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Mr. Pablo Rodriguez

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• (0905)

[Translation]

The Chair (Mr. Pablo Rodriguez (Honoré-Mercier, Lib.)): Good morning, everyone. Welcome.

Our meeting this morning will be divided into two parts. Most of the meeting will be devoted to the appearance of the Association des universités de la francophonie canadienne. That will go until approximately 10:30. Then, in the final half-hour, I'd like to discuss with you certain points related to the committee's business.

Today, we have the opportunity to hear from Yvon Fontaine and Guy Gélinau. Welcome and thank you for being here this morning. First, we'll hear a brief address by you. Then we'll move on to a period of discussion between you and the committee members.

That's okay?

Mr. Yvon Fontaine (President, Association des universités de la francophonie canadienne): Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Thank you as well to the committee members.

First, I'd like to introduce the person here with me this morning, Guy Gélinau, Executive Director of the Association des universités de la francophone canadienne. I'm its president. I'm also the Rector of the University of Moncton. In that capacity, I've been sitting as president of that association for a few years now. And it was as president of the Association des universités de la francophone canadienne that I was asked to make a presentation before this committee.

If I've correctly understood, Mr. Chairman, you're giving us 10 or 15 minutes to make a presentation, and then we'll have a discussion with you. Is that correct?

The Chair: Absolutely.

Mr. Yvon Fontaine: Thank you very much.

Some of the committee members reminded me that I was here two years ago to discuss health. I have to say that I've previously appeared before the committee a number of times. It's always a pleasure to come here before the Standing Committee on Official Languages because we get the impression we're heard. Even though people occasionally talk a lot, we're often not sure that we're being heard. From my experience, this committee seems to hear what we say. We can see that from the comments you subsequently make, and that's very much appreciated.

Briefly, I would like, first of all, to tell you who we are. We are an association of university institutions that offer university programs in French, either at universities or in French-language or bilingual

institutions, but outside Quebec. Thirteen member institutions are scattered almost entirely across Canada. I say almost entirely across Canada because we don't have any member institutions in Newfoundland, Prince Edward Island or British Columbia, since there are no institutions providing university training in French in those provinces. So there are no institutions admissible to our association.

Without naming the 13 member institutions, I know that we have filed a certain number of documents with the Clerk, in particular a report. We're obviously identified on the cover page of the report. As I said, we're present from east to west, outside Quebec, of course. In Quebec, universities are represented by another association, which is called the Conférence des recteurs et des principaux des universités du Québec, CREPUQ.

I nevertheless wanted to tell you that our network is established virtually across Canada. In a moment, I'll no doubt refer to the fact that the members of our association are very often present where French-language communities are the most dynamic, where there is greater vitality, and where university institutions have long been established.

The main thrust of my remarks will be to explain why we think the action plan we've submitted is absolutely essential and should be supported by the Canadian government.

First, allow me to speak more specifically about this action plan and to tell you why it's essential for the institutions and why it should be supported by the Canadian government. I'd like to give you a little background, which may give you a better appreciation of what we're trying to do. I know the parliamentary committee is not used to receiving action plans that are being considered by the government for specific funding, but I believe a little background will afford you the opportunity to better understand that this is really a key instrument.

Earlier I referred to the most dynamic Francophone communities outside Quebec at this time. I'm thinking, for example, of the greater Edmonton area, Saint-Boniface, eastern and northern Ontario, the Maritimes, the Moncton area, the Acadian Peninsula, northwestern New Brunswick and Baie-Ste-Marie in Nova Scotia. Those are the most concentrated Francophone communities, first of all, but also, to a certain degree, the most dynamic communities. One senses that there's still a vibrant energy about the French fact in those communities. They're also the places where French Canadian university institutions are located.

Those institutions have been established in those communities for a very long time. They were first developed by religious orders as classical colleges. Subsequently, in most cases, they became lay institutions funded by the government.

● (0910)

That's definitely the case, for example, of the Faculté Saint-Jean in Edmonton, the Collège universitaire de Saint-Boniface, in the Winnipeg area, the University of Ottawa, Laurentian University, Glendon College in Toronto and the University of Moncton, in New Brunswick, which has three campuses: one in Mr. D'Amours' riding, another in that of Mr. Godin and a third in Moncton. The same is true of the Université Sainte-Anne in Baie-Ste-Marie, Nova Scotia.

For decades and decades, not to say the entire last century, Francophone communities developed largely by attaching themselves to tangible institutions which provided essential services to the communities, in particular the university institutions that we represent. I can assure you that, while most of those institutions are now funded by the government, and are thus public institutions, those institutions culturally have a very deep sense of belonging to the communities that first established them. Those communities are remarkably attached to these institutions. As the rector of one of those universities, I can tell you that our universities don't just belong to their respective university communities or to their respective boards of governors, but that they genuinely belong to the communities they serve. That's very important.

I'd like to provide another bit of background here this morning. I don't know whether any of you were members of this committee in the late 1990s, but the communities were somewhat uncomfortable about the Canadian government's renewed commitment to the official language communities. Some strategic reports were commissioned by the government in the late 1990s. I myself had the privilege of chairing one on transformation in government and its impact on the official languages. There was another report, roughly at the same time, that was prepared by a colleague, Professor Donald Savoie.

The findings in both cases were similar: a firm renewal was required of the Canadian government's commitment to its leadership, its leading role in Canada's linguistic duality, but especially with regard to development of the official language communities in Canada. Those reports, which were submitted in the late 1990s, obviously led to an effort by the Canadian government that resulted in the Canadian government's Action Plan for Official Languages, which was tabled in March 2003. I believe we're now celebrating its second anniversary. It must have been tabled around March 20, which is the Journée internationale de la francophonie, and the event was held at the Cité collégiale in Ottawa; I was there.

The official language communities had a lot of expectations at the time because the Action Plan for Official Languages presented a vision that was, as it were, applauded by the communities and, definitely, by the universities we're representing here today. The Action Plan for Official Languages renewed the Canadian government's commitment to service to the public, of course—that's the government's responsibility—and also to participation in the federal institutions by both linguistic communities, but also to the vitality of the official language communities.

It's this last point that I'd like to talk to you about today. I'm not claiming I want to provide a report on the Action Plan's impact or its scope as a whole, but I can tell you we've closely monitored the impact it has had to date on aspects affecting the universities. It was the tabling of that plan that led our association to decide to develop its own action plan, which is entitled Action Plan 2005-2010.

The Canadian government's Action Plan for Official Languages concerns us in a number of areas. First, it addressed the need to reconfirm certain things, and, more especially, the Action Plan for Official Languages pleaded for increased development of the capability of the universities we represent to offer programs to the communities they serve, and thus the capability to offer additional programs in the official language communities.

● (0915)

Of course, when a report like this states something like that, it concerns, first of all, our university institutions, whose purpose it is to serve those communities. The Action Plan for Official Languages also pleaded for increased capability to provide university-level training in the second language.

So it's very important for the Canadian government to make sure we can also enable young Anglophones who have decided to attend an immersion school for 12 years to continue on to university in their second language if they so wish. The Action Plan for Official Languages also states this with great determination, and we therefore felt concerned about this as well because our institutions are already working with students who want to study in their second language. However, to be able to do that adequately on a larger scale, our ability as an institution to offer programs in those areas absolutely had to be further developed.

The Action Plan for Official Languages also concerned the universities we represent on two or three other points.

The problems of immigration and the decline of Francophone communities outside Quebec are serious. The Action Plan for Official Languages and Immigration Canada are greatly concerned with this question. In our action plan, I believe we've put forward plausible solutions for helping to encourage immigrants to settle in Francophone communities outside Quebec.

We're all aware of the challenge. I believe we have an interpreter here today. If she wanted to make a comment, she would confirm that for us. It's an enormous challenge to continue training people who will do translation and interpretation in this country. If we really want to be a country where it's possible to be served in both official languages, both orally and in writing, we have to ensure that our university institutions train people who will be able to provide those services. However, most translation programs in Canada are given at the universities we represent. Additional capacity must be developed.

So, from a careful reading of the Canadian government's 2003 Action Plan for Official Languages, we felt very much concerned, and we, the 13 members, decided together to prepare an action plan, which we submitted to the government in early December. For the first time, our association has developed a solid consensus on common objectives of resource-sharing, complementarity in our field of action, and we firmly believe our purpose is to contribute to the implementation of the Action Plan for Official Languages.

Having said that, I won't conceal the fact that the member university institutions of our association are somewhat disappointed with the lack of speed and punctuality of the government's feedback to date.

The Canadian government's action plan concerned a number of departments, of course, the Health Department in particular. We know perfectly well that the Health Department reacted quite quickly. It has already allocated \$100 million over five years to assist in creating additional training programs in health, and our institutions have greatly benefited from that.

Industry Canada, through the Atlantic Canada, Western Canada and Quebec regional economic development agencies, has also allocated financial resources for additional technologies to continue developing its ability to deliver courses on line.

However, most of the resources of the Canadian government's Action Plan for Official Languages are not held by the Department of Health or Industry Canada, but rather by the department that I believe has always been champion of the cause of linguistic minorities, that is to say the Department of Canadian Heritage. We're stuck between a rock and a hard place in that regard.

Very little money has been allocated in the past two years, particularly in terms of additional targeted funding in the Action Plan, because the Canadian government chose to wait until it had reached bilateral agreements with the provinces on official languages in education before determining whether it would continue doing what it had always done, that is to say intervene directly with the university institutions in bipartite fashion.

● (0920)

As the rector of the University of Moncton, I can assure you that I've signed a number of agreements directly, without going through the province.

A new approach has developed in the Canadian government in the past two years. They seem to want to favour the channel of the provinces almost entirely for deploying additional financial resources for education, including postsecondary and university training. I think that's a concern. I'll close with this.

It's a concern for various reasons. First, in many provinces, the departments of Education of course don't have as much control over the universities as they do over the public education system. That goes without saying. The universities are public organizations that operate at arm's length from the province.

Second, I'd go so far as to say—and, in this regard, perhaps I'd make an exception of the Province of New Brunswick, not because it's my province, but because, as we know perfectly well, it's the only officially bilingual province, although other provinces have made

considerable efforts in recent years—that the real champions of the minorities' cause over the past 35 years have been—let's be frank—the Canadian government and the institutions that belong to the minorities. It's these two constituent bodies that, through their leadership, make a very big difference in the communities.

Of course, the provinces are gradually coming back at the charge and back to the table, but I'd be very concerned if the Canadian government today relied, in all matters pertaining to official languages in education and additional funding granted to post-secondary education under the Action Plan for Official Languages, on the agreements reached with the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada and refrained from discussing or entering into agreements directly with the university institutions.

Mr. Chairman, I may have spoken for more than 15 minutes.

The Chair: A little more.

Mr. Yvon Fontaine: I'll close with that. I'm sure there'll be questions, which will enable me to add to my presentation, as necessary.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Fontaine.

We'll now go on to questions and comments.

Mr. Lauzon.

Mr. Guy Lauzon (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Welcome, Mr. Gélinau and Mr. Fontaine.

You said you believe that the federal government would be prepared to help you, but that reaching agreements with the provinces is a problem. Is that why you're short of funds?

Mr. Yvon Fontaine: The Official Languages in Education Program, which is managed by the Department of Canadian Heritage, is normally implemented in the provinces through bilateral agreements, which is understandable. Education is a jurisdiction of the provinces. We're not saying that shouldn't be the case.

What I can say, moreover, is that the latest agreements, which are normally three-year agreements, expired in March 2004. They were extended for one year, until March 31, 2005. I believe there have been developments this week. You have to be honest: I think the Canadian government absolutely wants to reach agreements with the provinces before March 31 of this year so that it can sign bilateral agreements on official languages in education. In view of the fact those agreements no longer exist, even if we're asked to submit five-year plans, we've had no response on the subject, even though we submitted those plans two years ago, because the provinces aren't going to compromise themselves with regard to our universities before knowing exactly what the agreements with the Canadian government are. So there have been tough negotiations, from what I've heard, between the Government of Canada and the provinces.

Beyond that, traditionally, in addition to the Official Languages in Education Program, the Canadian government has been able to intervene directly and to reach agreements with the universities. That's definitely the case with the National Health Training Centre. Some of you are familiar with the project. We've obtained \$68 million over five years, which has been shared among our institutions under direct agreements between the Department of Health and the universities. That wasn't negotiated through the provinces.

I believe the government must retain a degree of flexibility so that it can sign agreements directly with the universities. Not everything should go through the federal-provincial agreements.

• (0925)

Mr. Guy Lauzon: Is the government waiting for there to be agreements with all the provinces before granting new funds?

Mr. Yvon Fontaine: That's virtually the case in this instance. To my knowledge, none of our universities has received written confirmation from its province of its funding for the next three or five years, because there hasn't yet been an agreement, to my knowledge, between the federal government and one of the provinces. I believe that's understandable. If the pie is a particular size, the federal government wants to ensure that all the agreements with the provinces are signed before it distributes the resources.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: Have you received any additional funding over the past two years?

Mr. Yvon Fontaine: No, none at all. I couldn't say for each of the universities we represent, but those I recently asked told me that their funding levels through the federal programs had remained stable.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: Has enrolment increased?

Mr. Yvon Fontaine: Yes, at some of our institutions.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: By what percentage has it increased?

Mr. Yvon Fontaine: I don't have the figures in front of me, but I know that registration at my institutions has probably increased 15% over the past four years. The University of Ottawa has had very considerable increases. Other institutions in our association have had increases as well. I want you to understand, Mr. Lauzon, that the money we're seeking through the agreements is not for operating budgets. It's money for specific development projects, and the number of students enrolled has no influence on that.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: Do you have enough funding for your operations?

Mr. Yvon Fontaine: No. Theoretically, you can't have those kinds of resources. The programs of the Department of Canadian Heritage or the federal funds that go through the provinces are intended for development projects, not for operating budgets.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: You said you were trying to train Anglophone students in their second language. What percentage of students does that represent?

Mr. Yvon Fontaine: First, you have to beware. In our association, there are bilingual universities: the University of Ottawa, Laurentian University, Glendon College and so on. The percentage of immersion students at those universities taking some of their courses in French is probably relatively high. We also attract immersion students who are taking most of their courses in French at those

universities, even though they may be taking a certain number in English. In the unilingual French universities such as the Université de Moncton and the Université Sainte-Anne, the percentages are still very high, but we've said we want to increase that number. To do that, we have to ensure we have the necessary, optimum supervision level in order to help them fit in to the university environment in their second language. The Action Plan for Official Languages moreover contains specific provisions for institutions where there is a marked interest in taking in more immersion students.

• (0930)

Mr. Guy Lauzon: You think the problem is attributable to the signing of agreements between the provinces and the federal government.

Mr. Yvon Fontaine: No. There are going to be agreements: there always have been. There have been official languages agreements between the federal government and the provinces since the Official Languages Program has been in existence, since 1966 or 1968. What's troubling is that, even though that existed before, there was always a certain budget envelope for national initiatives that didn't go through the provinces. I know this is a sensitive subject because education is a provincial jurisdiction, but I remind you that the Canadian government has intervened directly in the universities' favour in many areas, not just for the minorities.

We're all familiar with the Canada Foundation for Innovation, for example. Billions of dollars flow directly from the Canadian government to the Foundation and to the universities: the provinces aren't involved. There's the Canada Research Chairs Program, under which funding has been granted for 2,000 Canada research chairs. The Canadian government grants direct funding to universities to establish those chairs. There are enough precedents, particularly when you're talking about university education. I'm not talking here about the jurisdictional problem between the federal government and the provinces regarding public school education, but about the universities; I think there's enough flexibility to find a solution.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lauzon.

Mr. Benoît Sauvageau (Repentigny, BQ): I won't talk about areas of jurisdiction, since Mr. Lauzon is the great defender of shared jurisdictions between the federal government and the provinces. I thank him for that.

First, I'd like to welcome you. I appreciated your comments. I'm going to keep the ball rolling. You cited the Canada Foundation for Innovation as an example. Is that the organization that has more money in its accounts today than it had when the government gave it funding? There's a management problem in the foundations. Circumventing the system by going through the foundations is a problem, as is the lack of any audit of their accounts. The foundations can be a good thing for the universities, but, if those foundations were functional, it might be a better thing for the universities.

You also said the federal government and the communities have done the most to promote official languages in the past 35 years. In passing its Official Languages Act, the Government of New Brunswick must have contributed a fair share as well.

Mr. Yvon Fontaine: I also said that, if there was an exception, it was the Government of New Brunswick. Others, such as Ontario, for example, are gradually beginning to act. Others have also made considerable efforts.

Mr. Benoît Sauvageau: I understand your viewpoint. You can't say they're mean: they're providing your funding: on the other hand, if you think of the Action Plan for Official Languages two years ago, you see that everyone's initial reaction—I was my party's critic at the time—was to say they were happy. When I say everyone, I'm thinking of the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne, of your association, and so on.

Thus, Yvon, other colleagues and I, who wanted to say something about this, were asked why we were complaining, since everyone said it was good. However, two or three years later, the Francophone communities are saying it might not have been that good. We would have liked to have a little more flexibility so that we could continue defending you when the time came. Perhaps your extravagant comments made three seconds after the plan came out somewhat hurt the opposition, which would have liked to make it fuller and more concrete for you.

If you look at this nice plan that Mr. Dion presented to us two years ago, you see there's no concrete education objective, that there's nothing in the way of accountability, that there's nothing for the rights holders who eventually wind up in your universities. If you take little Francophones and send them to English-language schools, later on they won't have a Francophone university. That logic may be a bit simplistic, but I think it's at least a start.

So I'd like to hear you talk a bit about the Action Plan for Official Languages. I'd also like to hear what you have to say about asymmetry. Wouldn't our main problem be related to the fact that, every time anyone wants to help, for example, the Francophone minority universities, they have to give the equivalent to the Quebec Anglophone universities, as a result of which we're driving with—please pardon the expression—one foot on the accelerator, the other on the brake? You won't get very far that way.

First, are there different needs? That should be said, acknowledged, affirmed and written down. It's not in here: you give to Jean and you give to Pierre. Perhaps Jean has greater needs than Pierre. Would you like asymmetry to be recognized? Do you recognize asymmetry?

You referred to immigration. When Dyane Adam tabled her report on immigration in the minority communities, it was said that, if there weren't separate intake structures, Francophone immigrants would be condemned to assimilation. The report talked about “throwing them to the wolves”. So, in immigration, it might be a good thing to have adequate intake structures.

So do you recognize asymmetry?

I'd also like to know your reaction to the budget. I know that, if we were in camera, your reaction might be different.

Lastly, you've requested \$52 million from the federal government to carry out your action plan. Where does that request stand?

• (0935)

Mr. Yvon Fontaine: First, if we go back 20 years, I was President of the Fédération des francophones hors Québec from 1986 to 1988. As regards the matter of the comparison between the Anglophone community in Quebec and the Francophone communities outside Quebec, everyone agrees those situations are different. That doesn't mean there are no needs in either of those two communities. If you're trying to get me to say that Quebec's Anglophone community doesn't need federal government intervention, I'm not here for that. On the contrary, I believe its situation is specific to it and that you must be very sensitive to it.

Is there complete symmetry in the programs? I've always claimed I didn't have sufficient knowledge of the situation regarding programs to state an opinion. I said programs, not major government policies and constitutional principles. I know what the Francophone communities outside Quebec need. In that sense, is this adapted or adaptable to Quebec's Anglophone communities? I don't know. My impression is that one day you can invite them here and ask them the question.

I believe there should always be a degree of symmetry, particularly in program delivery, because situations are different. I also believe there must be some asymmetry in program delivery between the Fransaskois community and the Acadian community of New Brunswick. It's not true that you can claim that meeting the real needs of the Acadian community in New Brunswick will help the Fransaskois community develop. What we're ready to give the Fransaskois community will definitely not be enough to help the Acadian community in New Brunswick.

Mr. Benoît Sauvageau: Mr. Fontaine, pardon me for interrupting you—it's very impolite—but you shouldn't diminish the meaning of things. In Saskatchewan, there are differences between north and south, between large cities and small towns, between urban areas and rural areas.

If we want to advance the concept—I apologize to those who don't like the term—of Francophone communities outside Quebec, we have to recognize that there's a specific need and to stop beating around the bush. Let's invest money and admit there's a specific problem there. In Quebec, the Anglophone communities aren't endangered. Outside Quebec, there's an assimilation rate of 70% in the Francophone communities, in the Western provinces, among others. There may be a specific need there. You say so, that's true, but the government hasn't written that down.

When the time comes to work on the Official Languages Act, it's symmetry that takes precedence, not asymmetry. If asymmetry and the situation were recognized, perhaps the \$52 million and the budget would then respond to that and I'd have an answer to my other two questions.

Mr. Yvon Fontaine: Mr. Sauvageau, I'd go so far as to suggest that, regardless of what the Official Languages Act says today—and I'm very familiar with it—it won't prevent the government from adapting official languages in education programs so that they reflect the different situations of the Francophone communities outside Quebec and the Anglophone community in Quebec.

Moreover, in health, when the Canadian government decided to invest \$75 or \$80 million to reinforce programs, if it had simply considered the number of Anglophones in Quebec and the number of Francophones outside Quebec, the budget distribution percentages would have been different from what they were. In fact, 80% of the budget envelope went to the Francophone communities outside Quebec because that's where the real needs were. McGill University and Concordia University had sufficiently sound infrastructures. Perhaps they can use additional funding. So much the better if they got it. As the rector of a university, I'm not going to go criticize them for that. In fact, the government sensed that the real need was in the university institutions that we represent today. I can assure you that this is making a real difference in this case.

• (0940)

The Chair: Please be brief, Mr. Fontaine.

Mr. Yvon Fontaine: You asked us where we stood with our action plan. I told you we submitted it six months ago. We've had a lot of discussions with government authorities that have authority in the matter, but we have not obtained funding to date.

Mr. Benoît Sauvageau: Did the budget enlighten you in this area?

Mr. Yvon Fontaine: We've seen nothing in the budget, at least not for the moment. Perhaps we'll have some confirmation before March 31, as a result of the expired funding.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Sauvageau.

Mr. Godin.

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I'd like to welcome both of you, but especially the rector of the Université de Moncton, which, let's hope, will very soon become the Université Louis J. Robichaud; we're working on that. Let's hope you'll be the rector who announces that historic event.

You say in your brief that you presented your plan six months ago. What difference will it make? It's true there's nothing for students in the budget. We see what's currently going on in Quebec: students are striking. They're in the streets; it's become impossible. Things are all right for those who live in Moncton and who live with their parents. They're going to university and have no expenses to pay, while their parents pay for food and housing. They take the bus and go to university. But is there anything in the plan for students who come from outside the region and who are required to pay for housing, travel and so on?

Mr. Yvon Fontaine: First...

Mr. Yvon Godin: Pardon me. I'll say politely that I don't want a five-minute answer because I won't be able to ask my other questions.

Mr. Yvon Fontaine: In response to your specific question, I'd say there's a very high percentage of financial resources for student scholarships, but those are scholarships for international students, because the idea is also somewhat to encourage a policy of immigration to our communities. There's also something for immersion students.

Going beyond the examples you cite, no, this plan doesn't respond to that. If we get the financial resources we've requested, we'll have more programs in our universities that will respond to a larger number of students who are close to our universities and don't need to go as far to study because some of these programs are not currently offered in our universities.

Mr. Yvon Godin: One of the problems at Canadian Francophone universities and outside Canada... I get phone calls from Jean-Marc Beausoleil, a project development officer in Montreal—I don't know whether you know him—asking to meet us because he wants books translated into French.

Two nights ago, I was talking with a student here. It's terrible. A Francophone from Gatineau was telling me she goes to the University of Ottawa. Her courses are in French, but she had to study in English in order to write a test in French the next day. I don't think students at McGill University study in French in order to write tests in English. Where do we stand in this area? There are a lot of Francophones who feel it's better to go to an English-language university, since they'll be studying in the language of the exams they'll have to write. That's what some of them are saying; it's a fact.

One person very close to me, who is taking a course in health in Montreal, was telling me that, when she needed information, she had to go to the McGill University library to get documents in English. She speaks virtually no English, but she has to study in English. She asked that those documents be translated. It's an incredible disadvantage.

What does a Francophone university to get documentation in French? I don't think France goes to England to get documents. What's happening here for us Francophones?

• (0945)

Mr. Yvon Fontaine: I don't interpret the situation the same way as you. Personally, I don't find the situation as dramatic as you describe it. I think that depends on the disciplines that are taught at the university. One thing is clear: the more you tend toward disciplines where knowledge evolves quickly—science, applied sciences, etc.—even in France, the fact is that the most relevant, most recent documents are in English.

I was in Paris earlier this week. On Wednesday, I had lunch with the advisor to the Minister of National Education on scientific and medical issues. He told me there was a serious problem in France. All that to tell you that this plan contains no measures to that effect. However, I believe that, if you go to the university libraries of most of the institutions we represent to see whether there are any works in the disciplines that are taught there and for which they have a budget, you'll see that, if a document exists in English, they acquire it. That doesn't mean they don't have to buy documents in other languages. I believe that knowledge is evolving at such a rapid rate... Go to Laval University, to the University of Montreal; you'll see the same phenomenon. It's a problem because students who arrive in order to study...

Mr. Yvon Godin: It's a problem. You're saying that that's what's happening around the world. Why don't the Francophones around the world join forces to get information? I'm happy for Anglophone students, but you don't choose your birth. I didn't ask to be Anglophone or to be born in a particular place. I'm an Acadian from Saint-Sauveur, New Brunswick. What does the Francophone community around the world do to solve this problem? Are we losing the battle over the long term? This troubles me. I wonder whether we're losing the battle, since you say, Mr. Fontaine, that the situation is the same everywhere, even in Europe, even in France. This is becoming alarming.

Mr. Yvon Fontaine: The Agence de la Francophonie, on whose board I sit, regularly considers the question: in what language is science currently being done in the world. It's being done in a number of languages, but the main language right now is English. We all know that.

Mr. Godin, the reason we're here today, I believe, goes beyond that question. Our universities are obviously making efforts, like all French-language universities, to obtain as many documents as possible in French. We offer our courses in French, but our students, like all students around the world, will consult works in various languages, including English, of course. Some want to learn German because German authors are more prolific in their field, etc. I believe that, if you look at a curve for the last 25 or 30 years, you'll see that the ability to teach in French in our institutions outside Quebec has vastly improved.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Godin.

Mr. Yvon Godin: It's already over?

The Chair: Time goes so quickly when you speak.

I believe that the domination of English in the sciences is indeed a global phenomenon. I'm thinking of Latin America, where I come from and where I regularly go. In all the major Latin American universities, the most recent science books are in English.

As regards Mr. Beausoleil, that will be part of our in camera proceedings at 10:30.

Mr. Yvon Fontaine: I didn't comment on his first remark because I didn't want to comment on it, not because I forgot to do so.

The Chair: When he said he had come out of his mother's womb?

Mr. Yvon Godin: I'll reconsider my first remark.

The Chair: You'll reconsider it, Mr. Godin.

Mr. D'Amours

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for acknowledging the fact that it's our turn.

The Chair: It's your turn.

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: Thank you very much for being here, Mr. Fontaine and Mr. Gélinau.

I studied at the Edmundston campus of the University of Moncton for a number of years, and I'm proud to have studied there because I'm convinced that campus has a future.

I want to go back to the entire question of the Canada Social Transfer. We were talking about it and we're still talking about it, especially in the past few weeks. The federal government indirectly contributes to university funding through the CST. The transfer is made to the provinces, which in turn redistribute the funds.

To help universities, particularly Francophone universities, do you think it would be important to attach certain conditions or even to say that a portion must be allocated directly to postsecondary educational institutions?

• (0950)

Mr. Yvon Fontaine: I think that would be a proper measure for all the issues facing Canadian universities. I'm not sure what the impact would be on the institutions we're representing here today. I think that would then be subject to the sharing of strengths within each of the provinces. Our institutions are so weak relative to the majority institutions that we would have a lot of trouble doing that. If the Canadian government decided that a given amount should be allocated to the development of our Francophone institutions outside Quebec, I believe it would be more prudent to do so directly than to go through transfer payments. Unless the transfer payments include sufficiently detailed clauses guaranteeing amounts are allocated for that purpose, I would be afraid the budget envelope might be lost among all the needs of the universities. Since the majority universities are much more powerful in our provinces, we'd have a lot of trouble succeeding.

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: Which means, if I've correctly understood, that it would be a good thing for our minority educational institutions if we could identify them and transfer funds to them.

Mr. Yvon Fontaine: Absolutely.

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: Earlier you referred to the entire issue of immersion, in which students whose mother tongue is English go to learn French. If I understand you correctly, your association represents 13 university institutions. The country is extremely large. The fact of the matter is that, in one way or another, Francophones are virtually forced to travel from the outset. If an Anglophone student wants to learn French as a second language at a French-language university, he or she has virtually no other choice but to travel in order to study.

Bearing that in mind, would it be a good idea to provide for additional assistance for the students? We're talking about encouraging Anglophones who have learned French as a second language. To encourage them to continue their education in French, would it be a good idea to give them more help in doing so? The same is true for Francophones who very often must also travel in order to study in their mother tongue?

Mr. Yvon Fontaine: In this program as such, we've definitely targeted immersion students, those who want to study in their second language. Moreover, the action plan provides for two major scholarship programs, including one for immersion students. We believe we need incentives to attract these students to our universities. In my own university—and I'm sure we'll see this virtually everywhere at all our universities—we have funds for scholarships and financial assistance for students, but donors have established very specific targets for those scholarships. If I have \$2 million a year for scholarships, but my donor tells me those scholarships are for students from the École Clément-Cormier in Bouctouche, since they aren't immersion students, those scholarships won't be awarded to immersion students. So we need to catch up.

Now I'll answer the second part of your question. We referred to very specific issues, but we have one very great concern. If we can't develop complementary offers of programs at our institutions... Mr. Godin is partly right. It must be kept in mind that 85% of students at our universities are bilingual. Tomorrow morning, if a Franco-Manitoban decided that the Collège universitaire Saint-Boniface didn't really offer programs equivalent to those he could get at the University of Manitoba, where do you think he'd go?

We need assistance from the Canadian government to enable us to strengthen our ability to offer programs. Otherwise, we may become obsolete. The day we become obsolete—and I'm coming back to my first comment—the vitality of our communities, without university institutions, won't last very long. Everything the Canadian government is doing everywhere is good. The various federations are good as well, but, in concrete terms, when you have university institutions that train young people in their language and who work in their own region, that makes a difference. That's the major issue behind all this.

• (0955)

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: That leads me back to the question of assistance programs. I left university not long ago. As we can see, the faculty are aging somewhat. So there will soon have to be a renewal. Perhaps the renewal is not going as fast as it should. There's increasing talk about immigration. On the Edmundston campus, for example, I took some courses by videoconference with the Moncton campus while I was doing my masters, in the MBA, multimedia. More and more immigrants are teaching. The University of Moncton is surely not an exception. Is there potential there for the future? That enables you to see something else. It also enables you to go a little further, not only in education, but toward a better understanding of the reality of the Francophone world.

Mr. Yvon Fontaine: I believe the vitality of our communities will depend in large part on their ability to attract immigrants, whether they're university professors or workers in other fields. We need a multicultural and multi-ethnic mosaic in our communities if we really want them to grow, flourish and survive. University institutions can do that partly by accepting students who come from

various countries. Statistics show that, when a student from country *x* comes to study with us, there's a better chance that he or she will stay in the community rather than go somewhere else in Canada where he or she didn't go to university.

The problem is simple. The Government of Quebec currently grants funding to cover the difference in tuition fees for international students. That means that those students cost as much as Quebec students. So if I want to recruit the same student from France and bring him or her to my university, I have to charge \$8,000, whereas the University of Montreal would charge \$1,800. So if I don't have government assistance to compete somewhat with Quebec, I'll still be facing a systemic recruitment barrier. That, in my view, is another aspect of the concrete nature of the program and one we very much emphasize. That component of the program will enable us to attract these people.

The Chair: Thank you.

Time is going quickly. We'll move on to a second round of five minutes per speaker.

Mr. Poilievre.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Nepean—Carleton, CPC): I only have two or three questions, so if I finish before my time is up, I'll share it with Mr. Sauvageau.

Thank you for being with us today.

I'd like to request clarification on the second theme on page 26 of your action plan.

The Chair: That's in the English version, I believe.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Yes.

Mr. Yvon Fontaine: It's on page 26 of the English version, but page 22 of the original document.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: It states that a total of \$16.5 million will be spent for international students. Are those students from other parts of the world?

Mr. Yvon Fontaine: Yes.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Is it wise to spend half of our money on a program reserved for students who aren't Canadian?

Mr. Yvon Fontaine: Yes.

Mr. Chairman, I briefly referred to existing programs in Quebec. The purpose here is essentially to enable international students to come and study in Canada and to enjoy the same tuition fees as a Canadian student. It's not for all our international students. We'd like to have a certain number of scholarships which we could offer in a certain number of countries for international students who would come and study at our institutions and who would be encouraged to stay in Canada afterwards, more particularly in our communities. The Government of Quebec is currently doing this.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: So that would be for potential immigrants.

Mr. Yvon Fontaine: Absolutely.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: All right. That's interesting.

Mr. Yvon Fontaine: Absolutely. I think it represents \$4,000 per scholarship.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: All right.

Mr. Yvon Fontaine: The program would affect 300 students.

Mr. Guy Gélinau (Vice-President and Executive Director, Association des universités de la francophonie canadienne): That would be for 300 out of 20,000 students.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Thank you.

Could you describe the role you think the provinces might play in this area? How can the federal government work with the provinces to ensure that programs are provided as effectively as possible?

Mr. Yvon Fontaine: The operating budgets of the universities we represent currently stand at more or less \$400 million. If tuition fees represent one-quarter of that amount, \$100 million, the provinces are currently injecting \$300 million a year in our university institutions.

That moreover is somewhat the problem encountered in negotiations between the federal government and the provinces. When the government says it wants the provinces to contribute 50 cents on every dollar, the provinces answer that they're already spending \$300 million for postsecondary education. They add that \$55 million is being requested from them here, in addition to other amounts through the bilateral agreements, but that they won't request more than \$300 million and that their 50% is fair.

Is that a sound argument? I don't know. That's nevertheless the argument that prevails today. We'd obviously like the provinces to do much more. Personally, I would like all the provinces to do what the Government of Quebec is doing to improve the situation of Quebec's Francophone universities, which want to attract Francophone students from elsewhere in the world.

However, the fact is that our power of persuasion is not as strong in all the provinces. Moreover, the federal government has traditionally been slightly more attentive to our needs so that we could develop our institutions.

•(1000)

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: In conclusion, I entirely agree that your work is very important because it's immersion at the primary, secondary and university levels that will ensure that we have a truly bilingual country in the future. So the Conservative Party supports you in your efforts. We also want to increase funding levels for immersion schools and to restore it to what it was during the years of the Mulroney government.

I've unfortunately taken all the time allotted to me, Mr. Sauvageau.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Poilievre. You exceeded your time by 20 seconds. So we're going to reduce the time allotted to Mr. Sauvageau by 20 seconds.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Chair: We'll continue with Mr. Godbout.

Mr. Marc Godbout (Ottawa—Orléans, Lib.): Welcome, gentlemen. I'm always pleased to see former colleagues coming and testifying before the committee.

My colleague referred to federal transfer payments to the provinces. These are quite massive transfers for postsecondary education. You said you were concerned, to a certain degree, by the path the federal government is taking with regard to the provinces. On the other hand, as you said, there have been negotiations between the federal government and certain institutions. That may become a burden for the government, and it can go to the point where the strongest party wins, if it makes better representations than the others.

Has your network considered an ideal mechanism through which it could sit down with the government to obtain financing that would be not only fair, but also consistent with the needs you've expressed? What do you think would be the best mechanism to achieve that?

Mr. Yvon Fontaine: Earlier I cited two or three examples in which the federal government takes massive action for 90 Canadian universities without going through the provinces. I mentioned the Canada Foundation for Innovation and the Canadian Millennium Scholarship Foundation. I could also cite the Canada Research Chairs, areas of excellence and the major research councils. The Canadian government distributes billions of dollars every year.

In the budget, those amounts have been further increased, no doubt not enough for us to be satisfied, but we're never satisfied. That's at least what they tell us university people. But there's even more additional funding for the major councils and so on.

So there are mechanisms. I know the Auditor General is concerned. Moreover, Mr. Sauvageau asked a question on the accountability of the foundations and so on. Beyond that, the Canadian government has previously invented mechanisms, is still inventing them and will invent more tomorrow.

•(1005)

Mr. Marc Godbout: I'm talking about universities. Would the mechanism be your network itself?

Mr. Yvon Fontaine: Yes, it could be. This \$55 million plan can be implemented in two ways. If the government has problems going through the network so that network then forwards the money to the institutions, it could go directly to the institutions. However, the institutions aren't opposed to the network handling the matter.

The Canadian government has enough examples to take action with universities. I don't want to be naive. I'm a lawyer, so I'm well aware that there are areas of jurisdiction, but there are a enough precedents to warrant direct intervention with the universities.

As far as we're concerned, is it preferable for the government to do this through a central association with accountability rules? We're open to all that. If we want to do it through the provinces, please let it be clear enough. If envelope x is granted to the province and that envelope is to go to the institutions, then amount x should eventually go to the institutions. That's not always the case.

Mr. Marc Godbout: It wouldn't be a problem if it communicated directly with the network.

Mr. Yvon Fontaine: We'd obviously have to acquire additional administrative capability, but that's not impossible.

Mr. Marc Godbout: Your action plan is obviously a response to the Action Plan for Official Languages tabled by the government. Except in the part devoted to research, I didn't see that you had requested funding for what I would call networking as such between French-language or partially French-language universities. I thought you were a bit modest in that regard. Perhaps you're focusing more on the action plan.

As a result of the range of programs, which can't be enormous in all the provinces, shouldn't the networking option be considered so that someone who doesn't have access to a program in Manitoba, for example, can register in Moncton, while taking advantage of the necessary incentives to do so?

Mr. Yvon Fontaine: As regards administrative networking, our organization is receiving a grant from the Canadian government for a national secretariat in Ottawa.

Mr. Marc Godbout: I'm mainly thinking of networking for programs.

Mr. Yvon Fontaine: You have to understand that the universities are independent corporations. It can't be claimed that they will readily give up their powers. I think complementary relationships have to be developed. In the plan, we have an academic program aimed at a certain number of disciplines. It's a start. We'd obviously like to be able to anchor that in a more sustainable way. While it's a modest five-year plan...

That's not all the institutions are requesting. In the bilateral agreements with the provinces, there are requests from the universities to the provinces negotiating with the federal government over the transfer issue, in a certain number of areas, as has always been done. In the past, we've received envelopes directly from the federal government. This is the dominant component right now.

Mr. Marc Godbout: The rights holders...

The Chair: Please be brief, Mr. Godbout.

Mr. Marc Godbout: We're told that the action plan doesn't refer to rights holders. It does, but I see nothing in this plan that's based on rights holders. It refers to immersion students. I'm aware that's important, but I'd like it first to address Francophones. Charter rights holders may not have had such easy access to postsecondary education.

Mr. Yvon Fontaine: It's true there's nothing on that subject, but the problem of rights holders is one that concerns childhood. Rights holders are recovered in the public schools from the moment they enter school. This linguistic catch-up shouldn't normally be the responsibility of the universities, although they do it. In all our institutions—and these costs are added to the operating costs of our universities—there are language training programs for Francophone students attending our institutions. It's felt that, in many cases, French-language proficiency levels should be improved to university standards. The real problem of rights holders is in the public secondary schools.

• (1010)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. André.

Mr. Guy André (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Good morning and welcome, Mr. Gélinau.

I have a few questions to ask you.

Do the Francophone universities outside Quebec offer all the programs the minorities need? Are all disciplines offered? If not, should priority be given to certain disciplines in the next few years?

Mr. Yvon Fontaine: Not every one of our institutions offers a full range of programs. The smallest ones, the Université de Hearst, the Faculté Saint-Jean and the Université Sainte-Anne, offer a certain number of basic programs. The largest, Laurentian University, the University of Moncton and the University of Ottawa, offer a fairly complete range of programs at a number of levels, that is to say the bachelors, masters and doctoral degrees.

A certain number of disciplines are not very represented in our institutions, such as all the medical disciplines. The University of Ottawa offers a bilingual program. It's the only institution in our entire network that teaches medicine to a certain number of Francophones.

In New Brunswick, spaces are being bought at Quebec universities. The Government of New Brunswick, not the university, buys a certain number of spaces from the Government of Quebec, because there's no faculty of medicine in New Brunswick.

Programs in the highly specialized fields, such as architecture and pharmacology, are non-existent as well. There are general university programs, and professional programs, such as engineering, are found at some of our universities. Obviously, we don't find everything that's available at the largest Anglophone universities, but there's nevertheless a significant percentage. We have to make some of the programs available at Moncton or Ottawa accessible to other institutions that we represent and that are not offering them at this time. That's also part of our plan.

Mr. Guy André: Your action plan contains requests to develop certain types of training. Are you also making requests to consolidate programs at certain universities? For example, a lot of students have to travel to another province to get training. Is this well matched? Would there be any improvements to make?

Mr. Yvon Fontaine: As you can see, a number of things are planned here, but it's not complete. What you see here doesn't represent everything we can do. Each of our institutions, through the Ministry of Education in their province and the bilateral plans with the federal government, has also made requests for some aspects you're referring to.

Some of our universities offer specific scholarships for students from very remote and small minority regions. At my university, we have specific scholarships for Francophones from Newfoundland who want to come and study at the University of Moncton, since there's no university instruction there.

With Health Canada, the University of Ottawa has undertaken to help develop nursing sciences at the Faculté de Saint-Jean and the Collège universitaire de Saint-Boniface, for example. Part of the training is given there, and students finish it at Ottawa. They can do it through distance education or they can move. This is in a number of fields.

Mr. Guy André: I read that you had spent two years developing a strategic plan for 2005-2010. You have haven't yet received any answer about getting the budget that would enable you to implement this action plan. The plan seems to be a kind of stimulus designed to revitalize the French-language universities outside Quebec.

What will the consequences be if you don't get a favourable answer to your requests?

Mr. Yvon Fontaine: This plan focuses on a few major challenges specific to each of our institutions, including enrolment. As you may know, Francophone demographics outside Quebec are not currently on the upswing: they're declining in all provinces.

The number of students is large enough in a number of our programs for it to be possible to maintain them. In the context of the plan, we would need to get all we can in the way of scholarships for international students and scholarships for immersion students and continue maintaining and developing the student population. If we don't get that and we can't attract more students from other communities, a critical mass problem will start to be felt within our programs.

• (1015)

The Chair: If you continue, Mr. Sauvageau will have less time.

Mr. Godin.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Fontaine, earlier you referred to a problem concerning the Department of Canadian Heritage. That department provides funding and, consequently, has a role to play. Furthermore, the Canada-community agreements should be signed by the end of March. However, this morning, we received a letter from the President of the Fédération des communautés francophones, Mr. Arès. He's not very happy. Things aren't moving forward.

Do you also get the impression that the Department of Canadian Heritage is slow to act? Unless the Dion Plan and the minister responsible for it, Mauril Bélanger, are the cause of the problem. I don't want to put you on the spot, but you're here to talk about the situation with your parliamentarians so that they can help you.

We get the impression that these people don't know where they're going, that the programs are slow and that nothing's moving. Do you sense that anything is happening? Plans are all well and good, but you need money.

Mr. Yvon Fontaine: Earlier Mr. Sauvageau said that we had applauded the plan too soon. I didn't have a chance to respond to that, since I wanted to finish my presentation. We had said that the plan outlined a good vision, that it was headed in the right direction, but that it wasn't yet functional. In the subsequent weeks, we said it should become functional and that the plan should be specifically quantified.

It was announced in the federal budget that slightly more than \$700 million would be invested in that action plan. I must say that was a step in the right direction compared to the \$450 or \$500 million we were receiving before. It's not because of the vision contained in the government's plan that we disagree: it seems to me the plan hasn't yet been implemented as regards the transfer of funds to the institutions.

I think that's somewhat the reason why we wanted to come and see you. It's not that the plan isn't good; it's that its implementation is too slow.

Mr. Yvon Godin: It's an action plan without action. I said that: you don't have to say it as well.

Mr. Yvon Fontaine: I'm not here to engage in partisan politics.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Pardon me, Mr. Chairman, but this has nothing to do with partisanship. This is about an action plan, but, as you yourself said, there's no action in it. So it's a plan without action. We'd like there to be some action.

Mr. Yvon Fontaine: We haven't received a response on that subject. However, some parts of the Canadian government's Action Plan for Official Languages were implemented quickly. For example, Health Canada paid us \$100 million over the eight months following the action plan's announcement. Industry Canada also took action. There are other examples in this regard.

What I'm telling you is that things are dragging in the case of some components we were very much relying on and that are concerned by the programs of certain departments. No, we haven't yet received a response. If we had, we wouldn't be here trying to sell you our plan.

Mr. Yvon Godin: I agree with you on immigration. The Société des Acadiens et des Acadiennes du Nouveau-Brunswick has done a lot of work in that area. We need immigrants; that's the truth. If we have no one at our universities, in our schools, they'll close. That's a possibility.

Don't you think there may be a problem? I'm not engaging in partisanship. I'm afraid you thought that, but it's not the case. At Immigration Canada, we see that Quebec has representatives in a number of countries—and I'm happy for them—who work in the immigration field and have the opportunity to recruit people for Quebec. Aren't you afraid that Immigration Canada will mainly recruit people for the regions of English Canada and that the Francophone regions outside Quebec will miss the boat? There isn't enough emphasis on recruiting immigrants for our communities, whether it be Moncton, Shippagan or Edmundston.

Mr. Yvon Fontaine: I'll answer that wearing the hat I'm wearing today. I would remind you that \$16.5 million out of the \$55 million was allocated precisely for that purpose, because the Quebec universities contribute to an immigration policy that favours Quebec with the assistance of the Quebec government: money is provided to international students so they don't have to pay excessive tuition fees. That's all we're asking. If that's done, then it's my responsibility to go to France or to Africa and to tell students that my university is as good as the University of Montreal, Laval University or another university and that they can attend it for the same price. However, if I can't do that, I'm facing a systemic barrier that makes it very hard for me to recruit.

• (1020)

Mr. Yvon Godin: That's what we did in the case of our community colleges, and it works very well.

Mr. Yvon Fontaine: I'm less familiar with the community colleges, but that's the challenge. I'm not here to solve all the problems, but where the universities were able to intervene to deliver the action plan's vision to the Canadian government, I believe they shouldered their responsibilities. What you see here is the collective aspect. Each of our universities, together with their province, has also developed major five-year plans related to that.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Godin.

With your consent, we could have a final round of two minutes, which would take us to 10:30. So I'll ask you to be very disciplined.

Hon. Raymond Simard (Saint Boniface, Lib.): Mr. Chairman, it seems to me that, if we call witnesses, we should do so for two hours. Four of us on this side never get a chance to ask questions.

The Chair: You have a question every round. We never skip your turn.

Hon. Raymond Simard: The same people have asked questions four times.

Mr. Benoît Sauvageau: No. I only asked questions once.

Hon. Raymond Simard: I'm talking about the parties.

The Chair: I can show you the list of speakers. I scrupulously monitor the time allotted to each person.

Hon. Raymond Simard: I understand that you follow the list, but I contend that, when we summon witnesses, we should do it for a period of two hours so that everyone has an opportunity to ask questions.

The Chair: I understand your point of view. However, if we proceed that way, we won't be able to discuss future business of the committee.

Hon. Raymond Simard: We're not here for nothing.

The Chair: I understand. We can talk about that again when we discuss future business.

Mr. Lauzon, you have two minutes.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: I'm very interested in students from outside the country, international students. The results achieved in Quebec show that works well. Does a certain percentage of those students stay in our country after completing their education? Is it a high percentage?

Mr. Yvon Fontaine: It's hard to get good statistics. I believe we estimate the number of international students who study in Canada and ultimately become landed immigrants at approximately 30%. We know they often stay in the region where they've done their education because they've met people there and so on. That's not the case for everyone, but there's a fairly interesting causal relationship here.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: Is the objective of 900 students very ambitious?

Mr. Yvon Fontaine: It's not very ambitious. At my university alone, there are currently 400 international students. On the Francophone side at the University of Ottawa, there must be at least 400 or 500 as well. We'd like to double the number of international students at our institutions over the next five years. We're very optimistic about our chances of doing that, if we obtain a little in the way of financial resources for that purpose.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: Is it also possible to achieve the objective of 900 immersion students?

Mr. Yvon Fontaine: Yes. For immersion, it's a matter of resources. That's not at all a problem. I'm convinced it's entirely achievable.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: I'm going to share my last 30 seconds with Mr. Sauvageau.

The Chair: Your last 10 seconds.

Mr. Benoît Sauvageau: I have two minutes. I think I have the time to tell a little story about foreign students. Sometimes there are amusing problems or situations.

Mr. Bilodeau, a Quebecker and a former Canadian ambassador to Belgium, was at the Department of Foreign Affairs. His daughter was born in Ottawa. He subsequently worked in Belgium and around the world. In Quebec, his daughter is considered a foreign student. There's a bilateral agreement between Quebec and France, as a result of which her boyfriend, who is French, pays less than she does to study in Quebec. This is a real problem.

You conducted negotiations to obtain the \$56 million. The federal government's first comments amounted to silence in the budget. There's something that it would be a good idea to match. What there is in this plan, and what doesn't appear in the Dion Plan, are objectives. For the government to agree to pay \$56 million and for you to be able to negotiate at the same time so that objectives are included in the action plan... Generally, when you set objectives, you grant funds to achieve them. Expected outcomes are outlined in your document. I believe that expected outcomes are what's missing from the Action Plan for Official Languages. Either the federal government recognizes your expected outcomes and gives you the money to achieve them, or you ask that they be included in the action plan. Can simultaneous negotiations be conducted?

• (1025)

Mr. Yvon Fontaine: Yes, but I would remind you of the health issue. The institutions we represent here are, with few exceptions, virtually the same ones. The way we presented our plan is very measurable in terms of results. It was funded out of funding under the action plan, even though the objectives of the Canadian government's action plan were not as clearly stated as ours. I'm trying to tell you, Mr. Sauvageau, that I don't believe that's what's preventing them from saying yes to our request at this time, even though the government's action plan might not have been as elaborate with regard to measurable results.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Simard.

Hon. Raymond Simard: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Welcome, gentlemen.

I'm obviously interested in this subject since the Collège universitaire de Saint-Boniface is in the middle of my riding. You're perfectly right about health. In immigration, the Collège universitaire has greatly benefited from the official languages program. You referred to nurses we train at home and to young science graduates. I believe we have partnerships with the University of Ottawa and the University of Sherbrooke. Every year, seven or eight young people from back home go to study medicine. That's been very beneficial.

You also referred to the rich history of our universities. You're right again. The Collège universitaire de Saint-Boniface was founded in 1880, I believe. It indeed has a very rich history. The University of Manitoba, which now has 24,000 students, is responsible to the Collège universitaire de Saint-Boniface. The first chancellor is a Francophone. But whereas the University of Manitoba has 24,000 students, the Collège de Saint-Boniface has only 1,000 or 1,500.

My question concerns the research chairs and the Canada Foundation for Innovation. These funds often target more specialized universities. Are our universities penalized because they aren't specialized or because they're smaller?

Mr. Yvon Fontaine: Yes, absolutely. Moreover, our small universities, like other small universities, regardless of language, have made many submissions to the effect that, if there aren't more specific measures for them with regard to the Canada research chairs, etc., they could well go completely unnoticed.

Some corrective measures have been taken. For example, the smallest universities that didn't have major research areas received a research chair. But the problem is serious, because all the major federal programs for universities always favour large universities. Among our universities, only the University of Ottawa can measure up to those large universities. The others can't. If there are no supplementary measures—you've been talking about this for two hours—that take these situations into account, we'll have a problem. We think these measures can be taken for linguistic reasons; they can also be taken because these are small universities, of course, and you'll have to do business with others, which is all well and good, but also for linguistic reasons. Supplementary measures are necessary, and that's where we stand.

That's the message we want to leave with you. This is absolutely essential. Otherwise, the gaps will continue to grow.

The Chair: We'll finish with Mr. Godin.

You have two minutes.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Mr. Fontaine, as a lawyer, you know that education is an area of provincial jurisdiction. On that subject, you said earlier that, if funding were paid to the province, it would have to be ensured, under an agreement, that the universities in fact receive the money. Is that correct?

How would we normally proceed? Is the money paid to the province, which gives priority to the colleges? It seems to me a

province, particularly since education is a provincial jurisdiction, should attach importance both to its universities and to its colleges. In New Brunswick, we're proud of our universities, whether it be the University of Moncton or the University of Shippagan.

• (1030)

Mr. Yvon Fontaine: If the federal government ultimately decided to forward the money through the province, that wouldn't be our preferred solution. In that case, however, if matters were very clearly defined and the duty of accountability were also as great as the duty that falls to me when I enter into an agreement with the federal government, we'd have to deal with the situation. I know that some situations in Canada that require urgent action by the Canadian government to favour minorities have been settled.

In the 1980s, there was the Mercure crisis in Western Canada. Mr. Simard no doubt remembers that. At that time, the Canadian government financed between 110% and 115% of the start-up costs of the French-language school boards where there were Francophone minorities, not 100% or 50%. In Saskatchewan, the figure was estimated at 125%.

May I answer? I know you don't have a lot of time to ask your questions, but there's going to be a problem if I don't have time to answer.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Go ahead.

Mr. Yvon Fontaine: The same thing happened in the case of the colleges in Ontario. As Mr. Godbout no doubt remembers, the Canadian government funded a very large portion of the start-up costs of the Cité collégiale and the Collège Boréal. That had to be done because those colleges were important for the communities.

What I'm telling you is that, if we don't take massive action for the university institutions we represent, we're going to lose ground. I maintain that, although the Church was one of the most important institutions for protecting linguistic minorities until 1970, everything that currently exists is now important. I also believe that postsecondary education institutions are of capital importance and that the government must intervene massively.

In this context, I would encourage all parties to do what they have often done when real language debates arose, concerning, among other things, the new Official Languages Act of 1998. The vote in the House at the time was unanimous. In this case, I believe we must go beyond political parties and ask the government to take very significant measures to help us achieve this plan.

Mr. Yvon Godin: You're talking about the action plan you're proposing?

Mr. Yvon Fontaine: That's only part of what we need.

The Chair: The time available to us has elapsed. Thank you, Messrs. Godin and Fontaine. Thank you, Mr. Géliveau.

[The committee continued in camera]

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