

Canada - France
Interparliamentary Association



Association interparlementaire
Canada - France

**Report of the Canadian parliamentary delegation
on the second round of the legislative elections**

Canada-France Interparliamentary Association

**Paris, France
June 13-18, 2007**

Report

On May 16, the new president of the French Republic, Nicolas Sarkozy, officially began his five-year mandate as Head of State. Sarkozy, representing the centre-right UMP (*Union pour un mouvement populaire*) won 53.1% of the vote to defeat his socialist rival, Ségolène Royal, in the presidential election held on May 6. Record voter turnout (84 %) illustrated the importance the French public placed on this election. The election was notable for the down-turn in support for the extreme right, represented by Jean-Marie Le Pen's National Front Party (10 % of the vote at the first ballot) and the rise in support for the centre, represented by François Bayrou (18 %).

The high voter turnout suggested a thirst for change with regard to France's economic and social policies. The French recognised that there was a real need for reform and, in voting for the bigger parties, called for greater efficiency.

On May 17, Nicolas Sarkozy appointed François Fillon, a former minister under Chirac, as Prime Minister and mandated him to form a new government. A streamlined government comprising 19 ministers and Secretaries of State, 12 of whom are men and 7 of whom are women, was duly named.

The honeymoon period began. President Sarkozy enjoyed a 67% approval rating, unseen since the days of Charles de Gaulle. The legislative elections held on June 17 echoed this result, comfortably returning a UMP majority to Parliament.

Opinion polls revealed that, in voting for Sarkozy, the French were both recognising a need for reform and demanding that it be forthcoming. There was consensus as to the need for major structural reform to stimulate employment, revive competitiveness, renew education and training systems, promote innovation, and improve efficiency in the public sector.

At the first round, voter turnout was 60.50%, with President Sarkozy's party winning 39.54% of the vote and the socialists 24.73%.

This was the lay of the land when the Canadian delegation went to France on a parliamentary mission during the second round of the legislative elections. The visit allowed the Canadian parliamentarians both to establish relationships with their French counterparts and to advance parliamentary dialogue on areas of mutual interest.

The delegation would like to thank Mr. Claude Laverdure, Canadian Ambassador to France, as well as all of the representatives of the Canadian Embassy in Paris, particularly Marc Berthiaume and Julie Normand from the Policy Division, for their efforts in making this visit a resounding success. The members of the delegation returned home certain that their visit had contributed to the renewal and the strengthening of parliamentary ties between the two countries.

A brief overview of the French legislative elections

The legislative elections allow the French public to elect deputies to the National Assembly. The National Assembly comprises 577 deputies who are elected by direct universal suffrage for a renewable five-year mandate, except in the event of the dissolution of the National Assembly (Article 24 of the Constitution).

There were **7 639** candidates, of whom 3 177 were women. Almost **44.5 million electors** were called to the polls to elect their **577** representatives at the National Assembly.

The National Assembly has been dissolved five times since 1958: in 1962, 1968, 1981, 1988 and 1997. The National Assembly may not be dissolved in the year following a general election.

The vote is organised by electoral district, with each electoral district corresponding to a seat in the National Assembly. Members are elected by a two-ballot, first-past-the-post system.

In order to be elected, a candidate must:

- ▶ **In the first ballot**, win an absolute majority of votes cast, equal in number to 25% of registered voters;
- ▶ **In the second round**, win a relative majority. In the event of a tie, the older candidate shall be elected. To stand in the second ballot, the candidate must have obtained a number of votes equal to at least 12.5% of registered voters.

June 13, 2007

The delegation met **Mr. François Logerot**, Chairman of the National Campaign Accounts and Political Funding Commission, who provided a broad overview of the election financing system for candidates and political parties.

Responsibilities incumbent upon candidates

Candidates are required to respect a number of rules. They must:

- designate a financial trustee (a natural person or an association) and register him with the *préfecture* at the beginning of the election campaign. The financial trustee will open a bank account for the monitoring of financial transactions (receipts and expenditure);
- not exceed the expenditure ceiling for the election in question;
- submit their campaign accounts to an auditor, unless no expenditure has been made and no receipts received;
- table a campaign account with the Commission that is either balanced or in surplus;
- table all supporting documents for expenses and receipts.

Possible outcomes

After having examined the campaign accounts, a number of options are open to the Commission. It may:

- approve the campaign account;

- approve the account with amendments, particularly where the submitted expenses are not attributable to electoral expenditure;
- reject the account for failure to comply with the electoral rules (no auditor, gift from a corporation, account in deficit, expenditure ceiling exceeded ...).

The Commission may also signal that an account has not been tabled or has been tabled after the deadline.

Consequences of the Commission's decision

If an account is rejected, not tabled or tabled after the deadline, the candidate will not be entitled to have his campaign expenses reimbursed and the matter will be referred to the elections judge who may:

- either declare the candidate ineligible;
- or, choose not to do so, should she believe the candidate to be in good faith, or should she believe that the Commission has not ruled rightly.

A decision to approve the account with amendments may result in the amount reimbursed to the candidate being less than the amount claimed.

Candidates may challenge a decision made by the Commission either by appealing to the Commission or by appealing to the *Conseil d'État*, France's highest administrative court.

Candidate reimbursement

To be reimbursed, a candidate must satisfy certain conditions. He must:

- have won at least 5 % of the total ballots cast (at least 3% for European elections and territorial elections in French Polynesia);
- have complied with the requirements incumbent upon him;
- have undertaken expenditure for electoral purposes;
- not have had his account rejected.

Where these conditions are satisfied, the candidate will be reimbursed the amount ordered by the Commission to reflect her personal contribution (personal disbursements and loans registered with the financial trustee). This amount may not exceed 50% of the spending ceiling for the electoral district.

Responsibilities incumbent on political parties

Political parties and political groups must:

- keep accounts;
- close the accounts at year-end;

- have their accounts certified by two accounting officers (mandated to attest to the legality of the accounts and the absence of corporate contributions);
- table the yearly accounts by June 30 of that year at the latest.

Political party financing

There are two types of party financing:

- Private financing comprising contributions from other political associations, dues paid by party members and elected representatives, and donations from natural persons;
- Direct public funding, which is divided into two equal envelopes. The first envelope is earmarked for funding political parties and groups contingent upon their results in the legislative elections (the candidates must each have obtained at least 1 % of the ballots cast and the party or association must have endorsed candidates in at least 50 electoral districts in metropolitan France; those parties and political associations having endorsed candidates only in overseas territories must have won at least 1 % of the total ballots cast in the ridings in which they endorsed candidates).

The second envelope is attributed to parties and political groups who have qualified to receive funding from the first envelope and is divided among them proportionally to reflect the number of parliamentarians who state that they belong to that party or group each year.

The discussion then turned to the similarities and differences between the Canadian and Quebec systems. Ms. Claude DeBellefeuille, Member of Parliament, provided a brief overview of the Canadian rules for reimbursing candidates' expenses and explained that, with regard to political party financing, Elections Canada provided parties with \$1.75 for every vote received. The Canadian delegates also explained that an Officer of Parliament, appointed by the House of Commons, administers the legislative measures governing elections and the financing of political parties.

Thursday, June 14, 2007

Mr. Pierre Lequiller, deputy, hosted a breakfast for the delegation to discuss the impact of Nicolas Sarkozy's election on the future of the European Union. A great friend of Canada, Mr. Lequiller shared a number of anecdotes about his many trips to Canada, which led to a discussion on Canadian politics. The senator provided an overview of the latest political happenings and explained that federal elections were possible. Senator Bacon took the opportunity to congratulate Mr. Lequiller on being re-elected at the first ballot.

The discussion then moved on to the possibility of a new Constitutional treaty for the European Union being ratified following the failed attempt in 2005. As the president of the National Assembly's Delegation to the European Union, Mr. Lequiller is very familiar with this issue that is so very important for the future of the European project to which he is firmly committed.

He believes that the French public's rejection of the Constitution in 2005 was not so much a rejection of the European project, as an expression of their dissatisfaction with the domestic political landscape (student strike over the controversial first employment contract, precarious economic situation, Jacques Chirac's floundering popularity). He expressed hope that the new President, Mr. Sarkozy, would reinvigorate the political process needed to strengthen the European institutions.

For this to be achieved, the support of France and Germany is a *sine qua non*, but the concerns of all of the 25 member countries will be taken into consideration in order to maximise the chances of success.

Ms. Sylvie Goulard, academic, former adviser to Romano Prodi and President of the *Mouvement Européen-France*, met with the delegation to discuss today's major international issues and the role which President Sarkozy intends to play in addressing them.

Ms. Goulard expressed hope that a way would be found to reopen discussions on ratifying a European constitution. She feels that Europe has ground to a halt since the constitution was rejected by the French in 2005, but believes that the rejection should be interpreted as a rejection of the then leaders of the day as opposed to a rejection of the European project. She therefore hopes that the new President, buoyed by a strong electoral mandate, will be able to breathe new life into the project.

With regard to the Middle East Peace Process, Ms Goulard pointed out that Mr. Sarkozy was a strong ally of Israel and remarked that it would not be in the near future that France's influence within the Quartet would be felt. The Quartet, comprising Russia, the United States, the European Union and the United Nations is currently trying to relaunch peace negotiations in this troubled region.

Ms. Goulard ended by expressing her pessimism on the future of Iraq. In addition to the tensions between the Shiites and the Sunnis, she voiced concern that a Turkish invasion of Northern Iraq would cause the country to implode.

In the evening, the delegation visited Versailles to attend the UMP's last pre-election meeting, where Prime Minister François Fillon rallied his troops, urging them to fight to win as many seats as possible at the second ballot.

Friday, June 15, 2007

The delegation met with Mr. Bruno LeRoux, the socialist candidate for the Seine-Saint-Denis electoral district in Paris's first *arrondissement*. Following a discussion on the local and national issues at stake in the election, the candidate graciously invited the Canadian parliamentarians to attend his last election rally. The delegation greatly appreciated this opportunity, as it allowed them to meet and talk with the constituents of this blue-collar, ethnically diverse electoral district in a relaxed and convivial manner. Mr. Le Roux ended up winning his seat with 62.71% of the vote.

Saturday, June 16, 2007

On the last day of the election campaign, the delegation had the privilege of meeting the incumbent, Mr. Julien Dray, in Ste-Geneviève-des-Bois in the electoral district of

Essones. Mr. Dray had been a close adviser to the defeated socialist candidate, Ségolène Royal, during the previous month's presidential elections.

Mr. Dray, who according to the polls was struggling, shared his observations on the campaign with us. He also discussed the avenues that the Socialist Party would have to explore to modernise and to develop solutions to address the problems faced by France in the twenty-first century.

Mr. Dray ended up defeating his UMP rival, winning 53.48% of the vote.

Sunday, June 17, 2007

To conclude its mission, the delegation met with the Deputy Mayor of Cachan, Mr. Jean-Yves LeBouillonec, in order to gain an understanding of the role played by the Mayor in the electoral process. He briefly explained that the Mayor acts in his capacity as a representative of the State and is responsible for ensuring that voting is carried out properly in his municipality.

At the end of the meeting, the delegation accompanied the Mayor to a polling station to observe first hand the vote taking place and was thus witness to an important moment in French democracy.

Respectfully submitted,

The Honourable Lise Bacon, Senator

Travel Costs

ASSOCIATION	Canada-France Interparliamentary Association
ACTIVITY	Second round of the legislative elections
DESTINATION	Paris, France
DATES	June 13-18, 2007
DELEGATION	
SENATE	The Honourable Lise Bacon The Honourable Marcel Prud'homme
HOUSE OF COMMONS	Mr. Yvon Godin Ms. Claude DeBellefeuille Mr. Steven Blaney Mr. Mario Silva
STAFF	Mr. Jean-François Pagé
TRANSPORTATION	\$ 34,696.10
ACCOMODATION	\$ 14,990.64
HOSPITALITY	\$ 28.54
PER DIEMS	\$ 3,994.06
OFFICIAL GIFTS	\$ 343.00
MISCELLANEOUS / REGISTRATION FEES	3,789.36
TOTAL	\$ 57,841.70