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Tout d'abord, je tiens à saluer tous les francophones et tous les francophiles qui sont parmi nous aujourd'hui - et je sais très bien monsieur le Président qu'à l'occasion d'un congrès de l'ACSUS, qui regroupe les spécialistes américains les plus importants qui s'intéressent aux réalités québécoises et canadiennes, je n'y trouverai pas de francophobe!

Let me tell you, first of all, how happy I am to be here today. I would especially like to thank the conference organizers for inviting me to speak at this year's conference, and for giving me the opportunity to meet with the members of ACSUS, a number of whom I have come to know quite well. Some of you may already know that I myself am an academic - and you know what they say, "Once an Academic, always an academic"! Well, let me confirm first hand that there is a great deal of truth to this saying. I always return home a little more invigorated, and especially enjoy that feeling that I have just had a kind of academic transfusion. Chers collègues, je suis ravi d'être ici avec vous ce matin.

I can tell you sincerely, though, that most of all, I enjoy the personal contact when I come to these conferences. I feel that we always come away having learned a little more about each other, and when I am with my American friends, I am able to appreciate more fully each time that history has moulded us into two very complex societies, which are undeniably different on the one hand - but societies which are both, in their own unique ways, strongly committed to North America, and to being North American.

When I think about Québec's place in North America, I can't help but consult to a gem of a book written by Joel Garreau who was then Washington Post editor, and published fifteen years ago under the title "*The Nine Nations of North America*".

In this essay, the author provides the reader with a clear answer: "*Québec is that part of North America that is so distinct from the rest, and against such odds, that it takes pride in serving to define what a nation is - and can be.*" And he goes on: "*Québec, when it comes right down to it, ends up being a nation, not because of industry or armies or stirring political rhetoric, but because when you're there, you know it's no place else.*"

In light of Joel Garreau's analysis, and within the context of all the most recent global and North American trends, Québec's determined attempts to maintain its unique cultural identity and values has become a kind of underpinning which has come to guide the

great majority of Quebeckers today.

There is a very major challenge which has been taken up by all Québécois, regardless of party affiliation or political stripes: It is desirable and possible for us to maintain our language culture and heritage while remaining a vibrant, evolving society which is a meaningful player of a quickly changing world.

Needless to say, we want to avoid at all costs the creation of a folkloric-museum society, which would surely lead to an irrelevant, marginal existence in the eyes of all Québécois. Rather, they are taking the necessary steps to face the challenges and tasks that lie ahead in the third millenium.

For the past 30 years, Quebeckers have sought to develop the tools and acquired the skills in order to build a modern society. And anyone who has traveled to Quebec lately can testify to this.

As you all know, since the Quiet Revolution 35 years ago, Quebec has become modern society, increasingly open to the rest of the world as it has grown economically and culturally secure within its own borders.

Given modern trends and contemporary problems, is Quebec's quest for sovereignty relevant? Let us take a moment to look at how today's world is shaped.

For most people, the world is made up of 185 nation-states, some huge, some tiny, some of them democracies, most of them not, but all on an equal footing as far as international law is concerned. They are the basic units of geopolitics, the pieces on the international chessboard, the essential components of the game of foreign policy.

But over the past 50 years, these units have become less separate and less independent, thanks to the growing importance of new forces:

Economics: the increasing ease of moving cheaper goods from one place to another has eradicated all beliefs of national self-sufficiency and autarchy. A more globalized economy is in many ways a more efficient one, people are richer now than they were 50 years ago and international financial markets have made governments more careful in the handling of their economies.

Defense: Before World War II, the only way a country could impose its will on another was to defeat its soldiers on the ground. But there has been a radical change in the nature of war, let alone a national reluctance and an international reprobation to use this recourse. And apart from the United States, very few countries can garner the financial and technological means to afford contemporary warfare equipment.

Information technologies: It is stating the obvious that information technologies will likely have a greater impact on science and culture in the 21st century than did the invention of printing press some centuries ago. People in different countries now have the means to know far more about each other, thus making similarities and differences between people more apparent. Governments cannot control that flow of information, not even the images of others it helps to project.

In light of such powerful forces, many people have already sounded the death knell of the nation-state as we know it. Not so fast. The nation-state may have more durability than people realize, for it is still the sole possessor of the magic formula without which it is difficult, in today's world, to hold any sort of political structure together.

A nation-state is a place where people feel a natural connection with each other because they share a language, cultural traits but above all, a set of common values strong enough to bind them together and make them feel different from others.

Only when this level of national consciousness is attained, that sense of identity is reached a nation can envisage a full participation in a grander scheme. As one of our most famous poet Gilles Vigneault once put it: "Before being from everywhere, one must first and foremost be from somewhere!"

Take Europe for instance. Just last century, Prussians and Bavarians did not think of themselves as Germans, nor did Tuscans and Sicilians as Italians. Still, by the end of this century, European countries will have achieved what was even inconceivable less than 50 years ago.

We ought to keep in mind that the European Union remains an association between old nation-states - the new ones are eagerly awaiting the opportunity to join in. It is therefore not a surprise that the debates over the Maastricht Treaty and the Eurocurrency have shown how difficult it is for governments of national entities to cross the line between the pooling of their economic resources and the political integration.

By destiny rather than choice, Quebec has been confronted many times with the same kind of dilemma: how to be part of larger structure, whether it be political like Canada or geographical like North America, while maintaining its language, culture and values.

Gone are the days when we could ensure cultural survival by joining forces to exclude the outside world. Rather, we are trying to develop the means, and refine the tools, which will prepare us for the twentieth-first century. That is the Quebec nationalism of today! By any international standard, we have become world leaders in aviation technology, software development, and telecommunications, to name but a few.

We all understand today that integration does not mean assimilation - au contraire! For Quebecers to adopt any form of isolationism, especially in the name of keeping our culture alive, is a sure formula to hasten the end of everything we are trying to save - and, I may add, only after suffering a difficult and painful death. But once again, this is not the crux of the debate in Quebec. You understand that as well as I do.

There exists today a very strong sense on the part of Quebecers that they must find the way to be able continue to live in French. There is no debate on this point. But what is most exciting is that we share an equally fervent desire to build a society which, in the decades ahead, will enable Quebec to maintain its reputation as an active, credible partner in North America - a partner which continues to share all of its own strengths, and draw upon those of its friends.

The most difficult question - and the emotional issue which lies at the very heart of the debate - is: How that can best be achieved? Which formula offers us the greatest sense of security for the future? And just like in any healthy democratic society, there is sharp disagreement on some very fundamental points, but not on whether Quebec should fight to maintain its language, culture and heritage.

It is no secret that the Parti Québécois Government feels that Quebec now has both the resources and the maturity to create a sovereign state, one which will finally enable us to ensure our own cultural existence.

Our distinguished friends in the Opposition ranks, on the other hand, argue that Quebec culture can be preserved most effectively within Canadian federalism. Now, I should

point out here that the overwhelming majority of them also feel very strongly "Québécois" and "Québécoise", and would passionately insist that we can have no monopoly on Quebec nationalism! And they are entirely correct! We are not talking here about a type of nineteenth-century nationalism, but more a common desire to maintain our Quebec identity. You would probably call it "patriotism".

Il est important de comprendre que nous nous entendons sur l'essentiel d'un certain nombre de principes fondamentaux et que nous reconnaissons tous notre besoin de développer une stratégie à long terme qui permettra au Québec de continuer d'exister comme une société moderne à prédominance francophone en Amérique du Nord. En fait, on ne peut analyser la question du statut du Québec dans le Canada en termes de "gentils" contre "méchants".

We simply cannot evaluate this very crucial period in our history in such grossly simplistic terms - the "Good Guy" trying to outwith the "Bad Guy" is not an accurate rendition of what is really happening! The stakes are just too high. We are engaged in a most complex and fundamental debate, one which is sure to have a determining impact on the future of our entire culture. It is emotional - of course it is! - but it is also entirely civilised, and needs to be treated with all the respect that it has earned over the decades. In short we are trying to decide who - and where - we will be as a people in a hundred years from now.

The 1995 referendum, with a truly astounding 94% participation rate, will undoubtedly go down in history as a record for dramatically close results. There was a substantial increase in the "oui" vote compared to 1980, but those who voted "Oui", while clearly disappointed, accepted the outcome without question. Such is democracy! But at the very least, they expected the results to be a wake-up call to the rest of Canada, a sentiment echoed by the international press and economic decision-makers throughout the world.

As to those who voted "Non", poll after poll showed that fully 80% of them entirely rejected the status quo in Canada, and that they were the group most determined to push for constitutional change. After all, that had been promised by Jean Chrétien himself just a few days before the vote - even though, quite ironically, he had done everything in his power to sabotage Meech just a few years before!

Today, Quebecers are being asked to compromise once again, and to dilute even that most generous position negotiated by Bourassa ten years ago. Think of it - we are not even supposed to utter the words "distinct society", because English Canada might get upset! Well, I can tell you right now that a meaningless "unique society" statut will simply not be enough for Quebecers, especially when it means that we would end up with substantially less than we had for more than a century before the 1982 *débâcle*!

Where does that leave us today? Since the referendum of 1995, Premier Bouchard has committed our government to achieving fiscal responsibility and to eliminating the deficit. We have done everything to remain on track in this area, and will respect the time-line made public at the beginning of the process. Quebec continues to be an important part of the North American economy, and in fact, Quebec stands today as your ninth most important trading partner - more important than most European nations, by the way!

The Free Trade Agreement and NAFTA, always strongly supported by all political parties in Quebec, have proven to be even more beneficial than the most positive forecasts. In 1990, Quebec exported 43% of its GDP - that number rose to an extraordinary 54% in 1996. In fact, in that same year, Quebec exported an impressive 85 billion \$ worth of goods and services, about half in value-added products - a sure sign that our economy continues to evolve.

Premier Bouchard has just spent two weeks in China, accompanied by nearly 200 entrepreneurs from Quebec, leading a trade mission designed to open new markets and to develop new partnerships. The mission was clearly a huge success, and has already paid off on a number of levels. We have been able to prove once again that we have become true international partners - with all the benefits and responsibilities which that entails. Our trade with Latin America and Europe continues to grow at a faster rate every year, but without a doubt, our best trading partner remains by far the USA. We now export well over 40 billion \$ worth of Quebec products south of the border every year - and we are working closely with new partners all the time to expand that figure. That is the North America since NAFTA!

In closing, let me share with you how pleasant it is to be able to address a group of experts on Quebec and Canadian affairs here in the United States. Many of you have made the study of Quebec and Canada your life's work, and have come to appreciate our history and society to a degree which often eludes our own people. It is fairly obvious to me that you people have come to know us better than the specialists of any other foreign country. Et c'est tout à fait normal! Après tout, nous sommes voisins et voisines!

Now it is our turn! We have always understood that, in many respects, it is more important for us to know about the United States, than it is for you to know about Quebec. We have our stable of experts, of course - Louis Balthazar, for example, who is here today, along with a number of his students (or should I say "disciples") - who have made the United States their life's work. And there are many others in a wide range of disciplines!

I feel that it is time, however, to see what resources we really do have in Quebec, not only in our universities and colleges, but in the government and private sectors as well. We all think we know the United States, but what expertise do we really have in Quebec? How can we share that knowledge, the years of teaching and research, the resources and data banks which have been developed for decades in some cases?

For this reason, I am creating a work group in Quebec, which will be asked to look at this question in the coming months. They will determine what resources already exist in Quebec, and will be asked to propose a formula which enable us to share those resources more effectively. I see this as a golden opportunity to create a kind of clearing house, one which is sure to improve long-term communications between the key players in our education community, and our private and government sectors.

In addition, we will be able to develop a closer relationship with scholars in this country, one which will offer our specialists in Quebec and American affairs the tools to explore all manner of exchanges with their counterparts in the United States.

This can no longer be a dream - we have reached the point where it is a necessity for both of us. As North America becomes a smaller and smaller place, our future prosperity must inevitably be found in the boardrooms and classrooms of our neighbours outside of Quebec. We want to be ready as partners - partners who understand what it means to be part of the North American community.

Merci!