



**Report of the Canadian parliamentary delegation to
the Meeting of the Parliamentary Affairs Committee of the
*Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie (APF)***

**Canadian Branch of the Assemblée parlementaire
de la Francophonie**

**Andorre la Vieille, Principality of Andorra
May 6 and 7, 2008**

Report

The parliamentary delegation of the Canadian Branch of the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie (APF), which attended the meeting of the APF Parliamentary Affairs Committee held in Andorre la Vieille, Principality of Andorra, on May 6 and 7, 2008, has the honour to present its report. Consisting of the Honourable Pierre De Bané, Senator and Chair of the Committee, the delegation was accompanied by Jean Michel Roy, Executive Secretary of the Branch.

The following branches were represented at the meeting: Belgium/Communauté française/Wallonie-Bruxelles, Benin, Burkina Faso, Cambodia, Canada, Central African Republic, Chad, Democratic Republic of Congo, France, Gabon, Jura, Mali, Morocco, Moldavia, Niger, Ontario, Principality of Andorra, Quebec, Romania, Senegal, Switzerland, Valle d'Aosta.

Tuesday, May 6, 2008

Before the proceedings began, Bernadeta Gaspa, Vice President of the General Council of the Principality of Andorra and Chair of the Andorran Branch of the APF, welcomed the members of the Committee.

In her remarks, Ms Gaspa recalled that the Principality has been attached to the French-speaking world through its joint sovereignty for over 800 years, and that the APF was the first supranational institution the Principality joined, almost 20 years ago.

With respect to language, Ms Gaspa said that while the official language of the Principality is Catalan, two other languages are spoken there, Spanish and French.

Address by the Chair of the Committee

Senator Pierre De Bané discussed the situation in La Francophonie. In the course of his remarks, he pointed out that one of the characteristics of the Parliamentary Affairs Committee's meetings is that the people who participate are usually members of delegations eager to debate issues under the jurisdiction of parliaments, exchange experiences as parliamentarians and follow up on the APF's cooperation programs.

He also noted that the Committee has a special feature that distinguishes it from the other three APF committees and makes it one of the most valuable: in addition into examining substantive reports, it also examines the follow-up reports on interparliamentary cooperation programs. The APF implements Interparliamentary cooperation programs in collaboration with the Agence intergouvernementale de la Francophonie (AIF).

The following topics were then discussed by the Committee:

Migration policies

The following two resolutions were considered:

- Resolution on migration policies in Europe's francophone sphere, adopted at the 20th European Regional Assembly of the APF in Skopje, Republic of Macedonia, on October 23 and 24, 2007;
- Resolution on migration policies in the francophone sphere, adopted at the meeting of the APF's Cooperation and Development Committee in Ottawa, Canada, on April 22 and 23, 2008.

Access to information for all citizens

Sylvie Roy (Quebec) presented the report. She pointed out that in a number of countries with parliamentary systems of government, the citizenry is losing interest in politics, with a resulting low voter turnout. And yet the public now has much broader access than ever before to parliamentary and political information, facilitated among other things by progress in information technologies and the work of the print and electronic media.

Most francophone parliaments have taken measures to promote the distribution of parliamentary and political information to the public, especially by way of the new information technologies. For example, the printed version of Hansard has been joined by the broadcasting, televising and webcasting of parliamentary debates. Over the past decade, many legislatures that belong to the APF have launched Internet or Intranet sites, which generally make an impressive range of parliamentary information instantly available, and allow the webcasting of parliamentary proceedings, including those of committees. Some of these sites also encourage citizen participation in the decision-making process, by online consultations, interactive discussions, e-mail, videoconferencing and digital signatures. The radio and television broadcasting of debates, whether in chamber or in committee, has developed considerably and is now widespread among the States belonging to the francophone sphere.

Some APF parliaments have developed instructional activities for informing their citizens. Inspired by the success of the Francophone Youth Parliament, mock parliaments have proliferated in French-speaking countries in recent years. The Senate of Canada has its Teachers Institute on Canadian Parliamentary Democracy and the House of Commons of Canada has a page program that every year allows a great many young people to work at Parliament.

While there are many factors contributing to the phenomenon, the detachment and even cynicism of a large part of our populations when it comes to politics and the exercise of parliamentary democracy is to a great extent the result of a lack of understanding of the work that is done in Parliament. Any remedy to this general cynicism, which is the catalyst for loss of confidence in our democratic institutions, will necessarily involve better information, more accessible to all.

Ms Roy concluded by describing the approach of Quebec's National Assembly to access to information, and emphasized the contribution that the Canadian Branch had made to her report.

Legislative assemblies in the francophone sphere: procedures and practices

Michèle André (France) presented the Chapter IV summary report on parliamentary organization. Before describing the chapter's structure, she noted that parliaments in the francophone sphere are organized in ways that reflect a heterogeneous institutional framework. From this perspective, there is no one "francophone culture", since each country has a constitutional structure that has emerged from its own unique history and political and legal traditions.

Chapter IV contains six sections dealing with the following topics: overall systems; financial and administrative autonomy; governing bodies; political parties; committees; parliamentary delegation and offices.

It should be noted that the Canadian Branch submitted a contribution to Chapter IV.

Wednesday, May 7, 2008

Follow-up on election observer missions

Chantal Bertouille (Belgium/Communauté française/Wallonie-Bruxelles) presented this report, which dealt with observer missions under the auspices of the Organisation internationale de la Francophonie (OIF) in which members of the APF participate. Two missions have been carried out since July 2007, and two APF parliamentarians participated in each of them:

- early legislative elections in Madagascar, September 23, 2007;
- early legislative elections in Togo, on October 14, 2007.

The APF Opinion at the Quebec City Summit – follow-up on the Ten-Year Strategic Framework

Serge Vifian (Jura) presented the report. He explained that the Opinion is traditionally divided into two parts: the first deals with the issues a summit has chosen to consider, in this case *the environment, governance and democracy and the French language*; the second with follow-up on the previous summit, in this case the Bucharest Summit, and more specifically the progress made in implementing the objectives of the OIF's Ten-Year Strategic Framework.

The Framework, adopted by La Francophonie at the X Summit in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, in 2004, sets out four fundamental missions:

- promoting the French language and cultural and linguistic diversity;
- promoting peace, democracy and human rights;
- supporting education, training, higher education and research;
- developing cooperation on sustainable development and solidarity.

The involvement of the Parliamentary Affairs Committee falls within the mission of *promoting peace, democracy and human rights*, the strategic objective of which is *to consolidate democracy, human rights and the rule of law*.

Because the Strategic Framework must include the role of women and young people, the Committee chose the theme of “*La jeunesse*” [youth], citing the Francophone Youth Parliament and the creation of national youth parliaments.

The Francophone Youth Parliament and the national youth parliaments

Martine Bondo (Gabon) presented the report on the 4th Session of the Francophone Youth Parliament (FYP) in July 2007 in Libreville, Gabon. Thirty-four member branches accepted the invitation from the FYP and the Gabonese Parliament.

Ms Bondo began by outlining the program. The FYP is one of the interparliamentary cooperation programs within the “peace, democracy and justice category” implemented by the Agence intergouvernementale de la Francophonie (AIF). Its objective is to promote representative democracy and to make the public aware of the work done by legislatures, while bringing together young people from all parts of La Francophonie. The Organisation internationale de la francophonie (OIF) put the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie in charge of the program, which the OIF funds.

The FYP is one of the specifically youth-oriented activities within the framework of Mission B, *Promoting peace, democracy and human rights*. The APF plays an essential role in the areas of cooperation and parliamentary diplomacy.

The holding of the 4th Session of the Francophone Youth Parliament in Libreville demonstrated the APF’s concern for youth involvement in political life, North-South relations, international solidarity, development, and the strengthening of democracy.

The FYP committees studied papers on the following topics:

- Young people and conflict prevention (Policy Committee);
- Francophone youth, problems with migration and HIV/AIDS (Education, Communications and Cultural Affairs Committee);
- Given the increasing tide of migrants (voluntary or forced -- refugees, illegals, etc.), what policies on migration are indicated for the future? The point of view of French-speaking youth (Cooperation and Development Committee);
- The electoral registration of young people (Parliamentary Affairs Committee).

As for the national youth parliaments, they are the result of a support program with a twofold objective: to strengthen youth parliaments within APF member branches and to promote the creation of such structures in branches that do not yet have them.

The parliaments of Niger, Mali, Gabon and Burkina Faso have been the first to benefit from this parliamentary cooperation program. The official introduction of the Mali and Burkina Faso national youth parliaments is anticipated for 2008. Congo, Cameroon, Senegal and Madagascar national youth parliaments will also be set up in 2008. The next parliament to obtain APF support will be that of Mauritania.

Bachir Dieye, *chargé de mission* for the FYP within the APF General Secretariat, answered questions from Committee members.

Parliamentary seminars and traineeships

Ramatou Rahimou (Niger) presented this report. She noted that since the meeting in Libreville in July 2007, the APF had held a parliamentary seminar in Mauritania and organized training for parliamentary officials at the École nationale d'Administration (ÉNA) in Paris.

A parliamentary seminar was held in Nouakchott, in the Islamic Republic of Mauritania, in December 2007. It dealt with the following topics: the parliamentarian's role; the oversight function (oversight of the budget and oversight of government action); the parliamentary administration; and parliamentary diplomacy. The seminar was organized by the APF in collaboration with the Parliament of Mauritania for the benefit of that country's parliamentarians.

The APF also participated in a training function organized jointly with the French Parliament and the ÉNA. This traineeship, focusing on the organization of parliamentary business, took place in April 2008. It was specifically designed for parliamentary officials. The speakers were senior parliamentary officials: secretaries general, directors general and service directors. Representatives of the following sections took part: Macedonia, Madagascar, Mauritania and Niger.

The Noria program

Mireille Eza, Director of the Noria program (APF General Secretariat) presented this report on behalf of Senator De Bané. She explained that the purpose of the program was to narrow the digital divide by assisting partner legislatures to computerize and modernize management and access to parliamentary information.

The specific objectives of the Noria program are:

- to strengthen parliaments' capabilities in the production, processing, management, distribution and conservation of legislative information;
- to enhance and upgrade parliaments' information channels by equipping them with networked computer tools and by training people to use those tools;
- to assert the presence of French-language information in different formats, whether electronic or paper, among other means by translating institutional Internet sites into French;
- to support the formation and moderating of professional networks in the work associated with parliamentary information processes.

Three main areas of action, corresponding to three separate types of support, have been proposed:

- general support entailing implementation of an integrated information system (computer network and Intranet); this is intended primarily for French-language parliaments where no such structure exists;
- more specialized support intended for parliaments where the use of French is fairly widespread; it would make possible distribution of legislative production in French by translating Internet sites, providing French-language documentation and funding French courses;

- network support for the development of professional networks within and between parliaments, in order to facilitate the exchange of information, knowledge and expertise.

In existence for only six years, the Noria program has already helped some 15 parliaments all over the world.

At the APF executive meeting in Bujumbura in February 2008, new participants were designated: Gabon, Burundi, Mauritania, Laos and Nova Scotia. In December 2007, the program completed its second four-year cycle with the beneficiaries designated in 2004: Burkina Faso, Congo Brazzaville, Cape Verde, Tunisia and Vietnam.

Program activities are being carried out in all participating assemblies, each of which has each been visited. In 2006-07, a total of nine parliaments benefited from the program: Benin, Burkina Faso, Congo, Cape Verde, Cambodia, Macedonia, Vietnam, Tunisia and Madagascar.

The Committee's next meeting will be held on July 6 in Quebec City, as part of the XXIV Session of the APF.

Respectfully submitted,

Pierre De Bané, Senator
Member of the Canadian Branch of
the *Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie (APF)*

Travel Cost

ASSOCIATION	Canadian Branch of the <i>Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie (APF)</i>
ACTIVITY	Meeting of the Parliamentary Affairs Committee of the APF
DESTINATION	Andorre la Vieille, Principality of Andorra
DATES	May 6 and 7, 2008
DELEGATION	
SENATE	Hon. Pierre De Bané
HOUSE OF COMMONS	
STAFF	Jean Michel Roy
TRANSPORTATION	\$ 8,738.31
ACCOMMODATION	\$ 2,128.09
PER DIEMS	\$ 585.39
OFFICIAL GIFTS	\$ 25.50
TOTAL	\$ 11,477.29