

Rallying around the French language and Québec culture

Quebecers form a nation. This nation has been built over the course of a singular, historic journey that embodies a heritage. It is also the expression of a collective will-to-live that resolutely extends into the future. This nation has its own identity, a common language, a defined territory and the inalienable right to self-determination of its future.

The role of the Québec government, as a political expression of the Québécois nation, the only majority francophone community in North America, is different than that of the other provinces. The proposals in this document are aimed at ensuring the Québec government fully assumes its specific responsibilities, notably in promoting the French language and the widespread dissemination of the Québécois culture.

The French language is the common denominator of the Québécois identity. Previous measures that have been undertaken to promote it have been fruitful. But the progress we have seen is still insufficient and sometimes precarious. Considering the current circumstances the Coalition for the Future of Québec believes strong measures need to be undertaken to consolidate the position of the French language in Québec. The measures being envisaged should result in a better integrating of immigrants into Québec's francophone majority, an improvement in the teaching of French and its growing use as the language of business.

Culture shapes the collective identity of a people and ensures its cohesion and development. Neglecting one's culture is self-denial. It is also depriving oneself of a powerful economic tool. Québec's cultural vitality is undeniable. But the Coalition believes more can be done to derive benefit from the cultural vibrancy of the Québec people. The proposed policies are aimed at increasing the dissemination of Québécois culture, in Québec and outside the province.

1- Promoting the French language in Québec: facts and measures

Any reflection on the future of French in Québec has to be based on a certain amount of facts and principles. French is the common language of Quebecers but it is not the only language. There are linguistic minorities that live in the province. Any effort to promote the French language must be done in conjunction with being respectful of Québec's English-language minority. This initiative must also consider the fragility of the First Nations' linguistic heritage. Québec's francization efforts should not, in any circumstance, signify a turning inward. Rather, it should acknowledge the dominance of the English language in the modern world and it should be accompanied by measures aimed at improving the teaching of English in Québec's French-language schools.

Québec's francization efforts will have to be conducted in a difficult context. Everything has already been said about the precariousness of French in North America, a language that is spoken by less than 2% of the population of this area. The significant decline of the relative place of the French language in Canada as a whole further exacerbates this fragility. The percentage of people in Canada with French as their mother tongue went from 29% in 1951 to 22% in 2006. This decline, which has been unabated for six decades, is considerable, and there is nothing to indicate this trend will be reversed in the future. Over the next decade, the percentage of francophones in Canada will likely fall to about 20%.

To understand the linguistic problem in Québec and Canada one needs to be aware of some essential data, and that is the lower birth rate. For generations, francophone Canadians' higher birth rate enabled them to slow down the decline in their demographic weight in Canada. Since the 1960s, which marked a noticeable decline in the birth rate among francophones in Québec and Canada, there has been nothing to counterbalance the two factors contributing to the increase in the percentage of anglophones in Canada, namely the linguistic transfers to English by francophones outside Québec and, in particular, the massive adopting of the English language by Canadian immigrants.

The lower birth rate is not strictly a Québec phenomenon, but it has taken on special meaning in this province. Resorting to immigration has, over time, become a significant part of Québec's demographic policy. Immigration is now, and will be even more so in the future, a key to Québec's demographic growth and a restraint on an overly sharp reduction in its demographic weight in Canada as a whole.

The future linguistic attitude of immigrants, and notably the percentage of them that decide to adopt French as their language of use, is a fundamental, if not - as many feel - the key factor which will ultimately determine the success of any francization effort. This is especially true in Montréal, where almost 90% of newcomers to the province of Québec settle. The percentage of allophones' linguistic transfers to French – barely 51% according to the most recent data – is still well below the level required to ensure the maintaining of the demographic balance of the francophone group in Québec in general and Montréal in particular.

Lucidity should be the watchword in the devising and implementing of measures that could consolidate and reinforce the position of French in the province of Québec. This initiative will have to be conducted in a flexible, tolerant but also a resolute manner, keeping in mind that it will be done under difficult circumstances, among these being the universal attraction of English, the significant drop in the number of people whose mother tongue is French in Montréal and the relentless reduction in the demographic weight of French and Québec in the overall Canadian context. This is why the Coalition believes some new life has to be injected into the francization-of-Québec effort that began just over three decades ago with the adoption of Bill 22 and then the French-language Charter.

While strong political action is one of the ways to promote French, francophones themselves have a role to play by taking on more responsibilities. It isn't a matter of moralizing in inviting every individual to feel a sense of responsibility for the future of the French language and Québec culture, and in issuing a reminder that too often, for a series of reasons that are laudable but problematic nevertheless, Québec francophones tend to switch to English once they detect the person with whom they are speaking is not mother-tongue French. This personal habit has collective consequences. But the vitality of French in Québec depends on Quebecers themselves,

on their everyday attachment to this language, which isn't only a means of communication for them but a way to immerse themselves in the world, express their singularity, offer the world a share of their singularity and universality.

Considering the aforementioned, the Coalition proposes a series of measures in the following three fields of endeavour in an effort to consolidate the position of the French language in Québec:

The integrating of immigrants

Quebecers cannot allow themselves to be partially successful in the harmonious integration of immigrants into the francophone majority. One has to admit the dramatic increase in the number of immigrants over the last decade – 53,985 people in 2010, a 67% increase over the year 2000 – was not accompanied by the proper resources to ensure the integration of this large contingent of newcomers into Québec society. In a recent report Québec's Auditor General highlighted some of the problems relating to the administrative handling of immigrant selection files, noting the selection grid used to match qualified workers with job-market needs had limited effectiveness. Similar concerns were expressed in a parliamentary commission brief recently submitted by the Superior Council of the French Language. In the brief, the Council, after noting the Québec government is not taking the required measures to integrate immigrants, proposes a series of measures to help ensure they are better integrated into Québec's francophone majority and the job market. The courses of action the Council proposes to attain these objectives would seem to be promising but they will really only be successful if sufficient resources are devoted to these initiatives.

The facts are clear. The tools and resources devoted to the selection, reception and integration of immigrants in Québec are not enough to ensure their employability and promote, under the best possible conditions, their integration into the francophone majority. This situation does a disservice to both immigrants and the province of Québec. By keeping in mind that greater thought needs to be given to the problem of immigration, the following specific measures are

being proposed to ensure a more significant and harmonious integration of immigrants into Québec's francophone majority:

Proposal 1. There needs to be considerably more resources devoted to the integration of new arrivals. It is proposed the budget devoted to this effort be substantially increased over the next few years. Resources devoted to teaching French to adult immigrants must be significantly enhanced. This measure will help in providing immigrants with more comprehensive and in-depth training and a better understanding of Québec culture. It will also help to consolidate the professional status of the teachers who perform these duties and raise their remuneration. Restructuring will allow these people to envisage career plans that will provide them with more stability and greater recognition. Resources will also be allocated to ensure better integration for immigrants into the job market. A special effort will be made to help authorities in regions that are away from major centres to receive more immigrants. The amount of money that would be allocated to reach these objectives would result in doubling the Minister of Immigration and Cultural Communities' resources devoted to the integration of new arrivals (\$108 million) and would be an increase of more than 40% of the effort devoted to the integration of immigrants by all of the ministries combined.¹

Estimated cost of the measure: \$125 million

Proposal 2. In light of the glaring lack of resources and the absence of proper planning that has marked the significant increase in the number of immigrants in recent years, the Coalition proposes taking a two-year pause in an effort to more rationally and efficiently reorganize the integrating of immigrants into Québec society. During this transition period, the number of immigrants to Québec will be cut back to 45,000 people per year.

This threshold, which is close to being in line with the average number of immigrants received per year in Québec over the last decade (44,000), will be gradually raised to reach a target of

¹ In addition to an overall increase in allocated funding to integrate immigrants, efforts will be devoted, in collaboration with the job-market partners, to promote greater recognition of the abilities of immigrant workers, which has been one of the main stumbling blocks to a successful integration, as well as to implementing measures to attract and retain more business-oriented immigration, notably immigrant investors. In the same perspective, a concrete action plan will also be advanced so that immigration would be better matched to the needs of the job market and Québec could thereby derive more benefit from the vast resources immigrants have to offer.

50,000 annual immigrant arrivals after measures have been implemented aimed at maximizing their employability and better ensuring their integration into Québec's French-language community. This transition period will also provide an opportunity to explore avenues with a view to further increasing the percentage of immigrants that have a fluency in the use of French when they arrive in Québec. Attaining these two objectives goes hand in hand because many employers have noted that the lack of fluency in the French language was a hiring detriment for many immigrants.

Proposal 3. Discussions will be entered into with the federal government to renegotiate the terms of the Canada-Québec Agreement on family reunification. The number of immigrants admitted through this program represented about 20% of immigrants admitted into Québec in 2010. Managing this "Contingent Particulier" (special quota) would raise the percentage of immigrants selected by the Québec government to about 95% and would result in better coherence in attaining Québec's immigration objectives.

French as the language of business

Proposal 4. A clear sign must be sent regarding the language of commerce in Québec. It is a recurring grievance: it is increasingly difficult to be served in French in certain places of business in Montréal. In retail businesses, French is sometimes mangled; quite often, French is not spoken at all. This certainly doesn't help to foster the image of French as a language that is indispensable and necessary in everyday life in Montréal. L'Office québécois de la langue française will have to assume its responsibilities in this regard in ensuring the French face of Montréal is not only reflected in the window and sign of the places of businesses but also in the ability of each and every person to be served in the French language.

Education

Proposal 5. More resources will be devoted to the teaching of French in the Québec collegiate system. Various avenues will be explored, notably task modulation of French teachers and hiring teaching assistants. Consultations with the main parties involved (teachers, parents and student representatives) will be conducted to better channel the employment of additional resources devoted to this measure. The addition of these extra resources will be accompanied by the raising of the requirements in regard to the mastery of French leading to the granting of a collegial diploma. More efforts and resources will be devoted to improving the teaching of English as a second language in the collegial system. The objective is to better prepare students for the workplace and make French-language colleges even more attractive to those seeking to enhance their linguistic abilities.

Estimated cost of the measures: \$125 million

The Québec government's prerogative in linguistic matters

Proposal 6. Québec must be sovereign in linguistic matters because of its objective reality in North America. It is right for its government to legitimately use the notwithstanding clause when it is a matter of defending the French language. But if the use of the notwithstanding clause remains a last-resort measure and if its indiscriminate use would be an egregious mistake, excluding its use a priori would be depriving the Québec government of a tool to ensure the perpetuity of the French language. The Coalition believes the Québec government, like the Liberal Party under the leadership of Robert Bourassa in 1988, should therefore not exclude this eventuality when its fundamental objectives in matters of protecting the French language in Québec are jeopardized by an interpretation of the 1982 Constitution Act, which Québec still has not endorsed.

The issue of gateway schools is a good example of this. The so-called “gateway” schools provide parents that did not attend an English-language school in Québec and in Canada with an opportunity to send their children to a non-subsidized English-language school and eventually

enrol them in a subsidized school in the English sector. This practice is an injustice and is an unacceptable breach in the application of the French language Charter. The Coalition proposes this practice be prohibited and does not rule out resorting to the notwithstanding clause to achieve this objective.

2- Grasping our culture and identity: observations and recommendations

Culture is an essential element in developing our identity. The various modes of artistic expression are a special outlet enabling us to preserve our collective memory and our uniqueness. It is not only our link with our history but with our ability to envision a future that reflects our personalities and our collective pride.

A key component of Québec's artistic vibrancy is its openness to the world. Québec culture has evolved at a brisk pace over the last 30 years. It continues to break into new markets outside the province and it is further enriched by the support of an immediate environment that is more multicultural. The Asian influences that are a part of Robert Lepage's plays, the literature of Dany Laferrière, the sound of Mile-End musicians, and the emergence of Québécois cuisine with its blend of myriad influences are just some of the expressions of this evolution. Modern Québec culture reinvents itself in prolific fashion every day by maintaining its colourfulness and its own personality.

Quebecers subscribe to a cultural diversity management model based on openness, tolerance and mutual understanding. This approach is predicated on the notion that diversity forms nations' wealth. It presumes an active involvement, from the host society to the integration of new arrivals. In the Coalition's view, this principle is defined in Québec by the core of fundamental identity markers, which include its historical heritage, the French language, democratic ideals and the principles of the secularity of the State and equality among men and women.

Culture is more than a source of collective pride and an endless well of creativity. It is also a major source of economic development for the province of Québec. The cultural sector generates

\$5 billion in revenue per year (which represents about 5% of the GDP) and provides employment to some 170,000 workers, either directly or indirectly.

Unlike the other major Canadian provinces, Québec is a net exporter of cultural products, for two reasons. It consumes few products that come from outside the province compared to its local product consumption, and it is able to export a large part of its production internationally. The Coalition intends to draw on this fact to devise a new cultural-policy direction. The aim is to build on the positive flux of Québec's cultural exchanges by encouraging more widespread exposure of its artistic products, in and outside the province. The positive impact of this policy is clear. Greater exposure for Québec's artistic products is a good way to enrich the cultural heritage of Quebecers and it is also an enlightened economic development strategy.

From strictly a financial standpoint, the effort expended by the Québec government in cultural matters stands out from that of the other provinces, with a per capita contribution which is well above the Canadian average (\$373 vs. \$292). Quebecers' contribution through income tax plays a crucial role in supporting the cultural industries' development with close to \$1 billion a year in direct assistance, government purchases and income tax credits to cultural companies. As a consumer, however, the taxpayer is lagging in supporting the private and public sector efforts in matters of culture. Québec households spend about \$551 per year, compared to the average Canadian household, which spends \$667. The gap widens even more when comparing Québec and Ontario households (\$721 per year).

We believe Québec has made some sound decisions in the past by making a significant contribution in the area of Québec culture. But we think even more can be done by laying out a clearer direction to its efforts. The Coalition thus proposes an action plan based around two specific objectives. The first objective is to stimulate the demand for Québec cultural products in the province. The second objective is to intensify efforts in order to help in the exporting of Québec cultural products and ensure there is adequate funding of major tourist events which have cultural content. To achieve these objectives, the Coalition proposes the maintaining, in actual value, of current government spending on culture and adding \$150 million a year to provide more support to the distribution and development efforts of local, international and digital markets.

The recommended measures to achieve these objectives are as follows:

Stimulating the demand for Québec cultural products

Proposal 1. A source of development and self-fulfillment, the arts help in the maturation process of our young people. But they need to be able to have exposure to the arts. To achieve this, we propose that school and pre-school budgets for the arts be increased by \$50 million a year. This funding will enable every Québec youngster to attend - over and above the activities that are already being offered – more Québec cultural productions.

Estimated cost of the measure: \$50 million

Supporting the export of Québec works and culture

Proposal 2. Québec's development is linked to our ability to break into new markets. Whether it is in dance, music, literature or the arts and film field, we have to be able to produce on the international scene to sustain the development of ambitious initiatives that meet our aspirations, while striving to provide Quebecers with products that can compete with the constant foreign-culture product offerings.

In this context, the Québec government needs to play a partnership role in market development initiatives through its crown corporations and the Ministry of International Relations. The Coalition proposes providing more support to the exporting of Québec's cultural products internationally and ensuring Québec's cultural presence in the digital world (world wide web) by raising the budgets allocated for this purpose by \$75 million per year. The disbursing of this increased support would be done as follows:

- o An additional \$25 million to help international development at SODEC;
- o An additional \$25 million to help international development at CALQ;
- o An additional \$15 million for new-platform marketing initiatives (coordinated by Télé-Québec);

- o An additional \$10 million to the Ministry of International Relations for the development of a Québec cultural program in each of its foreign delegations and the active promoting of Québec's artistic, culinary and touristic distinctiveness.

Estimated cost of the measure: \$75 million

Ensure the longevity of funding of major touristic cultural events

Proposal 3. Considering their substantial impact on Québec's cultural and touristic development, major cultural events should be able to count on adequate and foreseeable funding in the long term. With the disengagement of the federal government, the Québec government needs to assume its responsibilities by ensuring stable funding for these major events. Also, a development plan of existing public facilities should be proposed to the artistic community and Quebecers as a whole to ensure the enhancement of an under-used and costly infrastructure. The Coalition proposes the injection of an additional \$25 million per year to: 1) enable the financial and artistic longevity of these events; 2) promote them more at the international level; 3) provide top-notch venues for their presentation.

Estimated cost of the measure: \$25 million

Cost and funding of the proposed measures

The total cost of the additional measures proposed to help protect the French language and promote Québec culture is \$400 million. Funding for these measures will come from the restructuring of certain business tax credits, totalling \$4 billion a year.

Main sources

The information used in this document has been primarily derived from the following sources:

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