



TAKING CHARGE OF DEVELOPMENT

THE STRENGTH OF THE REGIONS

Québec 

**TAKING CHARGE
OF DEVELOPMENT**
THE STRENGTH OF THE REGIONS

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Foreword

The Minister for Regional Development and Tourism will embark on a tour of the regions in order to explain the elements of the draft legislation on the ministère du Développement économique et régional concerning the widening of the role and responsibilities of the regional county municipalities, the creation of regional conferences of representatives and the perspectives surrounding these changes.

The tour will allow local and regional groups to better understand the scope of the draft legislation, to express their views about the proposed changes and the Government's vision of decentralization and to begin thinking about the actions that will need to be taken once the bill is adopted. The information the Minister gathers will help the Government to better identify the needs and aspirations of the local and regional groups to adapt its activities appropriately over the next few months.

This document combines the main points of information about the draft legislation and specifies the anticipated steps of the Government's plan. **It presumes nothing with regard to the work of the National Assembly since the draft legislation may undergo amendment following the discussions held in parliamentary committee.**

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Message from the ministers

Québec was built on the strength of its regions, cities and villages and on the drive of the people who inhabit them. These essentials should provide us with a springboard for a new era with regard to local and regional development. If Québec is to affirm its place and its uniqueness in the new century, it must maximize contribution of all its regions.

Such an affirmation carries with it the need for sweeping changes. In fact, everyone agrees that many of our regions have posted results that are often remarkable. However, over the last 30 years, certain Québec regions have not attained a pace of growth and development that keeps pace with that for Québec as a whole. The Québec Liberal Party has had the opportunity to hear this message on many occasions during tours of the regions. It was after these highly productive consultations that one of its committees produced the document *Faire confiance aux régions*. The draft legislation takes its inspiration from this document.

We recognize that important advances have been made in local and regional development. What has been accomplished in this area will provide support for launching a new dynamic where citizens of the regions will have their say with regard to developing their communities. What we are proposing in this regard is to put the levers for economic and regional development back into the hands of the citizens of the regions and their municipal representatives by taking the unprecedented step of decentralizing and devolving responsibilities and resources.

This is a commitment by the State to the elected representatives of the regions and to the citizens who elect them. This commitment by the State is founded on people's attachment to the area where they live, the energy to build that brings local and regional communities together and the wish of socioeconomic leaders to contribute to the drive of Québec's regions.

The success of this new partnership that we are proposing to the regions relies on the determination of the leaders of our communities. The State will be the support for the initiatives and aspirations of the citizens of Québec's regions.

The Minister of Economic
and Regional Development



Michel Audet

The Minister for Regional
Development and Tourism



Nathalie Normandeau

The Minister of Municipal Affairs,
Sports and Recreation



Jean-Marc Fournier

Introduction

To follow up on its commitment presented in the document *Faire confiance aux régions*, the new government is proposing a change of course that will have momentous consequences for Québec. It is planning to markedly alter the relationship between the State and the regions, relying on the will of elected representatives to take development of their home regions in hand. The Government wishes to confer new responsibilities on municipalities, along with the related financial resources with a view to improving services to citizens and businesses, increasing transparency through the accountability of municipal representatives and reducing structures. This is a huge undertaking where the work will be carried out in stages. The Government is committed to giving the regions the means they require to develop their full potential.

Overall, the Government's plan to decentralize will unfold in three major stages.

First, draft legislation was brought before the National Assembly which was intended to strengthen the power of regional county municipalities with regard to local economic development and support for entrepreneurship. Initially, according to the plan, a regional conference of representatives will be set up in each of Québec's administrative regions.

Following that, the Government will determine which powers, responsibilities and resources may be decentralized and devolved to the regions. The departments and agencies will examine their programs and services in order to formulate proposals as to which responsibilities might be transferred to the regions or assumed jointly with the municipal or regional authorities.

Based on all of the proposals contained in an orientation document, to be produced in June 2004, the Government will be able, during the third stage, to begin discussions with each of the regions. Taking into account needs and resources, a regional conference of representatives will be able to identify what they require and enter into an agreement with the government to ensure the social, cultural and economic development of their region.

The pages that follow provide a diagnosis of the existing situation, and present the goals, principles and stages required to carry out the decentralization plan. In addition, the Government will propose a reporting mechanism and will clarify what type of transitional assistance it will provide to the regional conferences of representatives and the regional county municipalities.

1 Diagnosis of the existing situation

Background

The issue of redistributing and sharing powers and responsibilities between the State and local and regional communities is not new. Since the beginning of the Quiet Revolution, it has been at the heart of Québec society's great debates.

Québec's development has not been homogeneous throughout its territory. Strong disparities exist among the regions of Québec. The resource regions were unable to maintain the same level of economic activity as the heavily urbanized areas. Successive governments have sought a more equitable distribution of wealth among all citizens regardless of their place of residence. The State has developed far-reaching education and health and social services networks as well as income redistribution policies. It has also built the roads infrastructure to reduce isolation, lack of services and unemployment in the resource regions. The Government also established the Bureau d'aménagement de l'Est du Québec (BAEQ) and, later on, the Office de planification et de développement du Québec (OPDQ). It adopted policies such as *Le choix des régions* in 1983, *Développer les régions du Québec* in 1992 and the *Politique de soutien au développement local et régional* in 1997. In spite of all of these efforts, it must be acknowledged that the regions have not yet attained their full potential and that the main expectations of the local and regional areas are far from met.

They are summarized as follows:

- Improving the efficiency and quality of services to citizens in the regions
- Bringing decision-making closer to the citizens to provide a better adapted response to the variety of needs felt in the regions
- Expanding the responsibilities of local and regional areas to ensure greater empowerment over the development of their territory
- Taking into account by the Government of the priorities established by local and regional areas
- Simplifying the structures and relations between the State and citizens

These are the concerns that the Government's decentralization plan wishes to address in calling on municipal representatives to define significant choices surrounding the economic, social and cultural development of their regions. The Government will support their efforts by arriving at individual agreements with the regional conferences of representatives.

Some facts about the regions' current situation

Like all industrialized nations, Québec is facing a significant slowdown in the growth of its population, and this phenomenon will broaden in the medium to long term. The consequences of an aging population are predictable: aging of the labour force and, in the medium term, a declining labour force; increasing pressure on pension funds; increasing needs for health care, particularly in the long-term care sector; reduction and thinning out of school enrolment across the territory. These phenomena affect regions differently depending on their resources, the strength of their economy or their distance from large urban centres.

This situation has obvious consequences for government services in the regions. For example, the decrease in population makes it difficult to maintain schools in villages and the reduction in school enrolment has an impact on financing for CEGEPs and universities. In as much as all Quebecers must be guaranteed equal access to basic services regardless of their place of residence, spreading government resources becomes more difficult. For example, with regard to health care, Québec is already dealing with a lack of medical personnel, more sharply felt in the regions than in the large centres, and the situation is even more serious with regard to specialized services.

The Government intends to support regional initiatives designed to counteract the decline in their population. It will support measures to reduce the level of unemployment in the regions, to persuade youth to stay and to attract immigrants. Currently, the balance of immigration is toward the heavily urbanized regions. For example, the Montréal region

welcomes 87% of new arrivals. By encouraging local and regional leadership and taking measures so the regions can develop their full potential, the Government will promote the growth of economic activities to maintain the population of the resource regions.

Regarding economic development and assistance to businesses, we find a multiplicity of actors throughout the territory. Citizens and businesses are therefore obliged to knock at a number of doors to obtain services. In fact, there exists a multitude of non-profit organizations that are not accountable to the public and are often subsidized by government. A large number of departments provide services in the regions, without even counting the funds destined for local and regional development. The federal government is also present throughout the territory through the community futures development corporations (CFDC) and the business development centres (BDC). Thus, we are faced with such a mass of programs and structures that citizens and businesses have a great deal of trouble finding their way through it. The government will work together with the regions to simplify structures and programs and reorganize services in the regions to the huge advantage of both citizens and entrepreneurs. Less numerous yet simpler, services will be more efficient.

The economic context

The world economy is undergoing profound changes. Trade between countries is becoming freer and competition is driving businesses to increase their productivity and introduce innovative methods to stay in the race. Globalization has created difficult situations for many regions of the world. International conditions have also affected Québec. For example, the drop in the price of raw materials has had an impact on employment and the economy in several regions, particularly the resource regions. The events of September 11, 2001 caused a slowdown in exports and a reduction in tourism. The recent rise in the Canadian dollar relative to the US currency underscores the lack of competitiveness of many Québec industries. These few examples show the vulnerability of a number of industries and highlight the importance of pursuing a strategy of economic diversification in the regions.

The issues

Two major issues stand out among the various elements of the diagnosis: the regions' power of attraction and their ability to remain competitive in the new world economic environment.

First, the power of attraction is vitally important to the regions. The vitality of the population of the regions will depend over the next few years on their ability to attract young people and immigrants. Young families must be able to find jobs, a good quality of life and services in the regions so they can settle and continue to live there. If the decline and thinning out of the populations continue, the State and the communities will face the difficult issue of maintaining public services everywhere across the territory.

Second, the regional economies, due to their respective characteristics, will be affected differently by the process of globalization. They will have to find ways to remain competitive in their spheres of activity. Using new technologies will be necessary to improve productivity. A highly qualified labour force and the presence of efficient communications infrastructures will be key competitive advantages.

That said, regions whose development depends on a single industry will be particularly vulnerable in the new economic environment. In a single-industry region, the closing of the main plant or the shutdown of resource extraction operations can have catastrophic consequences on the local population, which then witnesses the disappearance of their sole livelihood. To reduce this risk, the regions must pursue strategies of economic diversification in order to be able to reconvert the local economy if necessary.

The assets and potential of the regions

The regions have assets and a potential for development whose advantages must be recognized. There are already many agreements between government and the regions to develop spheres of excellence and, since 1994, nearly 250 specific agreements of all types have been reached concerning regional development—agreements that the Government will uphold. To succeed, the regions must enjoy greater freedom of action and rely on the creative and dynamic ability of their citizens and businesses. Broadening the responsibilities of municipal representatives is needed to breathe new life into regional development. In effect, it is the local deciders closest to the needs of the areas who can best foster promising initiatives and encourage the emergence of new solutions adapted to the specific situation of each region. The Government will lend a hand to local entrepreneurship and support the emergence of structuring projects for local economies as well the improvement of public services and the development of the regions' cultural identities. The relationships between the State and the regions will be substantially altered.

2 The means to act independently, responsibly and in concert

The goal sought by the Government's decentralization and devolution plan is to encourage municipal representatives to play a bigger role in the economic, social and cultural development of their regions. By definition, elected officials are the population's representatives. By corollary, broadening the power of elected officials increases the power of the citizens.

Within the framework of the bill, the Government will broaden the roles and responsibilities of municipal representatives and grant them wider decision-making power. This change will have significant consequences for them: new areas of competence to control, new obligations to assume and new accountability to voters with regard to the use of public funds. The Government's decentralization plan will mean a change in the manner of governing, a new space for the exercise of democracy that will allow people living in the regions to make their own choices and have a more direct influence on their development plans.

Of course, attaining such a goal will take time. It will require getting accustomed to a new sharing of responsibilities between the State and the regions. It will necessitate a change of vision not only on the part of municipal representatives and the population, but also on the part of government and the Québec public administration. Seeing that a transition period will be necessary to allow all of the stakeholders to adjust to their new roles, **the Government has given itself a very specific target date. Therefore, before the end of the current term of government, municipal representatives must have the means to act independently, responsibly and in concert. In that way, they will have access to the best tools for encouraging new drive in their regions.**

Various criteria will make it possible to form a judgment as to the success of the Government's decentralization plan. Citizens and businesses must progressively see:

- Decision centres moving closer to local and regional settings
- An improvement in the quality of services
- The demonstration of new leadership with regard to regional development
- Greater power on the part of municipal representatives to make decisions
- A change in the Government's mode of intervention in the regions that emphasizes adapting and responding to regional needs

3 The principles of the approach

The Government's decentralization plan is based on the following principles:

- **Strengthening local democracy:** Because they are elected, mayors and wardens are accountable to the public for their decisions and actions within the framework of the responsibilities set out in municipal laws. The Government believes that by transferring certain of its existing responsibilities to municipal representatives it will give local areas direct control over a larger portion of public funds and, by the same token, strengthen local democracy. Consequently, municipal representatives will be obliged to account for the sums transferred to them by government. Given that each region will have the advantage of an individual agreement with government, accountability may vary according to the nature and contents of each agreement. Agreements will not necessarily concern the same issues from region to region.
- **Promoting discussion among elected representatives on the regional level:** The Government is proposing by law to create regional conferences of representatives. They will be made up majoritarily of persons already in office in order to carry out the responsibilities that are a natural extension of those already conferred on the RCMs. The RCR will be an assembly of elected representatives from municipal authorities designed to better carry out discussion and planning. In this way, the Government will promote a better coordination of existing local and regional democratic structures. Moreover, the socioeconomic leaders who will take part in the RCR will be able to participate actively in development projects in their regions.
- **Transferring appropriate responsibilities and resources:** To adhere to its commitment to the public, the Government intends to transfer the appropriate responsibilities and resources.
- **Avoiding the institution of a new level of government:** The Government has chosen to rely on the accountability of municipal representatives in conferring new responsibilities to existing municipal authorities such as the RCMs. These were created around the beginning of the 1980s and have become part of local and regional democratic life. Given that the RCMs already have special powers with regard to developing their localities, the Government preferred broadening their areas of responsibility rather than creating another structure.

- **Reviewing and streamlining the planning and development agencies:** One of the Government's main priorities is to review how the State intervenes in the economy. Consequently, municipal representatives, meeting in regional conferences of representatives, will have the mandate to review planning and development agencies at the local and regional levels, for the purpose of eliminating or merging agencies and implementing citizen and business services that are simpler and more effective. Each regional conference of representatives will make recommendations to the Government in this regard. A true simplification of economic development structures should result from this examination to the greater benefit of both citizens and entrepreneurs.
- **Bringing the delivery of services as close as possible to the citizens:** The Government believes that, being close to the citizens, municipal representatives will be better able to organize services. Within the jurisdictions transferred, municipal representatives will have the necessary authority to act, organize and adapt services based on the needs of the population. In addition, government itself will reorganize its own programs and services. Among other initiatives, it intends to work to further devolve its activities and develop online services.

4 The Government's decentralization plan

To indicate quickly its intention to move forward with regard to its decentralization plan, the Government has decided to include in the draft legislation constituting the ministère du Développement économique et régional provisions designed to equip the RCMs with new powers that permit them to create regional conferences of representatives. Therefore, adoption of the bill by the National Assembly is central to the first stage of the Government's approach, which consists in increasing the ability of the regions to assume those responsibilities that the Government is prepared to devolve to them. This will indicate more clearly the strategic role of municipal representatives in the development of their regions.

4.1 The first stage of the plan

With regard to decentralization, the draft bill, once adopted by the National Assembly, will provide the following measures:

The strengthening of the regional county municipalities (RCM)

Regional county municipalities, or their equivalent, will be given mandates that were previously under the authority of the local development centres. RCMs must obligatorily cede the transferred responsibilities to a non-profit corporation of their choice since the existing powers of RCMs do not allow them to manage business assistance programs. They will be obliged necessarily to call on a non-profit corporation to fulfil the new mandate that government devolves on them. This corporation may be the existing LDC or another agency they choose. Once chosen, the agency will be called the "local development centre." RCMs will be responsible for financing the agencies and appointing their boards of directors.

The basic mandate of the new LDCs will consist of the following elements:

- To provide, if need be in partnership with other persons or agencies, i.e. the private sector, all first-line business services and to secure their funding
- To develop a local action plan for the economy and employment that takes into account principally the development plan established by the regional conference of representatives for its area, to have the plan approved by the RCM, and to monitor the plan's execution
- To develop, based on provincial and regional orientations, strategies and objectives, private enterprise strategies and objectives, including an entrepreneurship development strategy that ties in the social economy
- To be a consultative committee to the local employment centre in its area

Special mandates that RCMs decide to devolve on the new LDCs may be added to this basic mandate as a follow-up to various of their programs or agreements reached with government departments or agencies.

The composition of the new LDCs will be certified by the RCMs, and no obligations will be put on them with regard to the milieu of the members they select. Nonetheless, municipal representatives must be among them, since LCD directors and directors of the local employment centres will automatically be non-voting members.

The agreed amounts and the terms and conditions of accountability will be established within the framework of an agreement between the Government and the RCMs. Furthermore the moratorium on the

Fonds local d'investissement (FLI) will be extended until the Government has decided on new ways to stimulate the economy of Québec and its regions.

With these tools, every region will have the necessary means and flexibility to fully develop its potential. While respecting the autonomy of municipal representatives, the Government will retain responsibility for developing policies and programs on the provincial level and for strategic support (development of infrastructure or other), as required. Beyond this, government will ensure the equitable sharing of resources among the regions and take into account regions that face particular difficulties.

Regional conferences of representatives (RCR)

The regional conferences of representatives will be made up of municipal representatives and, if they so decide, socioeconomic leaders. They will be mandated to confer, coordinate and plan in order to ensure the development of their regions. This regional-scale mandate will allow them to become the spokesperson of choice for the Government for their regions. The RCRs may set up consultation groups representing the various areas. In addition, the RCRs will be able to call on the RCMs and municipalities of their regions to carry out mandates and deliver services designed to implement their five-year development plans. The RCMs will be able to arrive at agreements among themselves in order to pool their resources when the situation requires. The RCMs and RCRs may also form agreements with the Government or departments, each within its own jurisdiction.

The regional conferences of representatives will take up the duties of the regional development council in each of the

seventeen administrative regions. The decree establishing each of the regional development councils will then be abrogated and the financial resources reserved for funding the RDCs will be transferred to the RCRs to enable them to fulfil their mandates. Contingent on adoption of the draft bill by the National Assembly, the Government will be in a position to honour its commitment to set up the RCRs within a timeframe of twelve months of being elected.

Mandate

The primary mandate of the regional conferences of representatives will be:

- To reach an agreement with the minister regarding regional development stating the conditions that the regional conferences of representatives will undertake to honour, as well as the roles and responsibilities of each of the parties
- To evaluate the planning and development agencies at the local and regional level that will be funded in whole or in part by government
- To promote discussion among the partners in the regions
- To advise the minister on the development of the regions
- To establish a five-year development plan defining the general and specific development goals for their regions
- To reach specific agreements for exercising the powers and responsibilities conferred under the agreement with the government departments and agencies and, if need be, other partners
- To fulfil any other mandates the minister may give them

A small secretariat will provide support.

Composition

The RCRs will be made up of municipal representatives, i.e. wardens and mayors. Their municipal representation may include, depending on the territory in question:

- The wardens of the regional county municipalities
- The mayor of the city with jurisdiction for the regional county municipality (RCM core)
- The mayors of municipalities with over 100,000 residents
- The mayors of the RCM core cities as defined under the *Act respecting Land use planning and development*
- The borough presidents of the cities of Montréal and Québec
- The mayors of cities referred to as central cities¹;
- In the event that the warden is the mayor of a core city or a city in appendix to the Act, the RCM will appoint a second representative

The conference of municipal representatives of the Laval administrative region will be made up of all the members of the city council of the City of Laval.

Those RCRs that so wish may make provision to include socioeconomic leaders among their number. They will then determine the length of their terms of office and the status of their representatives. However, their number may not exceed one-third of the elected members of the RCRs.

Therefore, their number may vary from one region to another.

The socioeconomic leaders will continue to play a major role in local and regional development, either as part of the RCRs or through consultation groups that the RCRs may decide to establish.

Reporting

Reporting is the corollary of accountability. The Government has decided on the following process:

- The regional conferences of representatives shall produce annual reports of their activities and financial statements to submit to the minister. The financial statements shall be accompanied by an auditor's report
- The minister shall table the RCRs' reports in the National Assembly within thirty days of receiving them or, if not in session, within thirty days of it resuming its work

The RCRs' reporting shall be included in the parameters of the agreement they must reach with the Government for the use of the funds the Government transfers to them. Furthermore, by making the meetings of the RCRs public, the legislature has incorporated a direct and ongoing form of reporting to the local population.

The RCMs shall determine the reporting requirements of the LDCs. The LDCs shall submit annually to the RCMs reports of their activities as well as their financial statements.

1. By city in appendix to the Act, the government refers to those cities that provide services to smaller surrounding municipalities.

Support for the RCRs and RCMs

The Government's decentralization plan will result in large changes in processes, in the relationships between regional authorities themselves and between the Government and the regions. To assist local and regional areas in understanding the nature, scope and legal or other consequences of the changes carried out, the ministère des Affaires municipales, du Sport et du Loisir and the ministère du Développement économique et régional will make available to them resource persons who will be able to visit the regions and provide the appropriate advice, in the same way as the Government provided to municipalities to develop planning diagrams during the establishment of the RCMs.

The regions will also be able to call on these two departments to obtain consulting services with regard to planning, project management and assistance to businesses. Other departments may also provide assistance depending on the agreements reached between the Government, the RCRs and the RCMs. Regional government offices will also make contributions in order to help local and regional areas. Government will adapt its service offering according to the needs expressed.

The Table Québec-régions

Furthermore, the Table Québec-régions will be maintained given the relevance of preserving the communications link between the Government and the regions. The composition of the Table Québec-régions will be determined jointly by the Minister of Economic and Regional Development and the Minister of Municipal Affairs, Sports and Recreation.

4.2 The second and third stages of the plan

Second, at the beginning of 2004, the Government will ask each department and each of its agencies to review all of their activities and programs in order to determine which may be decentralized and devolved. This work is complex and will be a determining factor in the organization of government.

Progressive and tailored decentralization

The Government plans to implement a tailored decentralization that will proceed in stages in order to meet the needs of each of the regions and take their particularities into account. The necessary time for discussion must be set aside in order to agree on the responsibilities that each of the regions is ready to assume.

The Government intends to begin its decentralization process in the areas of economic development and assistance to businesses. First, five departments will be specifically invited to submit decentralization proposals or to suggest joint actions with municipal authorities. These are the ministère du Développement économique et régional, the ministère des Ressources naturelles, de la Faune et des Parcs, the ministère des Transports, the ministère de l'Emploi, de la Solidarité sociale et de la Famille and the ministère de l'Agriculture, des Pêcheries et de l'Alimentation. Along the way, other departments will join the ranks and submit their proposals for decentralization or joint initiatives. Decentralization will then be extended to several other areas of government activity. These proposals will be contained in an orientation document to be made public in June 2004.

Devolution for better services for the public

Government departments and agencies will also review services and programs whose management might be devolved to the regions or that could be reorganized in the regions. The proposals selected will be included in the orientation document prepared by the Government.

The resulting decisions will have important repercussions on the delivery of services to the public. In the medium term, three consequences are foreseeable.

Services and programs will be reviewed and may be combined or reorganized. It may be that points of service will be distributed differently throughout the territory in order to be closer to the citizens. Last, the devolution of government activities may have the effect of moving, on a voluntary basis, civil servants into the regions to better support municipal institutions and better serve both citizens and businesses.

In the same spirit, the regional administrative conferences (CAR) will see their role better defined. They were established more than twenty years ago for the purpose of coordinating the services provided by department regional offices and agencies in the regions. Their mandate will be reviewed to reflect the new government organization regarding decentralization and devolution. The CARs will play a key role in carrying out the decentralization plan. They will assist the Government in smoothing out the difficulties that will inevitably arise along the way.

Last, online services will be another important phase of the Government's decentralization plan. The effort to develop the government portal and make it accessible to everyone will be stepped up. Citizens will be able to obtain the maximum information about government online, for example: receive and fill out forms, make transactions, obtain permits, pay their income tax, start up a business electronically. The list is far from complete. Many services are already available on the government's Internet site, and other developments are to follow. The Government wants all citizens in the regions to have the possibility of obtaining services electronically and to be able to communicate directly with government employees in the regions or elsewhere if the government portal is not enough. Last, the Government will explore the electronic links possible between its Internet site and those of the municipal authorities. The electronic services provided to citizens and businesses can then be maximized.

Finally, the Government of Québec will undertake discussions with the federal government in order to arrive at a better integration of business services in every region of Québec.

Conclusion

The Government's decentralization plan is eloquent proof of the Government's readiness to show its confidence in people in the regions and, in particular, municipal representatives.

The Government believes in the ability of the regions to manage themselves and find solutions adapted to their needs. It has faith in the strength and potential of the regions. Increased resources will allow them to develop more.

In time, a new balance in the relationships between government and the regions will be established to the benefit of all Québécois.

The development of the regions relies on strong leadership that is expressed directly at the local and regional levels. The Government wishes to give people in the regions all the autonomy they need to build their future and will accompany them in their effort by continuing to support local and regional development. Government will remain a committed partner in the regions, one that will recognize the choices made by the localities with which it works.

Entrepreneurship, autonomy and accountability of municipal representatives are all terms that mark a change of course in government of the regions. The Government is convinced that the regions will take their rightful place and develop their full potential—social, cultural and economic—while taking into account the citizens' ability to pay. In that way, they will contribute to the growth of Québec.

This plan marks a decisive turning point. All of the effort brought to bear will be justified by the delivery of better services, at lesser cost, to both citizens and entrepreneurs.

That means:

- Services that are closer to the citizens
- Services that citizens will help decide on
- Services that will meet localities' needs
- Services that are efficient and fast
- Services that are simple and accessible

