

Economic Mission to Canada
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"CANADA AND BELGIUM : FRIENDS AND PARTNERS"

**KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY HIS ROYAL HIGHNESS PRINCE PHILIPPE OF BELGIUM,
DUKE OF BRABANT**

Thank you, Madam President, for your kind words.

It is a pleasure to be back in Canada, this great country, and a privilege for me to address such a distinguished audience here at the Canadian Club, where so many prestigious speakers have taken the floor.

Canadians are very dear to our heart, and I am delighted to visit your country at the head of an economic and business delegation from Belgium. Where better to start our contacts than here in the business heart of Toronto.

I would like to take advantage of this distinguished forum to share with you some thoughts about what makes the friendship between Canada and Belgium so special.

To a casual observer, Belgium and Canada seem to have little in common. Our countries are very different in size, in geographic location, in climate. Canada has innumerable natural resources, which we haven't. And for a long time, the history of our nations has developed along different lines.

But when we look closer and do a proper analysis, we find that many things bring us closer together. Over the last century we have forged a very warm friendship. And there are even quite a lot of striking resemblances.

When Governor General Adrienne Clarkson spoke to you here at the Club a year ago, she said that even Canadians find it difficult to really grasp "how enormous and various Canada really is". She also said, and I quote "*To link Canada up in our minds, to have it feel like a real and united place, we must find ways to interact and to understand each other, ... to understand distant people and foreign lands*".

It is to the foreign and distant land of Belgium that so many young Canadians came in 1914 and again in 1944, to liberate us from oppression and war. They came from all over Canada, from Ontario and Quebec, and from Newfoundland, to stand shoulder to shoulder with our Belgian troops and with the other allies. Canadians know how precious freedom is : "*... the freedom that is ours, the freedom that has marked our history and our territory, ...the freedom that unites us all*". Wise words from Governor General Michaëlle Jean.

In the two World Wars, thousands of young Canadians paid the ultimate price: they gave their lives to help us, in Belgium, in Europe, regain our freedom. Surely the most moving tribute to Canada's war dead has been written by your fellow Canadian, John McCrae. He wrote his famous poem in the trenches near Ypres: '*In Flanders' fields the poppies blow, between the crosses, row on row, that mark our place*'. And if we are wearing poppies today, it is because of his inspiring words.

Belgium may have been a distant land to many Canadians during the war, but Canada itself was also a far-away destination for Belgians who migrated here over the last one hundred and fifty years. In 1869, Canada designated Belgium as a 'preferred country' in its immigration policy. Over the decades, the provinces of Ontario, Quebec and Manitoba welcomed thousands of Belgians who went to work in agriculture, tobacco farming, mining and industry.

Still today, active Belgian communities exist here in Ontario and in other provinces. I visited them a few years ago. The new generations are proud of their origins but they also feel completely at home in Canada, because they are appreciated here for what they are: hard working, loyal citizens who want to help build a prosperous, warm and tolerant society.

Canadians and Belgians have shared many important moments in history. But today, in this complex twenty-first century, there are many more things we share. I think our countries have found similar answers to some of the key challenges of our time. Let me discuss two issues here: the way we organize our society, and the way we shape our economy.

If you were to ask me to draw up a list of the fundamental problems we are facing today, I would certainly include in my list the following question: how do we organize our society in such a way that people can live together in harmony?

A lot of thinking is going on in Canada about this. There is the research done by two of your best known philosophers, Charles Taylor and Will Kymlicka. Both are eminent thinkers on the role of the individual in society; both have written extensively on, for instance, multiculturalism. And at the level of your institutions, there is Canada's own brand of federalism, with your own specific system of relations between Ottawa and the provinces and territories, and with the concept of open federalism launched by Prime Minister Harper.

All these efforts by researchers and leaders, but also the day-by-day commitment of Canadians all over your vast territory, have turned Canada, country of immigration, into Canada, model of multicultural integration.

Belgium with its own cultural, linguistic and religious diversity, also welcomes a lot of citizens whose origins lie elsewhere in Europe or in Africa, Asia or America. As an open economy with permeable frontiers, as a host country to major international institutions like the EU or NATO, and having been a trading nation for centuries, my country has also, long since, learnt the benefits and challenges of a multicultural society.

Canada and Belgium both are highly developed societies with a very high standard of living. We are also very complex societies, where the fundamental needs and rights of everyone have to be finely balanced. So we need to organize public life and the state in such a way that our citizens, whatever their background, can interact freely and understand one another in a multicultural setting.

Both our countries have chosen federalism as an organizing principle. It is striking to see to what a degree views on federalism in Canada and in Belgium converge. We know that federalism allows us to organize freedom in a context of diversity within unity. Federalism creates opportunities for people to develop an open mind. By open mind, I mean the capacity, when confronted with diversity, to see the world through the eyes of others, to go beyond one's own horizon. This is true in federal systems, and all the more so in multicultural societies.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Our economic and business delegation is convinced that Belgium and Canada have a rich portfolio of business activities to offer. Many Belgian companies are eager and capable to develop commercial and technological partnerships with foreign companies. Only a few Belgian companies have made it to the Fortune list of the Global 500, but that should not fool us. In many specialist markets, Belgian companies have captured leadership positions, because the focused and niche strategies of our companies have enabled them to develop products and services with unique characteristics.

Belgian and Canadian companies alike face the rough edge of globalisation, the constant pressure of resources needed for R&D, the never-ending search for highly qualified and motivated staff. Competition in open and free markets has challenged us and you to develop technologies and new ideas, in short to innovate.

Innovation is the key to our economic future. I am not here to tell you what innovation is, but I can tell you that innovation needs a breeding ground where Belgium and Canada, I believe, have an advantage, taking into account the elements I just described namely freedom, an open mind and federalism : freedom to innovate, an open mindset to build bridges between different institutions and to transcend one's own views. Federalism too can contribute to this innovative process since it can bring together people and ideas from various horizons. All that will boost innovation.

We in Belgium have taken that as a guiding principle. We have seen new companies emerge from a dynamic collaboration between universities and the business world.

Both in manufacturing and services, cooperation in Belgium between enterprise and higher education institutes is well above the EU average and indeed is among the highest in Europe. On average, Belgian companies contribute 11% of research and innovation spending in our higher education system. 15 to 20% of all patents come from the cooperation between universities and enterprises and that number is rising.

Let me give you one example: Belgium is number 1 in Europe for innovative research in pharmaceutical products. Together with the chemical industry, this sector is the biggest Belgian exporter to Canada.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me conclude.

History, values, business: on these strong bonds hinge our friendship and our future.

Freedom, federalism and an open mindset underpin our society and form the bedrock of our two nations. There is so much we can, and should, do together.

Thank you, Canada, for your friendship and your warm welcome. I wish all of you every success and happiness.