament).

Acknowledgements

The delegation would like to thank the staff at the Canadian Embassy in Paris for their assistance in preparing the visit and during the meetings, as well as for accompanying them to their various destinations. Special thanks to the Honourable Lawrence Cannon, Canada's Ambassador to France, for his unconditional support and availability.

Respectfully submitted,

The Honourable Andrew Scheer, M.P.,
Speaker of the House of Commons

Travel Costs

Visit of the Honourable Andrew Scheer, M.P., Speaker of the House of Commons and a Parliamentary Delegation, Paris, France, September 9-11, 2013

TRAVEL	\$28,178,37
ACCOMMODATION	\$7,216,27
PER DIEMS	\$3,420,38
PROTOCOL	\$1,162,73
MISCELLANEOUS	\$4,145,79
TOTAL	\$44,123,54