

**LINGUISTIC AND CULTURAL DIVERSITY IN THE  
CONTEXT OF ECONOMIC INTEGRATION OF THE  
AMERICAS**

**René Lemieux**  
**Michel Rossignol**  
*Political and Social Affairs Division*

**August 1997**



Library of  
Parliament  
Bibliothèque  
du Parlement

**Parliamentary  
Research  
Branch**

**The Parliamentary Research Branch of the Library of Parliament works exclusively for Parliament, conducting research and providing information for Committees and Members of the Senate and the House of Commons. This service is extended without partisan bias in such forms as Reports, Background Papers and Issue Reviews. Research Officers in the Branch are also available for personal consultation in their respective fields of expertise.**

**CE DOCUMENT EST AUSSI  
PUBLIÉ EN FRANÇAIS**



CANADA

LIBRARY OF PARLIAMENT  
BIBLIOTHÈQUE DU PARLEMENT

## LINGUISTIC AND CULTURAL DIVERSITY IN THE CONTEXT OF ECONOMIC INTEGRATION OF THE AMERICAS

### SUMMARY

The interpenetration of cultures through communications networks and freer trade presents Canada with both risks and opportunities. The strong cultural presence of the United States in Canada has always set us a challenge, one that we have met by taking linguistic multicultural and cultural measures that have contributed to the preservation of our linguistic and cultural diversity.

In addition to such domestic action, Canada has also looked beyond its borders; when the time came to create broader international trading blocs, it made sure the Canada-United States Free Trade Agreement and the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) contained clauses exempting its cultural industries from certain of their provisions.

Canada's experience in defending and promoting its linguistic and cultural diversity, both domestically and internationally, has made it a key player in the expansion of NAFTA and the creation of a pan-American free trade zone.

Parliamentarians are taking part in efforts to maintain this diversity, and certainly have a role to play in studying the repercussions of hemispheric economic integration on the rights of linguistic groups and Canada's cultural identity. As citizens' representatives in their ridings and as legislators, parliamentarians champion citizens' claims and take part in policy development in these areas. Moreover, through their participation in the work of interparliamentary organizations, they can inform their colleagues in other countries of the kind of problems facing Canada and compare notes on solutions to common problems.

On the occasion of the Parliamentary Conference of the Americas, Canadian parliamentarians will have the opportunity to exchange views on many subjects with their colleagues from a number of other countries in the hemisphere and to consider setting up a parliamentary network that could serve as a framework for discussions at the level of the Americas as a whole.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<b>PAGE</b>
INTRODUCTION.....	1
ACTION TAKEN BY CANADA TO MAINTAIN AND PROMOTE LINGUISTIC DIVERSITY .....	2
A. Legislative Measures .....	3
B. Agencies .....	3
ACTION TAKEN BY CANADA TO MAINTAIN AND PROMOTE CULTURAL DIVERSITY .....	4
A. Canadian Multicultural Policy.....	4
B. Canadian Cultural Policy.....	5
FTA AND NAFTA CLAUSES INTENDED TO MAINTAIN AND PROMOTE LINGUISTIC AND CULTURAL DIVERSITY.....	7
ROLES OF PARLIAMENTARIANS .....	8
A. As Representatives .....	9
B. As Legislators .....	10
C. In Interparliamentary Organizations.....	11
CONCLUSION .....	14



CANADA

LIBRARY OF PARLIAMENT  
BIBLIOTHÈQUE DU PARLEMENT

## LINGUISTIC AND CULTURAL DIVERSITY IN THE CONTEXT OF ECONOMIC INTEGRATION OF THE AMERICAS\*

The interpenetration of cultures through communications networks has always been a risk and an opportunity. [*Translation*]

Armand Mattelart<sup>(1)</sup>

### INTRODUCTION

There are those who believe that the elimination of trade barriers between the various countries of the Americas, together with the limited access some of these countries have to communications technologies, bring risks to the language and culture of certain states or communities. These persons hold that the interpenetration of economies leads to the interpenetration of languages and cultures and threatens to swallow up specific cultural traits.

Parliamentarians taking part in the workshops on culture, language and communication at the Parliamentary Conference of the Americas will be invited to discuss ways and means of ensuring the preservation of linguistic and cultural diversity in the context of economic integration of the Americas; among other things, they will be particularly called upon to examine protection measures such as the inclusion of cultural exemption clauses in hemispheric economic agreements, and to reflect on the role they themselves may play in this regard.

Canada is a country with two official languages, numerous cultural traditions and an aboriginal population whose cultural backgrounds are very varied. Though such diversity may today be a source of tensions among Canada's various political stakeholders, and may even have resulted in a national identity crisis, paradoxically it remains a potent force in the fight against the strong linguistic and cultural pressures exercised by our omnipresent American neighbour. It is imperative, therefore, for Canada to ensure that its linguistic and cultural diversity is preserved and remains vital.

---

\* This paper was originally prepared for the Delegation from the Parliament of Canada to the Parliamentary Conference of the Americas, September 1997, Quebec City.

(1) André Mattelart, *La Nouvelle Idéologie globalitaire* in *La Mondialisation au delà des mythes*, Éditions La Découverte et Syros, Les Dossiers de l'état du monde, Paris, 1997, p. 89.

Above all the state must take action domestically if it hopes to maintain and promote its population's linguistic and cultural diversity. It would be futile to try to maintain this diversity in the context of hemispheric or indeed global economic integration if nothing was done to protect it at home.

The defense and promotion of linguistic and cultural diversity is an integral part of the Canadian government's policies, as is clear from Acts and regulations and the various institutions, programs and activities that have been created, as will be briefly described below. These measures are intended to imbue Canadians with a sense of belonging and of having a distinct identity, thereby strengthening national unity.

This philosophy was expressed during the negotiations leading to the international trade liberalization agreements and, at the signing of these, particularly the Canada-United States Free Trade Agreement (FTA) and the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the agreements sponsored by the World Trade Organization. Indications are that Canada will follow this model once again when the time comes to hold negotiations for the expansion of NAFTA and the creation of a pan-American free trade zone.

## **ACTION TAKEN BY CANADA TO MAINTAIN AND PROMOTE LINGUISTIC DIVERSITY**

Canada's linguistic diversity results from the fact that it has two official languages — English and French — as well as a multitude of indigenous languages and the various "heritage" languages with which successive generations of immigrants from many countries have enriched our linguistic tapestry. Almost a quarter of all Canadians, 24.3% to be precise, have French as their mother tongue, making it the most commonly spoken language after English. Though the majority of Canada's francophone population is concentrated geographically within the province of Quebec, there are francophone minorities from one end of Canada to the other. The francophone majority in Quebec and the francophone minorities elsewhere in Canada therefore constitute a linguistic minority within all North America, where the vast majority are anglophone. Paradoxically, Quebec anglophones find themselves in the minority in that province even though they belong to the linguistic majority in Canada and on the North American continent.

## **A. Legislative Measures**

In Canada, the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, passed by Parliament in 1982, re-states and refines elements of the *Constitution Act* of 1867 with respect to official languages. French and English are stated to be Canada's two official languages, possessing equal status, rights and privileges in their use before the courts and in the institutions of the Parliament and Government of Canada and the Government of New Brunswick. The Charter also guarantees that, where numbers warrant, public funds shall be used to provide education in their mother tongue for official language minorities.

These two pieces of legislation are supplemented by the *Official Languages Act* of 1988, which grants equal status to French and English before the courts, in Parliament and throughout areas of federal jurisdiction. It spells out the federal government's commitment to supporting and fostering the flourishing of official language minorities and encouraging progress toward equal status and use of the French and English languages within Canadian society.

In addition to these Acts, the *Canadian Human Rights Act* which is more general in its scope, also provides a safeguard for human rights. It is intended to ensure equal opportunity for all and to eliminate discrimination in areas of federal jurisdiction. The Act outlaws all discrimination based on age, sex, race or any other of the enumerated factors. It gives protection against such discrimination to anyone living in Canada, whether the discrimination is exercised in or by federal government departments, agencies or Crown corporations, by federally regulated organizations, or by industries, such as chartered banks, airlines, radio and television broadcasters, and interprovincial telephone and telecommunications companies.

## **B. Agencies**

The Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages is a federal office whose mandate is to ensure respect for the linguistic rights of all Canadians, including those who make up the country's official language minorities, as stipulated in the *Official Languages Act* and the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. The Commissioner reports regularly to Parliament on what progress, if any, has been made in that regard and on the investigations he has carried out into complaints received. His role is at once that of an ombudsman, an auditor and a

promoter of linguistic equality. His main duties are directly concerned with the promotion of linguistic and cultural diversity, as indicated in his Annual Report:

[...] the chief quality of the Office: the capacity to stimulate, to accelerate and to foster progress while promoting open dialogue, accommodation and mutual respect between our two language communities, whether they live in majority or minority settings.<sup>(2)</sup>

The Minister of Canadian Heritage has such responsibilities as fostering progress toward equal status and use for French and English and encouraging the promotion and development of official language minorities across the country. To that end, the Department of Canadian Heritage administers assistance programs, in particular the Official Languages in Education Program under which the Canadian government refunds to provincial and territorial governments part of the expenditures they incur for the education of linguistic minorities.

## **ACTION TAKEN BY CANADA TO MAINTAIN AND PROMOTE CULTURAL DIVERSITY**

In Canada, action taken to maintain and promote cultural diversity may be considered under two headings: multicultural policy and cultural policy.

### **A. Canadian Multicultural Policy**

Even though it is still true that most of the population are descended from the two European nations that colonized and founded Canada, today, thanks to our active immigration policy, 31% of Canadians are of neither British nor French descent. This multicultural diversity ultimately gave rise to a Canadian multicultural policy as reflected in section 27 of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, which states:

This Charter shall be interpreted in a manner consistent with the preservation and enhancement of the multicultural heritage of Canadians.

---

(2) Commissioner of Official Languages, *Annual Report*, Ottawa, 1995, p. 1.



Canada's policy is based on the goals of the *Multiculturalism Act*; namely, to preserve and enhance multiculturalism in Canada, to facilitate the preservation of culture and language, to fight against discrimination, to foster awareness and comprehension of cultures and to promote institutional changes at the federal level that will reflect the multicultural dimension.

Responsibility for enforcement of the Act lies with the Minister of Canadian Heritage and Secretary of State for Multiculturalism and the Status of Women. A number of programs are charged with carrying out this responsibility, for example Race Relations and Cross-cultural Understanding, Community Support and Participation, and Heritage Cultures and Languages.

### **B. Canadian Cultural Policy**

Feelings of belonging and cultural identity are in many ways the result of familiarity with the special characteristics of one's own community and those around it. Canada's internal cultural cohesiveness has long been threatened by a wide range of factors, especially the omnipresent foreign cultural products of the United States.

The Canadian population is small compared to the size of the country and is, in addition, concentrated in a narrow 5,514-kilometre corridor along the U.S. border, with relatively easy access to U.S. culture. On the other hand, Canadian cultural products must contend with the problems created by the distance between communities, the division of the market into two linguistic groups, and tension between economic and cultural imperatives. The challenge for government is to provide choices that allow for access to Canadian culture without in any way limiting access to foreign cultural products.

In such a context, Canadian culture would scarcely have been able to develop without direct or indirect government support. Since the early days of cinema and radio, the Canadian government has had to intervene to ensure that Canadians had the opportunity to hear, see, read and communicate with one another. This development with respect to culture was only an extension of government policies already well established in other sectors, intended to encourage exchanges between the east and the west of the country.

Such nationalist policies were responsible for such things as creation of the country's main means of transportation and communication—railroads, telegraph lines, road transportation, shipping routes, airlines and, finally, land-based and satellite communications.

Government support for today's most advanced technology, the information highway, is grounded in the same philosophy of enabling Canadians from coast to coast to use Canadian infrastructures, ensuring access to Canadian products through these infrastructures and promoting the Canadian products themselves.

Today, Canada has a huge arsenal of Acts, regulations, institutions, programs and activities created by the federal government, including established public services and institutions, such as the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, direct funding, financial initiatives and investment incentives, tariffs, restrictions on Canadian ownership, Canadian content requirements, statutory rights and international trade agreements. They are intended to ensure Canadian cultural production by supporting creators and producers, facilitating public access to the resulting products, strengthening domestic distribution infrastructures and preserving cultural heritage for future generations.

In addition to the above-mentioned Department of Canadian Heritage, the main government institutions supporting, protecting or preserving Canadian culture are: the Canada Council for the Arts, the National Arts Centre, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, the National Film Board, Telefilm Canada, the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission, the National Gallery of Canada, the Canadian Museum of Civilization, the Canadian Museum of Nature, the National Museum of Science and Technology, the National Archives of Canada and the National Library of Canada.

Some of the laws that play a leading role in linguistic and multicultural policy have already been mentioned. Because of its key role on the cultural scene, the *Broadcasting Act* should be added. Its objectives with regard to Canadian content on radio and television have enabled the Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission to establish regulations that guarantee Canadians access to Canadian programming. These measures have led to the emergence of Canadian radio, video and television services and a domestic production industry of high quality. They have also provided air time for hundreds of Canadian artists, some of whom have gone on to earn international reputations.

The measures taken by Canada to ensure its cultural sovereignty are threatened in a variety of ways. Television programs from outside the country enter Canada and today the Internet, a new arrival on the telecommunications scene that is taking over the world with its astonishing capabilities and the amazing speed with which it transmits audio-visual data, is

increasingly present in Canadian businesses, government institutions and homes. As in other fields in earlier times, Canada has reacted quickly to this new phenomenon in order to ensure Canadian content and infrastructure without limiting access to foreign content. Today Canada has a highly developed information highway strategy which recognizes the importance of telecommunications in the transmission of culture by taking as one of its three objectives, “to reinforce Canadian sovereignty and cultural identity.”<sup>(3)</sup>

### **FTA AND NAFTA CLAUSES INTENDED TO MAINTAIN AND PROMOTE LINGUISTIC AND CULTURAL DIVERSITY**

At a time when vast international economic blocs are being created, the importance of culture in international trade, the dominance of U.S. culture in Canada and the leading role played by culture as a means of expression are all turning the government’s attention to cultural activities.

During the past decade, Canada has joined other countries in reaching a number of international agreements on trade liberalization. In the context of increased economic interdependence, the promotion of linguistic and cultural diversity assumes even greater importance in that it enables Canadians to better define themselves and allows Canada to distinguish itself from other countries.

Since the Canadian government had established domestic policies to promote linguistic and cultural diversity well before the international agreements were reached, it was natural to continue this approach in the international arena by ensuring that the agreements contained clauses to protect Canadian cultural industries and the fundamental cultural interests of all Canadians.

In the American hemisphere, Canada signed two free trade agreements, the Canada-United States Free Trade Agreement (FTA) and the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), both of which contain a clause<sup>(4)</sup> exempting Canadian cultural industries<sup>(5)</sup>

---

(3) Industry Canada, *The Canadian Information Highway: Building Canada’s Information and Communications Infrastructure*, Department of Supply and Services, Ottawa, April 1994.

(4) FTA, section 2005; NAFTA, section 2106.

(5) Cultural industries are defined in section 2012 of the FTA.

from the provisions of these agreements. The United States, however, has protected itself by inserting a notwithstanding clause that would allow it to take reprisals with an equivalent trade effect should Canada use its exemption.

The cultural exemptions under the FTA and NAFTA have not yet been invoked by either party, and there is thus no way of predicting whether they will be sufficient to enable Canada to create new cultural measures or maintain those that exist. Canada has cause for concern, however, since it was recently involved in a bitter dispute in this area.

In response to a challenge brought by the United States to the World Trade Organization (WTO), which is responsible for agreements such as the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trades (GATT), two decisions were reached in 1997 overruling four measures taken by Canada in support of Canadian magazines. Although these decisions do not cast any doubt on the ability of Canada, or any other WTO member nation, to take action to protect its cultural identity, the fact remains that Canada must now seek other methods of attaining its cultural objectives while complying with WTO regulations.

Yet Canada had tried to ensure protection for its cultural industries under GATT. Could a similar situation arise under the North American free trade agreements? In this context, how should Canada view its participation in the ongoing discussions on expanding NAFTA and creating a pan-American free trade zone?

## **ROLES OF PARLIAMENTARIANS**

Parliamentarians can play several roles in helping to maintain linguistic and cultural diversity in a context of economic integration. In fact, in a democratic system of government, whether it is the Westminster model used in Canada or some other type, parliamentarians act as both representatives of the people and as legislators; both roles put them in a position to contribute to the debate and also have input into decision-making on linguistic and cultural issues.

## A. As Representatives

As representatives of the citizenry, parliamentarians act in various capacities within their ridings; one study identifies half a dozen roles.<sup>(6)</sup> First, they provide a safety valve, inasmuch as voters can pour out on them their frustrations with various policies or policy vacuums; in this capacity parliamentarians give the government more time to respond appropriately. Further, they act as a conduit for information by relaying constituents' concerns to the government and explaining government initiatives to the voters. They can also act as their constituents' voice with the government and promote the interests of their constituents and of the region. Lastly, parliamentarians can become powerful advocates, smoothing their constituents' dealings with governmental and business organizations, and acting as benefactors through ensuring that the social services, businesses and community groups in their ridings get their fair share of the loans, grants and other benefits disbursed by government.

In these various constituency roles, parliamentarians can be a major force behind efforts to maintain linguistic and cultural diversity. As advocates for their constituents and promoters of the latter's interests, they are in a position to make known needs in this area; in addition to explaining the importance of diversity to their colleagues and to civil servants, they can acquaint them with public support for language and cultural policies. In their role as safety valve, parliamentarians can help the government retain public confidence while it studies the often conflicting claims emanating from different constituencies.

Indeed, in a country like Canada, with two official languages and many others in widespread use, the needs of various linguistic groups may vary enormously from one riding to another. Before establishing policy, then, governments often have to seek a consensus, if only to avoid upsetting one linguistic group while meeting the demands of another. Similar problems arise in the realm of cultural policy, where differences of opinion may exist not only among language groups but among regions or social classes with respect to how much government should spend on promoting the arts and protecting cultural industries.

Given the complexity of this situation, government policy can be slow to evolve; this may exasperate constituents, who are fully cognizant of their own needs but not necessarily aware of all the other considerations that the government has to weigh. Parliamentarians can explain to their constituents the complexity of the issues and the claims of other linguistic groups

---

(6) See Philip Norton, "The Growth of the Constituency Role of the MP," *Parliamentary Affairs - A Journal of Comparative Politics*, Vol. 47, No. 4, October 1994, p. 705.

or of cultural industries, while at the same time acknowledging their constituents' own frustrations and relaying them to the government. In this way, parliamentarians can serve as a source of information on language and cultural policy for voters. To do this, however, they need to understand the situation themselves, something that calls for research and communication with the representatives of various linguistic and cultural groups and with the civil servants operating in these areas.

To fulfil their role as advocates and benefactors, parliamentarians must be thoroughly conversant with the various governmental and business organizations charged with studying constituents' claims in linguistic and cultural matters and empowered to allocate the financial or technical assistance needed. Citizens are often confused by the complexity of the regulations governing linguistic groups and cultural industries and activities; they sometimes have trouble in understanding how powers are allocated among the different levels of government (federal, provincial and municipal), let alone the consequences of market globalization. Here, parliamentarians can smooth the way for citizens seeking to file claims or complaints. For example, they can direct citizens with complaints about television shows to the Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC), one of whose jobs is to ensure that programming is of good quality and contains a high proportion of Canadian material.

## **B. As Legislators**

As lawmakers, parliamentarians fill another role with respect to language and cultural policy; they have a hand in the legislative process whereby administrative bodies are constituted and their mandates defined. In the case of the CRTC, for instance, the Canadian Parliament passed the *Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission Act* in 1976 and, over the years, has passed and amended the *Broadcasting Act*, which governs policy in this area. In the course of the legislative process, parliamentarians also help determine needs, for example, for the creation of new agencies or the updating of regulations, in addition to reviewing bills tabled by the government and passing Acts. They can speak out in debates in the House of Commons and Senate and in committees.

Bills with a bearing on language and cultural policy are referred to committees whose job is to study the issues in depth. In committee, parliamentarians can apprise their

colleagues of their constituents' concerns with respect to the bill and have the opportunity to hear not just the opinions of their colleagues' constituents but also those of representatives of linguistic groups and cultural industries. Committees have the power to amend bills to reflect briefs from various groups and to study the consequences of the proposed legislation.

Legislators also oversee implementation of the laws they pass. Thus, the Department of Canadian Heritage and public bodies like the CRTC, the Canada Council and the CBC, all established under laws passed by the legislators, report to Parliament. Members of Parliament can examine the reports for themselves or study them in committee proceedings. The Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage of the House of Commons, for example, reviews all issues arising from the mandate, management and operations of the Department of Canadian Heritage and the public institutions reporting to Parliament through that Department. Studying the annual reports and estimates of the Department and other public bodies gives parliamentarians a chance not just to ensure that policy complies with the constituent Acts of the institutions concerned, but also to decide on changes to policy or amendments to the legislation itself in response to evolving needs.

The Canadian Heritage Standing Committee is also responsible for monitoring implementation of federal multiculturalism policy. In language matters, the Joint House of Commons and Senate Committee on Official Languages oversees the application of the *Official Languages Act*. Parliamentarians can use committee proceedings to press officials and representatives of linguistic and cultural interest groups for the information they need to fulfil their role as sources of information, and act as the voters' safety valve and advocate.

Linguistic and cultural issues in Canada are not immune to influences such as globalization of markets, interpenetration of languages and cultures and the development of new communications technologies, which are planetary in scope; thus, parliamentarians cannot afford to neglect the opportunities for discussion presented by their participation in interparliamentary organizations that bring together legislators from many lands.

### **C. In Interparliamentary Organizations**

Attending meetings and deliberations of interparliamentary organizations like the AIPLF (International Assembly of French-speaking Parliamentarians) and the Commonwealth

Parliamentary Association (CPA) affords Canadian legislators opportunities to meet their colleagues from other countries. Notwithstanding the distances separating countries and differences in cultural and social traditions, parliamentarians who participate generally find that they face very similar problems, whether as citizens' representatives or as lawmakers. By comparing notes on their approaches to problems, they may discover new ways of working, or learn to improve those they already use, so that they can serve their constituents better. The work of interparliamentary organizations can also benefit language and cultural policy.

Every country in the world is affected by the interpenetration of languages and cultures and by market globalization; parliamentarians can exchange ideas on how to deal with the problems arising from this situation. When linguistic and cultural groups from various countries are confronted by similar problems in these areas, they seek to find common solutions in the framework of the deliberations of inter-parliamentary organizations. When national positions diverge, with some countries favouring protection of cultural industries while others advocate elimination of all barriers to trade, meetings among parliamentarians may foster a better mutual understanding. Even where meetings produce no immediate solutions, they may ease tensions while a compromise is negotiated.

Interparliamentary organizations have an even more meaningful role to play with respect to linguistic or regional issues. The AIPLF, for example, is of major importance to the francophone minority in the overwhelmingly anglophone North American continent. This organization's objective is to promote the spread of the French language and defend and demonstrate French culture. Besides representing the worldwide French-speaking community, the AIPLF, through its Americas section, in which Canada, Prince Edward Island, Manitoba, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Ontario and Quebec are represented, gives French-speaking parliamentarians and those interested in the French-language community a forum in which to discuss language and cultural problems in the context of Canada and the Americas.

In their regional meetings, members of the Americas section become acquainted with the problems and needs of neighbouring francophone communities and pass these on to other regions. As a recognized advisory assembly at the summits of French-speaking Heads of State and Government, the AIPLF has a significant role in developing policies and enacting measures to protect the language rights of Francophone communities and promote the growth of their cultural industries.



AIPLF deliberations are not confined to language issues, however; worldwide trends such as market globalization and regional economic integration have an impact not just on language rights and cultural identity, but on other aspects of the lives of the citizens whom AIPLF members represent. In fact, within the AIPLF, as in the CPA and other interparliamentary bodies, there is more and more discussion of the fallout from economic integration, which several regions of the world have already gone some way towards. Differing levels of integration from one region to another may create trade problems, for instance where one more highly integrated region protects its cultural industries to the detriment of those of another region. Parliamentarians have to be concerned with this issue, especially where the cultural industries affected are crucial to the vitality of a linguistic group.

For the time being, discussions of these issues between Canadian parliamentarians and their colleagues from other parts of the Americas do not extend beyond the Americas sections of AIPLF and CPA, general meetings, and some bilateral forum. The economic integration process in various parts of the Americas has spawned a number of international parliamentary institutions such as the Central American Parliament and the Mercosur Joint Parliamentary Commission; however, there is still no special Americas parliamentary network bringing together legislators from all over the hemisphere.

The possible creation of such a network is one of the questions on the agenda for the Parliamentary Conference of the Americas in September 1997. The advantages of discussions among parliamentarians from different countries are well known, but the role of interparliamentary institutions in matters of economic integration is only now beginning to take shape. In those parts of the continent where free-trade agreements have been concluded, commitment to economic and, especially, to political integration varies from one region to another, something the hypothetical hemispheric network would need to take into account. Moreover, hemispheric economic integration is still in its infancy and it remains to be seen how far it will go and whether it will lead to political integration. If a pan-American parliamentary network does come into being, its members will have to make sure that they give high priority to maintaining linguistic and cultural diversity in their deliberations, for hemispheric economic integration will inevitably have serious consequences in this area.

## CONCLUSION

To echo and expand on André Mattelart's remarks quoted in the Summary, cultural interpenetration through communications networks and freer trade presents Canada with both risks and opportunities.

In terms of risks, the English-speaking Canadians are bombarded with U.S. cultural products in their own language, while French-speaking Canadians are inundated with North American output in a language not their own. Communications networks have contributed a great deal to this and there is every reason to expect the burgeoning of satellite communications, the Internet and other communications technologies to accentuate this cultural interpenetration.

Through its language, multicultural and cultural policies, Canada has thus far succeeded in showing that cultural interpenetration can be overcome, provided it is properly understood and firmly and constantly taken into consideration by all governments. Of course, this interpenetration has appreciable positive aspects, among them the provision of wider horizons, enhanced social and commercial contacts, and, one day perhaps, even world peace.

Canada's acquired experience in defending and promoting its linguistic and cultural diversity both within and beyond its borders gives it a leading role in expanding the North American Free Trade Agreement and creating a pan-American free trade area.