

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

**Montreal, Québec
May 3 to 5, 2011**

Report

The Standing Committee of the Canada–France Interparliamentary Association met in Montreal on May 3–5, 2011. The French delegation was composed of Marcel-Pierre Cléach, Senator for Sarthe, Chair of the France-Canada Friendship Group in the Senate; Georges Colombier, Member for Isère, replacing Marc Laffineur, Chair of the Association, who was unable to attend; and Catherine Coutelle, Member for Vienne. Matthieu Meissonnier, a Senate staffer, accompanied the delegation. The Hon. Claudette Tardif, Senator for Alberta and Chair of the Canadian Group of the Association, led the delegation composed of the Hon. Jean-Claude Rivest, Senator for Quebec, and Serge Pelletier, Secretary.

Between the Association's annual meetings, the Standing Committee meets to prepare for the following one. France will host the annual meeting in 2011. The Standing Committee also follows up on issues of common interest and helps plan working meetings on topical issues of interest to both countries.

The meeting began with a welcome dinner the day after the federal election on May 2, 2011. The unexpected election results were the topic of conversation for many participants.

Wednesday, May 4

Discussion on the morning of Wednesday, May 4, was on the preparations and themes of the Association's 38th Annual Meeting, which France is hosting in 2011.

The proposed dates are August 31, 2011, to September 7, 2011. The trip to France includes working meetings in Paris and Avrillé, tours of nuclear facilities and other industrial plants in Normandy, as well as sites and monuments commemorating the landing of Canadian soldiers in the Second World War. The trip to France will end with visits to Angers and Mans.

Four working themes were chosen for the annual meeting:

- 1) Electoral techniques and democratic issues
 - Surveys, practices and regulation
 - Primaries and/or party leadership races
 - New communication methods (social tools, etc.)
 - Election advertising
- 2) Family policy: social and economic issues
- 3) The future of nuclear power after Fukushima
- 4) Issues relating to the Canada–EU free trade agreement and the need to deal separately with cultural trade

For this part of the working meeting and discussion on the Canada–EU free trade agreement, the group was joined by Robert Moulié, Chargé d'affaires at the Embassy of France in Canada. Mr. Moulié explained that the new deadline to sign the agreement is now the first quarter of 2012. The most contentious issues concern investments, access to public markets, names of origin, as well as various other irritants including GMOs, the oil sands, seal products, etc.

Senator Rivest summarized the results of the Canadian federal election. He explained that the surprising results of the various parties illustrate the very nature of the Canadian first-past-the-post system. This long-standing system, of British origin, was based on the existence of two national parties, leading to alternation between the two. The advent of third parties has changed the order of things, in both Britain and Canada. He also explained that the Conservative Party of Canada won a comfortable majority of seats, even though 60% of voters overall did not vote for a Conservative candidate.

Senator Rivest highlighted the importance of social media and 24-hour news networks, which led to an election campaign based primarily on party leaders instead of debate on election issues and platforms. The social and demographic reality of a large country like Canada resulted in regional campaigns and messaging rather than national ones.

Discussion on the election continued at the residence of France's Consul General in Montreal, Pierre Robion, who hosted a luncheon for the participants. Mr. Robion explained the role of the Consulate General in Montreal, and confirmed that he would be stepping down in the summer after an enjoyable mandate.

A working meeting on the political upheaval in the Arab countries was held in the afternoon at the Center for Research in International Relations at the University of Montreal. Professor Samir Saul, a historian, and professor Marie-Joëlle Zahar, scientific director of the Francophone Research Network on Peace Operations, gave a presentation.

Mr. Saul began by saying that the present events in Arab countries are linked to their history. Pointing to the recent uprisings in Tunisia, he concluded that the grassroots movement is non-Islamic. In Egypt, Tunisia, Syria and Libya, a historical cycle is ending. The independence movements were national and progressive, but, after the 1960s, the movements flagged, armies replaced the decolonization elites, and the United States asserted itself in the region. As a result, development stagnated, the Arab world turned inward, political life withered, and religion remained the only freedom. The absence of a political life, made starker by military repression, maintains and cultivates Islamism, which, he clearly explained, is not the same as Islam.

Mr. Saul believes that the Arab spring is a restarting of the story, a process of great importance. In his opinion, the Arab renaissance is not based on Islam, and a return to the past seems unlikely.

He acknowledged that political change will take different forms depending on the country. Tunisia and Egypt have time-honoured and strong political structures, whereas Syria, Bahrain, Yemen and Libya have new and fragile ones.

Ms. Zahar, for her part, said that everything will depend on the balance that will be created between religion and politics, and the ability of the new regimes to meet the

expectations of the people. She emphasized the importance of the non-Arab world's attitude toward the outcome of events. She recognized that everyone was blindsided by what happened. She noted that the process of change varied depending on the country: controlled change in Egypt and Tunisia and violent change elsewhere. Countries that replaced politicians with soldiers face an uncertain future. Moreover, the differences among the Arab countries themselves could prevent change. Lastly, corruption may be another roadblock to the change wanted by the people.

The two presentations were followed by vigorous debate, mainly on the consequences of intervention, both military and other, by non-Arab countries in the region and the ongoing Israel-Palestine conflict that has fuelled militant Islamism. In the current upheaval, these countries should act with goodwill, concluded Ms. Zahar.

In the evening, the participants dined with the former chair of the Canadian Group of the Association, the Hon. Lise Bacon.

Thursday, May 5

At France's Consulate General in Montreal, participants held two working meetings: one dealing with shale gas development and the other on the Quebec-France Understanding on the Mutual Recognition of Professional Qualifications.

1. Exploration and development of shale gas

The members of the Standing Committee met with Jean Cinq-Mars, Commissioner of the Environment, a position reporting to the Office of the Auditor General of Quebec, where he is also the Assistant Auditor General.

Mr. Cinq-Mars indicated that Quebec's shale gas has been reported extensively in the Quebec media over the past year. He explained the role of the Office of the Auditor General of Quebec, which reports to the National Assembly. The Office conducts two types of audits: (a) audits of financial statements themselves; and (b) audits on the management of government agencies and departments. The results of these audits are presented in a report to the National Assembly, and the departments and agencies must confirm all the information in the report in addition to implementing all recommendations. As a result, 70% of recommendations are implemented overall.

The shale gas issue led to two rounds of consultations in 2010 following demonstrations in response to the announcement of projects across swathes of land. The first round, led by the Bureau des audiences populaires sur l'environnement (BAPE), consulted the public directly. The Office of the Auditor General held off so as to study whether the development of shale gas by the Quebec government and industry complied with the *Sustainable Development Act* passed in 2006 and the 16 principles on which it is based as well as the *Mining Act*, two acts based on sustainable development and respect for the environment.

In its report published on March 11, 2011, the Commissioner announced his key findings:

- The precautionary principle was not respected by the developers

- Liability insurance in the event of an accident did not meet standards
- Economic efficiency and socio-economic impacts were not taken into account
- Damages for road damage and waste water treatment by cities were not taken into account
- Shortcomings were also noted with respect to the leasing of land, work requirements on leased land, as well as taxes and royalties
- Exploration and development took place without the necessary city permits
- Absence of a cost/benefit analysis
- Noted offences were not followed up on

The Commissioner concluded that, in general, there are serious management issues with the development projects underway: small royalties, lack of industry transparency and information, possibilities of environmental disasters, unproven technologies, absence of control mechanisms, etc. In short, the departments involved have lost all credibility. After the report was tabled, the departments made an effort to restructure and imposed a partial moratorium, banning fracturing in the St. Lawrence Lowlands but not elsewhere.

In the discussion that followed, the financial situation of exploration and development companies was raised. These mining companies are highly speculative and publicly traded. Many of these companies are small and hope to find profitable seams in order to be purchased by larger companies. The problem with natural gas in general is that prices have tumbled since 2008 because of a market surplus.

The industry's point of view was presented by Stéphane Gosselin, Director General of the Quebec Oil and Gas Association (QOGA); Frédéric Badina, of Intragaz; and David Vincent, of Gastem, whose companies are both members of the QOGA.

The QOGA was created to encourage dialogue about the potential of a new industry in Quebec: oil and gas. The QOGA aims to develop these resources in a secure and environmentally responsible manner, while contributing to economic growth. Its main goal is to illustrate the shared interests and potential mutual benefits for both Quebeckers and the industry itself. The QOGA has nine members and three associate members.

Discussion opened with the history of shale gas in North America, which was first developed in Texas in 1993, and then turned to shale gas in Utica, Quebec, with an area of 10,000 km², for a recoverable reserve estimated at 40 TcF (the equivalent of 40 billion cubic feet). The potential production of Utica shale was first demonstrated in 2007. Test wells have been subsequently drilled.

For the industry, the main challenge is public awareness.

The QOGA is committed to consulting with stakeholders, providing transparent information, obtaining necessary approvals from authorities, negotiating fair compensation with landowners, choosing drilling sites to minimize its footprint and impacts on landowners, and restoring sites once a well is abandoned.

In September 2010, in response to the angry outcry following the announcement of the Quebec government and industry representatives of a shale gas development plan, the QOGA participated in three public information sessions, which were attended by over 1,000 people. That same month, the Quebec government announced a BAPE investigation, and consultations were held in the fall of 2010. BAPE presented its final report in February 2011, which, according to the QOGA, did not recommend implementing a moratorium. In response to the report, the government launched a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), a move supported by industry.

Industry representatives explained that all industry activities are regulated by the Mining Act, which states that resources are owned by the state of Quebec. However, according to industry, this legislation is considered by all (government, industry, municipalities and environmental groups) to be outdated in many areas.

The QOGA believes that developing Quebec's shale gas industry has significant advantages. In terms of investment, the benefit could be several billions of dollars. Shale gas development can bring significant direct and indirect economic benefits, including in the area of job creation, while reducing Quebec's dependence on this resource for its own energy needs. In terms of the environment, natural gas is the cleanest source of energy and is available in the long term, and its introduction into the energy grid would significantly reduce GHGs as compared to the use of coal and oil.

The QOGA believes that the success of this emerging industry requires: (a) certainty that the resource is proven and competitive; (b) a legal, regulatory and fiscally stable framework; (c) establishing the necessary infrastructure for services and transportation; and (d) stakeholder support. The QOGA recognizes that the industry faces a number of communication challenges: it must better inform the public and elected officials and react more swiftly to broad media coverage and misinformation. At long last, the industry recognized it made a tactical error by supporting the Government of Quebec on this issue, rather than encouraging relations with the public and local government officials.

The presentation concluded with specific discussion on the use of water resources for hydraulic fracturing, the impact of pollution waterways, the cost of waste water treatment and the industry's potential impact on the water table.

Throughout the presentation, the parliamentarians asked a great many questions, on all aspects of the industry. Shale gas development is a political issue in France and is also very controversial. The French parliamentarians were keenly interested in the issue.

2. Mutual Recognition Agreements on Professional Qualifications

The members of the Association's Standing Committee had the honour to meet two of the key players in this initiative, H  l  ne Le Gal, Consul General of France to Quebec, and Gil R  millard, Legal Advisor, Secretary General for the agreements.

Ms. Le Gal said the Mutual Recognition Agreements (MRAs) sprung from an observation made since 2005: significant French immigration to Quebec and the impossibility for many of these immigrants to practise their profession because of obstacles put in place by various professional orders.

A framework agreement was signed by the Premier of Quebec and the President of France in October 2008. Under the agreement, the professional orders on both sides of the Atlantic are encouraged to negotiate the recognition of professional qualifications with their counterpart. This requires examining the professional training to determine similarities and differences. With lawyers, for example, it is relatively straightforward, except for the ethical exam imposed in Quebec. With doctors, the main problem is the practice of public health care in Quebec and private health care in France, and the requirement of three-month practicums for immigrant doctors followed by a year of probation in Quebec. There are a few difficulties with veterinarians, as veterinarians in Quebec and the United States can move freely back and forth. Unions can also sometimes stand in the way of professional mobility.

What is interesting about the agreements is that mutual recognition is not based on being French or being a Quebecker: agreements are based on the place of study. A Polish person who studied medicine in France could settle in Quebec according to the same terms and conditions as a French immigrant born in France.

Since October 2008, 63 agreements have been signed, of a possible hundred or so in total. In reality, 80 agreements are likely. Fifty agreements are already in place. The flow of workers has already changed: 350 French have come to Quebec, notably in medicine and health care, and 50 Quebec lawyers now practise in France.

Mr. Rémillard pointed out the excellent cooperation of both French consulates in Quebec in signing the agreement and the resulting MRAs. He said that the agreement is very important to Premier Jean Charest. It is innovative in that it is both an immigration and migration agreement at once and contains important economic benefits. France is the third largest investor in Quebec. He told participants that on Monday, May 9, 2011, the Government of Quebec would unveil an important Northern Policy that has already attracted the interest of a number of investors such as AREVA (uranium), SUEZ (gas, environment, water), ASHTOM and TOTAL.

Another interesting aspect of the MRAs: they encourage professional mobility throughout the European Union and across Canada. A French engineer who is covered by an MRA who settles in Quebec can therefore work anywhere in Canada. Likewise, a Quebec professional who immigrates to France can seek work anywhere in the EU.

Mr. Rémillard clarified that the agreement is not an international agreement per se, but an administrative agreement, which made it possible to sidestep possible obstacles from the European Union or the Canadian federation. Prime Minister Harper and the UE gave their support, and the entire process was very positive.

Naming a number of professions covered by the MRAs, Mr. Rémillard said that 18 agreements had been signed for construction trades, 20 or so for non-construction trades and a dozen or so with professionals. Eight are to be signed in the coming weeks. Negotiations on other MRAs are underway in such areas as insurance, financial institutions and physical education.

In conclusion, Mr. Rémillard stated that the agreement is a success, even though the mobility figures are low for now, pointing to the newness of the MRAs. The effects can only be evaluated in the long term. As for students, figures show that there are currently 7,300 French students studying at Quebec universities, with 2,700 at Cégeps, while 1,200 Quebec students are studying in France. Given the total populations, these figures meet the expected results.

At the end of the meeting's agenda, the parliamentarians agreed to meet in France in September 2011.

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	Montreal, Québec
DATES	May 3 to 5, 2011
DELEGATION	
SENATE	The Hon. Claudette Tardif The Hon. Jean-Claude Rivest
HOUSE OF COMMONS	
STAFF	Serge Pelletier, Association Secretary
TRANSPORTATION	\$ 2,455.32
ACCOMMODATION	\$ 991.92
HOSPITALITY	\$1,514.66
PER DIEMS	\$ 284.50
OFFICIAL GIFTS	\$ 337.00
MISCELLANEOUS / REGISTRATION FEES	\$ 0.00
TOTAL	\$ 5,583.40