

Canada - France
Interparliamentary Association



Association interparlementaire
Canada - France

**Report of the Canadian Parliamentary Delegation
respecting its participation at the Meeting of the Standing
Committee**

Canada-France Interparliamentary Association

Paris, France

March 15 and 16, 2012

Report

The Canadian delegation was made up of the Honourable Claudette Tardif, Senator, Chair of the Canadian Group of the Association; the Honourable Michel Rivard, Senator; and Ms. Éline Michaud, M.P. The Honourable Serge Joyal, P.C., Senator, who was in Paris, joined the delegation. Serge Pelletier, Executive Secretary, accompanied the delegates.

The French delegation was made up of Mr. Georges Colombier, Member of the National Assembly, Chair of the French Group of the Association; Ms. Hélène Conway Mouret, Senator, incoming Chair of the France-Canada Friendship Group in the Senate; and Ms. Catherine Coutelle, Member of the National Assembly. Mr. Matthieu Meissonnier from the Senate and Mr. Alexandre Michel from the National Assembly assisted the French parliamentarians and organized the visit as a whole.

The mandate of the Standing Committee, in between the Association's annual meetings, is to organize future activities. The meeting in Paris took place in a special context: a change in the makeup of the French Senate's France-Canada Group, upcoming elections in France, and the need to take into account budget restrictions announced in both legislatures.

Thursday, March 15, 2012

a) Working lunch at the National Assembly

On Thursday, March 15th, participants met over a working lunch. The two parties discussed at length the reorganization of the Association in the context of cost-saving measures. The Chair, Senator Tardif explained that a review of the activities, and particularly the objectives and anticipated results, of the 13 parliamentary associations formally recognized and funded by the Canadian Parliament was under way in order to reduce costs. The Canadian Group has already reduced the allowable airfare for future meetings in France, reduced the number of delegates to the annual meetings from nine to seven, and suggested that the number of meeting days be reduced.

A review of the relevance, usefulness, and costs of all international activities, and particularly friendship groups, has also been initiated in both houses of France's legislature. For the moment, the France-Canada Interparliamentary Association's budget in the Senate is not affected. Although the French Group considered reducing the number of delegates to the annual meetings, this idea is problematic in the Senate in particular since it further reduces the representation of various political parties there. Although the possibility of eliminating the Standing Committee was also considered, the French Group was eventually of the opinion that the pattern of holding two meetings a year should be maintained as an indication of the Association's success and closeness. The French Group also suggested that the Association's work focus on two themes each year (to be considered both at the meeting in France and at the meeting in Canada), and that the regional cultural discovery aspect of the meetings be limited.

Senator Tardif informed her French counterparts that the two upcoming elections in France were of the greatest interest to the Canadian Group, which had therefore decided to organize two observer missions, one to the May election of the President and one to the June election of members of the National Assembly. As a result there would be no annual meeting in 2012, but Canada would invite an expanded Standing Committee to Ottawa in the fall of 2012, when Parliament will be sitting.

Following questions by the Chair, Senator Conway Mouret, discussion ensued on the results of the meetings of the Association, which deserve to be more widely shared in both legislatures and disseminated to the public, as are reports on missions and parliamentary studies. The French Group has committed to producing a five-year report on the Association's activities, showing the relevance and quality of the work the Association accomplishes.

Final decisions on all these proposals were postponed until the working meeting to be held the following day.

In turn, participants commented on the political situation in the two countries.

Senator Tardif noted the outcome of the May 2nd, 2011, federal election, which had relegated the Liberal Party of Canada (LPC) to the status of the second opposition party, behind the New Democratic Party (NDP). The LPC, now in an intensive rebuilding phase, is currently headed by an interim leader, Mr. Bob Rae, until March-June 2013, when a leadership convention will be held to identify a permanent successor to Mr. Michael Ignatieff. In January 2012, the LPC held a major convention in Ottawa, attended by close to 3,000 delegates. At that convention, a "primaries" method was chosen to identify the party's next leader, creating a new category of supporters who are not necessarily card-carrying party members. Senator Joyal noted that, although in the House of Commons the LPC is the second opposition party, in the Senate it still has the status of Official Opposition.

Senator Rivard, representing the Conservative Party of Canada (CPC), noted his party's origins in the merger of the former Progressive Conservative Party, which had been reduced to two M.P.s in 1993, and the clearly right-of-centre Reform Party. Prime Minister Stephen Harper was instrumental in the merger of the forces of the right, which led to two minority governments in 2006 and 2008 and a majority in 2011. Senator Rivard noted the two main bills tabled by the government since the convening of the present parliament: (a) a bill to amend the firearms registry legislation, passed in March 2012; and (b) an omnibus justice bill designed to protect victims of crime and toughen sentencing for a number of types of crime. Senator Rivard noted Canada's excellent economic performance. A budget will be tabled in late March 2012 that Senator Rivard is convinced will be acceptable to Canadians. Senator Rivard concluded by outlining Senate reform, aimed firstly at allowing the provinces to elect senators and secondly at reducing senators' term of office to a nine-year non-renewable period. He expressed the view that, while provinces such as Ontario and Quebec oppose this reform, given the government's majority in the Senate and in the House of Commons the reform will eventually be adopted.

On this point, Éline Michaud, M.P., and member of the NDP, expressed the opinion that the proposed Senate reform is unconstitutional. She noted her party's unexpected

May 2nd, 2011 victory, electing 59 M.P.s in Quebec and 103 nationwide and thus giving the NDP the status of Official Opposition. The NDP elected representatives are very young (20 M.P.s are under 30 years of age), and 40% of them are women. Ms. Michaud noted that her party's leader Jack Layton had passed away on August 22, 2011. A leadership convention will be held in Toronto on March 24, 2012. In the meantime, 130,000 members will be able to vote by Internet. At present there are six leadership candidates. Ms. Michaud stated that Quebec did not see itself reflected in certain bills tabled by the government. In her view, despite certain positive indicators the Canadian economy is fragile overall; as well, the situation of Canada's First Nations is cause for concern.

Mr. Colombier, of the Union pour un mouvement populaire (UMP), noted that France holds Senate elections every three years, replacing half of its senators. The National Assembly, which is re-elected in its entirety every five years, rose on March 6th, 2012, in preparation for its elections: the election of the President on April 22nd and May 6th; and the election of members of the National Assembly on June 10th and 17th. The National Assembly will reconvene on June 26th, 2012. Ms. Coutelle, of the Parti socialiste, explained that at a 2011 convention to identify a candidate for the presidential election, her party had adopted a "primaries" method and eliminated consecutive terms of office. The Parti socialiste primaries generated high interest, with voter turnout at 2,500,000. At the conclusion of the second round, François Hollande was identified as the candidate, rallying the support of all the other candidates. Overall the primaries proved to be successful and revitalized the political scene. Ms. Coutelle explained that politics in France becomes focused every five years at the time of the presidential election, which is highly personalized and mediatized and is accompanied by daily surveys that often produce contradictory indications. Mr. Colombier agreed, noting that campaigns focus more on form and personalities than on substance. Senator Conway Mouret added that, increasingly, major political rallies during campaigns resemble big political gatherings in the United States with bands, staged entries and multiple photo opportunities. Image trumps content, and social networks are increasingly important.

Following these overviews, at the request of the French Group, discussion ensued on the election of members of the National Assembly to represent French citizens living abroad, a point of diplomatic controversy between the two countries. Apparently 2.5 million French citizens live abroad; of this number, approximately 70,000 live in Canada, including 40,000 in Quebec. Under France's recently-passed electoral reform, 11 members of the National Assembly are to be elected to represent various regions of the world, including one member to represent North America. Canada opposes the method being considered by France to hold this vote. From France's perspective, the issue is seen as technical: Canada refuses to allow French citizens to vote in locations other than embassies and consulates, for example in French lycées. Senator Joyal asked whether French citizens may vote early, by mail or by Internet, alternative methods to voting at polling stations that are widely used in Canada: apparently these voting methods are not yet current in France.

Senator Tardif wondered whether there were underlying reasons for Canada's refusal: for example, the idea that a member of France's National Assembly, legitimately elected in North America, could take a stand in the National Assembly on Canada's domestic

and international policies could be seen as disturbing, to say the least. Senator Conway Mouret expressed the opinion that this possibility should be ruled out, since French parliamentarians elected abroad represent only French citizens resident in their constituency and have no mandate to take a stand on another country's domestic affairs.

b) Working dinner at the Canadian Embassy

Ambassador Marc Lortie welcomed the Canadian delegation to his residence for a working dinner, to which he invited two eminent experts on elections: Mr. Gaël Sliman, director of the BVA survey firm, and Mr. Gérard Courtois, political columnist for *Le Monde*.

As the Canadian delegation arrived in France, contradictory surveys had just been published, some placing candidate Sarkozy, and others candidate Hollande, in the lead in the first round of the presidential election. That said, all surveys predicted a wide lead for candidate Hollande following the second round.

Both experts candidly and openly offered highly enlightened comments on these surveys, evaluated the two main candidates' strengths and weaknesses in terms of political platform and personal style, and described scenarios that could alter trends observed since the beginning of the campaign. Transfers of support from other candidates on the second round were also analyzed. Mr. Sliman and Mr. Courtois noted the main issues of this election campaign: most importantly unemployment, but also social fragmentation, security, immigration, identity, diversity, and the Euro crisis.

With regard to the Euro crisis and the European Union (EU), Ambassador Lortie and Senator Joyal expressed Canada's favourable opinion of the EU, as well as surprise at EU members' inability to solve these problems and address the dysfunction that surfaces from one crisis to another.

In conclusion, Mr. Sliman and Mr. Courtois offered their predictions on possible candidates for the position of France's Prime Minister, depending on which of the leading candidates is elected President. The Canadian parliamentarians emerged from this meeting well satisfied with what they had learned and better informed about what is at stake in France's upcoming elections.

Friday, March 16, 2012

a) Presentation by SolarWall Europe

In the morning, at the National Assembly, Standing Committee members attended a presentation by Ms. Anouck Colson, Associate Director of the Canadian company Conserval Engineering Inc. / SolarWall Europe. On December 13th, 2011, this company distinguished itself by being awarded one of the Canada-France awards for small and medium-sized businesses.

Founded in 1977, Conserval Engineering Inc. has its head office in Toronto, a United States subsidiary in Buffalo, and a European subsidiary, SolarWall Europe, in Paris. The company has clients in 32 countries; these clients include Auchan, Walmart,

FedEx, Ford, Bombardier, Boeing, General Motors, and the Canadian and United States armies. This company invented a solar air heating technology for large buildings called SolarWall. SolarWall is a renewable-energy technology that forms an integral part of buildings; it is used to heat interior air and to meet building ventilation and heating system needs. It heats interior air to between 5° C and 30° C above the outdoor temperature. It is simple to install, has the same useful life as the building, and requires little maintenance. Using this technology can reduce heating costs by between 15% and 50%, depending on site parameters. The investment pays for itself quickly, in between two and five years. In France, 15 SolarWall projects have been completed since 2009 and projects valued at 8 million Euros are planned for 2012.

Following this presentation, parliamentarians were taken to the Pépinière building in the 18th arrondissement, where the SolarWall technology has been installed in a new building that houses emerging businesses. After meeting representatives of the city of Paris and the project partners and architects, parliamentarians visited the building rooftop to view the features of this technology.

b) Working lunch at the Senate

Standing Committee members met again to discuss the reorganization and the next activities of the Association.

After discussion, agreement was reached on the following points:

- The Association will continue to meet twice per year, once in France and once in Canada;
- The duration of meetings will be reduced to three or four days, and the regional cultural discovery portion will be minimized;
- The number of Canadian participants attending meetings in France will be reduced to seven; the number of French participants attending meetings in Canada may vary between seven and as many as nine participants, in order to ensure greater representation of the political parties in both houses of France's legislature. In order to adapt these changes to budget realities in both countries and streamline the Association's funding, it was agreed that the French Group would be responsible for its transportation and accommodation expenses during travel in Canada, and that the Canadian Group would do the same during its travel in France;
- The Association's work will focus on only two themes each year (to be considered both at the meeting in France and at the meeting in Canada), in order to maximize in-depth discussion of the themes;
- As a transition measure to the two-meeting-per-year format, the Canadian Group maintain its invitation for an expanded Standing Committee to Ottawa. Dates were discussed, and consensus was reached for November 18th to 21st, 2012.

On behalf of the Canadian delegation, Senator Tardif accepted the proposed changes to the Association's operations, subject to approval by the Canadian Group's Executive Committee, which will consider these changes at its next meeting.

Discussion ensued on the themes to be chosen for the following year. Agreement was reached on the following themes: (a) retirement and pensions; (b) sustainable cities.

c) Meeting-discussion on the repercussions of the Arab Spring events and the situation in Syria

In the afternoon, Standing Committee members had the immense privilege of taking part in a very high-level discussion with two significant stakeholders in the Arab Spring events, particularly the situation in Syria: Mr. Nassif Hitti, the Arab League's ambassador to France; and Mr. Éric Chevallier, France's ambassador to Syria (who had been recalled to Paris a few days previously).

To begin, Mr. Hitti stated that external military interference in Syria would be counterproductive and that a political solution is the only way. He noted a radicalization of discourse and a splintering of political and societal space. He added that the situation in Syria is the opposite of the experiences in Tunisia and Egypt. Syria is a mosaic of loyalties to mini-religious groups; these loyalties must be carefully managed. Mr. Hitti suggested that whoever controls Syria controls the Middle East. He noted the strong resurgence of Turkey and Iran in the current dynamics of the situation in Syria, which has characteristics of the Cold War. Recalling Mr. Kofi Annan's unsuccessful recent visit to Syria, Mr. Hitti noted that the Syrian government refuses any external intervention and seeks only internal dialogue. He noted the proposals made by Mr. Annan in his capacity as representative of the United Nations and the Arab League, on the basis of the Arab League's resolution: (a) a halt to all violence; (b) access for humanitarian aid; (c) dialogue among the factions and with the government; (d) a national unity government; (e) a government headed by a person chosen by consensus; (f) presidential and legislative elections, preceded by the election of a constituent assembly; and (g) democratic government and institutions.

In the short and the medium term, Mr. Hitti expressed a pessimistic outlook. The situation is turning into a war of attrition, and the country is at risk of imploding.

Ambassador Chevallier was not much more optimistic. The crisis in Syria has lasted for over one year, will continue, and may become even more violent. Although at one point the hopes of the Syrian people turned toward Tunisia and Egypt, this anguished country now looks toward Baghdad and Beirut. The balance of power now favours the government, with the Syrian army suppressing insurgents. There is a real possibility of civil war, as hope for a solution to the crisis fades and violence accelerates. In fact, internal opposition is splintered among the left, the right, Muslims, Christians and other groups, each of which has external support.

Ambassador Chevallier described the closure of France's embassy in Damascus and the effects on French nationals and staff. He noted that, since the departure of dictators in Egypt, Iraq and Syria, the situation of religious minorities has worsened. He suggested that the "consensual" democracy in Iraq among Shiites, Sunnites and Kurds, based on the Lebanese model, has failed. Canada, like France, has closed its embassy

in Syria; in the event that emergency consular assistance is required, Canada has an agreement in place with the Hungarian embassy.

Parliamentarians questioned the two ambassadors on the role of Russia and China in Syria. Mr. Hitti and Mr. Chevallier noted a change in these countries' policies that brings them closer to the international consensus, but also pointed out these countries' frustration at not being able to control the Syrian government. China appears to be more flexible, since it has interests in the Gulf countries.

Discussion ensued on the effectiveness of the sanctions ordered by the international community as a whole. The ambassadors expressed the view that the most effective sanctions are those that affect Syria's oil and gas exports and its central banks, individually targeted sanctions, and travel restrictions. Other types of sanctions could cause greater harm to the population than to the government.

In response to a question by Senator Joyal on the source of armed support for Syrian insurgents, the ambassadors responded that, with the support of all the Arab countries, a light arms supply route via Lebanon is becoming privatized. The government is supplied with arms by Russia and probably Iran.

In the opinion of Ambassadors Hitti and Chevallier, a solution to the crisis in Syria depends on unity among the factions about the country's future outlook including its economy and institutions, that is, on a shared vision that transcends the country's diversity.

Information was exchanged on the presence of weapons of mass destruction in Syria, Israel's attitude toward the crisis in Syria, the respective roles of Hamas and Hezbollah, and humanitarian assistance. The two ambassadors expressed the opinion that, although the Red Cross, the Red Crescent and the United Nations are possible channels for humanitarian assistance, forcing these channels open at present would constitute a declaration of war against the Syrian regime.

d) Canada-EU free trade agreement

Mr. Jean Dominique Ieraci of the Canadian Embassy and Mr. Colombier, Chair of the French Group of the Association, gave a presentation on the status of negotiations toward a Canada-EU free trade agreement.

In Mr. Ieraci's view, the actual negotiating rounds have been completed, and the parties have reached the compromise stage. In these negotiations, France's interests are: (a) access to national, provincial and municipal government procurement contracts in Canada: on this point, reciprocity (that is, access to European government procurement contracts) is problematic; (b) intellectual property, particularly in pharmaceutical products; (c) geographic indicators on food products; (d) the issue of Saint-Pierre-et-Miquelon, which as a French overseas territory is not part of the EU; (e) better protection for investors; and (f) greater mobility of persons.

The agreement will require assent by not only the EU but also the European Parliament and each member country. The idea is supported by both leading candidates in France's presidential election, in terms of fair trade, reciprocity, and opportunity for growth.

Mr. Colombier pointed out that the access to Canadian markets being sought by France is broader than that negotiated in the *North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA)*. France would also like to gain access to financial markets. Under the cultural exception, France wishes to exempt cultural products such as books and films. Mr. Colombier reiterated Mr. Leraci's comments on intellectual property and rules of origin. As well, France seeks to expand free trade in dairy products, and is still concerned about oil sands development and seal products.

Senator Rivard, a member of the Senate Standing Committee on Agriculture, raised the issue of exports to Europe of ice wine and hormone-raised beef and pork products. Ms. Éline Michaud emphasized the importance of supply management in Quebec for farm products including milk and eggs: these industries could be seriously threatened if the future agreement provided for freer trade in these products.

Following this meeting, participants met to bid farewell to Mr. Colombier, who will not stand for the upcoming legislative election in May. Senator Tardif, the Chair of the Canadian Group, highlighted Mr. Colombier's exceptional and steadfast contribution to the Association for nearly 10 years, and his aptitude for bringing people together beyond political differences. Mr. Colombier reiterated his deep attachment to Canada and to the Association. The Standing Committee also paid homage to Mr. Meissonnier, who from his position in the Senate has supported the Association for 10 years. Mr. Meissonnier has been transferred to another department and will soon be leaving his duties with the France-Canada Association.

e) Dinner at the residence of Canada's ambassador to UNESCO

Mr. Jean-Pierre Blackburn, Canada's new ambassador to UNESCO, invited the Canadian delegation to a very convivial dinner at his residence. Having been appointed only six weeks previously, Mr. Blackburn said how pleased he was by his appointment to Paris, but did not conceal the fact that many challenges awaited him. He already notes lessened use of French at UNESCO, a subject of personal concern.

Conclusion

The Standing Committee's meeting in Paris was an important one in the Association's history. The changes made and about to be made in the leadership of the French Group and its administrative support in the Senate, as well as the budget restrictions facing both legislatures, led the Standing Committee to review the Association's structure, funding and future activities. The Standing Committee is particularly pleased to have maintained a two-meeting-per-year format, with shorter meetings, and to focus its work on a limited number of themes.

Respectfully submitted,

The Honourable Claudette Tardif, Senator
Chair of the Canada-France Interparliamentary Association

Travel Costs

ASSOCIATION	Canada-France Interparliamentary Association
ACTIVITY	Meeting of the Standing Committee
DESTINATION	Paris, France
DATES	March 15 and 16, 2012
DELEGATION	
SENATE	The Honourable Claudette Tardif, Senator The Honourable Michel Rivard, Senator
HOUSE OF COMMONS	Ms. Éline Michaud, M.P.
STAFF	Mr. Serge Pelletier, Association Secretary
TRANSPORTATION	\$ 4, 609. 52
ACCOMMODATION	\$ 2, 810. 62
HOSPITALITY	\$ 0. 00
PER DIEMS	\$1, 259. 66
OFFICIAL GIFTS	\$ 444. 40
MISCELLANEOUS / REGISTRATION FEES	\$ 0. 00
TOTAL	\$ 9, 124. 20