DISCUSSION FORUM
on the perspectives of Canadians of diverse backgrounds on linguistic duality

FINAL REPORT
Halifax, November 8-9, 2011
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The forum findings speak eloquently to the need for concrete action to fully integrate linguistic duality and cultural diversity as two fundamental Canadian values. An analysis of the discussions helped identify potential measures the Office of the Commissioner as well as other government and community bodies could take.

To begin, there is a great need for rapprochement between the two language communities. The organizations that deliver services to English-speaking and French-speaking newcomers respectively would benefit from working together more. To this end, the Office of the Commissioner could do more to raise awareness of and promote linguistic duality with these service providers and ethnocultural organizations. It may also be useful to draw up a list of best practices related to linguistic duality within ethnocultural communities.

In addition, better access to language training in both official languages for newcomers is needed, particularly adults. Participants recommended looking at the possibility of expanding or improving existing programs to encourage newcomers to learn both official languages. Existing programs and resources available to newcomers for learning the other official language should also be promoted.

Lastly, a pre-arrival information kit for newcomers that paints a more accurate picture of the linguistic situation in each province should be developed for immigrants interested in settling in the Atlantic region.

SUMMARY

In order to establish a vision of linguistic duality that more faithfully reflects the experience of Canadians of all backgrounds, the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages decided to speak with Canadians from diverse backgrounds to gain a better understanding of how they see the links between linguistic duality and cultural diversity. In 2005, the Office of the Commissioner consulted a number of thinkers and opinion leaders who had thought about how to combine these two notions. Subsequently, the Office of the Commissioner held the first two of four forums on the perspectives of Canadians of diverse backgrounds on linguistic duality (Toronto 2007; Vancouver 2008). Representatives of ethnocultural groups who are involved in their communities were invited to these forums.

On November 8 and 9, 2011, in Halifax, the Office of the Commissioner held a third forum to continue the dialogue with Canadians of diverse backgrounds who have settled in the Atlantic region. Unlike the first two forums, the Halifax forum was two days long. During the first day of the forum, the perceptions of Frenchspeaking immigrants and newcomers who have integrated into Francophone communities were discussed, while the activities planned for the second day focused on the perceptions of English-speaking Canadians of diverse backgrounds of linguistic duality and its relationship to cultural diversity.

Over the two days of discussion, it was evident that all participants, without exception, have a profound appreciation of linguistic duality as a core Canadian value and embrace it wholeheartedly. Linguistic duality for them is not based on historical or legal considerations, but rather is central to Canadian cultural diversity.
BACKGROUND

In 2005, the Parliament of Canada amended Part VII of the Official Languages Act and all federal institutions are now required to take positive measures to foster the full recognition and use of both English and French in Canadian society. The Office of the Commissioner has since been looking at ways of promoting linguistic duality with due regard for Canada’s cultural diversity.

In order to establish a vision of linguistic duality that more faithfully reflects the experience of Canadians of all backgrounds, the Office of the Commissioner decided to speak with Canadians from diverse backgrounds to gain a better understanding of how they see the links between linguistic duality and cultural diversity. In 2005, the Office of the Commissioner consulted a number of thinkers and opinion leaders who had thought about how to combine these two notions to participate. Subsequently, the Office of the Commissioner held the first two of four forums on the perspectives of Canadians of diverse backgrounds on linguistic duality (Toronto 2007; Vancouver 2008). Representatives of ethnocultural groups who are involved in their communities were invited to these forums.

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The Office of the Commissioner worked with Citizenship and Immigration Canada, the Société Nationale de l'Acadie, the Nova Scotia Office of Immigration, the Office of Acadian Affairs and the Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21 to give participants in the discussions on Francophone immigration an opportunity to meet and talk with participants in the discussions on linguistic duality and cultural diversity. This networking activity took place at the Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21, in the Port of Halifax, at the end of the first day of the forum.

Rationale

Linguistic duality and cultural diversity were the underlying themes of both days of discussion, while the Francophone component also explored the topic of immigration to minority Francophone and Acadian communities. This section sets out the reasons why these issues were discussed as part of the forum.

Linguistic duality and cultural diversity

Linguistic duality refers to the fact that Canada has two official languages of equal status and that each language is associated with a community whose history and cultural traits have helped make Canada the country we know today. The concept of linguistic duality also refers to ties between these communities, and the dialogue and exchanges between Anglophones and Francophones, whether they are in a minority or a majority situation.

The Official Languages Act, which has been in effect for over 40 years, applies only to federal institutions. It does not apply to provincial, territorial or municipal governments. Some provinces and territories have nevertheless adopted legislation or policies to protect English and French within their jurisdictions. In the Atlantic region, New Brunswick is the only officially bilingual province. Its Official Languages Act was enacted in 1969 and revised in 2002. New Brunswick has also adopted An Act Recognizing the Equality of the Two Official Linguistic Communities in New Brunswick, known as Bill 88.

Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island each have a French-language services act, while Newfoundland and Labrador has an Office of French Services.

Cultural diversity is also at the heart of Canadian history. Diversity has always been present in the country: the social fabric woven by the intermingling of Aboriginal, French and English cultures has been enriched over the years by the contributions of Canadians from a variety of backgrounds. Within the general framework of linguistic duality, the federal government adopted a multiculturalism policy in 1971 that

1 Official Languages Act (SNB 2002, c 0-0.5)
2 An Act Recognizing the Equality of the Two Official Linguistic Communities in New Brunswick (RSNB 2011, c 198)
3 French-language Services Act, 2004, c. 26, s. 1
4 French Language Services Act, Chapter F-15.1
recognized the equal value and dignity of all ethnocultural
groups. The policy led to the adoption, in 1988, of the
Canadian Multiculturalism Act, which recognizes that
Canadians’ diversity in terms of race, national origin, ethnic
origin, colour and religion is a fundamental characteristic
of Canadian society. Diversity is seen as strengthening the
country because it creates an open society that values
differences and fosters a feeling of belonging. Canada
differs from many other countries by virtue of its experience
of diversity. Its 33.5 million inhabitants form a cultural,
ethnic and linguistic mosaic like no other, and racial, ethnic,
linguistic and religious diversity continues to increase.

Linguistic duality and cultural diversity are therefore two key
values that continue to interact with and complement one
another and, above all, transform Canadian society. Because
Canada will continue to see significant socio-demographic
changes, and the proportion of Canadians whose first
language is neither English nor French will continue to
grow, the Office of the Commissioner feels it is important to
establish a vision of linguistic duality that is more in line with
the experience of Canadians of all backgrounds.

Keeping this in mind, and being aware at the same time of
the gap between aspirations for linguistic duality and the
reality, which shows that duality is not present in the daily
lives of many Canadians, the Office of the Commissioner
initiated this series of forums to gain a better understanding
of the perspectives of Canadians of diverse backgrounds on
linguistic duality.

**Immigration to minority Francophone and Acadian
communities**

The 2006 Census showed that the Francophone population
of Canada is declining, in particular where Francophones
are a minority: “4.1% of the population outside Quebec
have French as their mother tongue, down from 4.4% in
2001.” The Atlantic region is no exception to this trend.

The demographic weight of Francophones compared to
the Anglophone majority varies significantly from one part
of the region to another. Acadians and Francophones are
majorities in some areas, but still constitute minorities
within each province taken as a whole. Until recently, these
communities had to turn inward to survive and maintain
their language and culture. But now, new demographic
realities are pushing them to reverse this approach and
open up to the world as a means of survival.

The socio-demographic and linguistic portrait of
Francophone immigration to Canada shows significant
differences between the percentage of French-speaking
immigrants settling in Canada and the overall proportion of
Francophones in Canada, particularly in minority situations.
In this context, Francophone immigration is important to
maintaining the linguistic balance and is part the strategy
of Francophone and Acadian communities for combating
demographic decline.

**Objectives**

The main objective of the Halifax forum was to consolidate
a network of partners involved in Francophone
immigration, linguistic duality and cultural diversity, and
use the information gathered to guide the Office of the
Commissioner’s future activities in these areas.

More specifically, the objective of the day on Francophone
immigration (November 8) was to discuss with newcomers
now settling or already settled in Francophone communities
about building inclusive Francophone spaces, and to gain a
better knowledge of participants’ perceptions of the benefits
of Canadian linguistic duality.

The specific objective of the second day (November 9),
which dealt with the perspectives of English-speaking
Canadians of diverse backgrounds who live in the
Atlantic region, was to gain a better understanding of
their perceptions of duality and diversity in the Canadian
context, and to improve the Office of the Commissioner’s
understanding of the issues they face.

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1 Canadian Multiculturalism Act (Bill C-93)
2 Statistics Canada, The Canadian Population in 2011: Population Counts and Growth,
Participants and observers
To identify potential participants and achieve the best possible representation of stakeholders from the four Atlantic provinces, the Office of the Commissioner sent invitations to ethnocultural organizations, multicultural associations and organizations that welcome newcomers and help them settle and integrate. The Société Nationale de l’Acadie was also consulted.

Potential participants were sent an invitation for the forum. Once registered, they received the forum agenda and a background paper on the theme of the session they would be attending so they could start thinking about linguistic duality and cultural diversity. They were also asked to fill out and return a pre-forum questionnaire designed to create a general profile of the participants.

Participants invited to the first day of discussions (November 8) represented French-speaking Canadians of diverse backgrounds who have settled in the four Atlantic provinces. They were selected on the basis of their interest in sharing their experience with the challenges and opportunities of joining a minority-language community and in sharing their perspectives on linguistic duality.

Of the 28 participants in the Francophone session, 23 filled out and returned the pre-forum questionnaire. All of the respondents were born outside Canada and have lived here for an average of 11 years. Most are from Europe (10) or Africa (10). Their language background is quite rich: 18 said they are trilingual and 11 said they speak four languages. While only 12 have French as their mother tongue, and just 1 has English, 21 of the 23 respondents now speak both official languages.

Participants invited to the second day of discussions (November 9) represented English-speaking Canadians of diverse backgrounds living in the four Atlantic provinces. They were selected from among the multicultural associations, newcomer reception, integration and settlement organizations, media organizations representing or interested in ethnocultural groups, and other concerned parties.

A total of 25 participants attended the Anglophone session; however, not all were immigrants. The pre-forum questionnaire showed that 14 were born abroad, in Asia or the Middle East (7), Africa (4) or Europe (3). In terms of languages spoken, 12 said they spoke three and 6 said they spoke four. Ten respondents said they speak both official languages.

Representatives of Francophone community groups and federal and provincial institutions that deal with immigration or cultural diversity were also invited to attend the forum as observers. The Office of the Commissioner thought it important that these representatives have a chance to hear the participants’ views on linguistic duality and cultural diversity with their own ears, as the discussions could provide some insight or possible solutions.

1. FORUM PROGRAM
The first day of the forum took place primarily in French and the second primarily in English. The program of each day was similar, and included presentations, discussion groups and plenary sessions. The program can be found in Appendix A.

1.1 Opening remarks
By way of introduction, the Commissioner of Official Languages, Graham Fraser, welcomed the participants and observers and offered his own views on linguistic duality and cultural diversity. He stated that, contrary to what some claim, duality and diversity are complementary notions that strengthen each other and are core values of Canadian society.

Canada’s social fabric, characterized since its beginning by the intermingling of English, French and Aboriginal cultures, has been marked by moments of tension and negotiation, but also continued dialogue and understanding. I believe that it is this respect for linguistic and cultural differences that has made Canadians more open to further diversity in Canadian society. […]

Linguistic duality and cultural diversity are central elements in Canada’s history, and now constitute two fundamental values of Canadian society. Canadians of diverse backgrounds adopt one of the official languages and contribute to the vitality of linguistic duality, and this allows people of all backgrounds to participate fully in Canadian society and to enrich it in all respects.

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6 Graham Fraser, Notes for an address at the Discussion Forum on the Perspectives of Canadians of Diverse Backgrounds on Linguistic Duality – Session for English-Speaking Canadians of Diverse Backgrounds, Halifax, November 9, 2011.
1.2 Special presentations

To help the discussions in small groups get started, two special presentations were given during the forum. For the French-language session, participants watched a video on linguistic duality made by the Centre d’accueil et d’accompagnement francophone des immigrants du Sud-Est du Nouveau-Brunswick, in partnership with the Office of the Commissioner and the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages for New Brunswick. The video showed seven young immigrants talking about their language-related experiences in New Brunswick and in Canada. The video is available online at http://caiimm.org.

On the second day, a young student named Henry Annan gave a presentation on “Linguistic duality and cultural diversity: Experience and vision of an engaged youth.” Mr. Annan shared his personal experience as a newcomer from Ghana arriving to the Halifax area. He already spoke English when he came to Canada, but has developed a genuine passion for French. He said that he had taken every opportunity to learn French and find out about French culture, including through immersion programs in Nova Scotia and Quebec, through his role as a youth ambassador with the organization French for the Future, and by taking part in public speaking competitions.

1.3 Bridging activity

The Office of the Commissioner wanted to include an activity in the program that would bring the Francophone and Anglophone participants together to meet and talk about the forum’s themes. A networking activity was therefore planned for the evening of November 8, at the Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21, the sixth national museum and the second one opened outside the National Capital Region. The guest speaker at this event was Wayn Hamilton, Chief Executive Officer of the Office of African Nova Scotian Affairs and former regional educator with the Nova Scotia Black Educators Association. As a person involved in his community, Mr. Hamilton spoke about the importance of linguistic duality and cultural diversity from both a personal and community point of view.

2. SUMMARY OF DISCUSSIONS

On both days of the forum, participants were divided into five discussion groups. Each group took part in two workshops with a facilitator and a note-taker. The observers were present at the workshops, but were asked to exercise restraint in contributing to the discussions. This section summarizes the workshop discussions as well as the plenary sessions.

2.1 Session for French-speaking Canadians of diverse backgrounds

As mentioned earlier, the first day dealt with the experiences of French-speaking immigrants who have settled in the Atlantic region.

Workshop 1 – Immigrating to a French-speaking or Acadian community in Atlantic Canada: Challenges, opportunities and relationships with the community

Participants in this workshop were asked to discuss their relationships with the Francophone or Acadian host community and reflect on their role in the local, regional and national Francophone milieu. The following topics were covered:

Feeling of belonging

The participants pointed out the great differences among the Atlantic provinces with regard to French. Except in New Brunswick, French-speaking newcomers said they did not know where to go to receive services in French or how to contact the local Francophone and Acadian communities. They found that these communities had little visibility. The result, they said, was that French-speaking newcomers tend to integrate into the majority Anglophone community, at least initially.

Once they had located a Francophone community, they were able to develop a feeling of belonging, most notably through the schools (often seen as the first anchor point), the workplace, community centres, volunteering and family.
On the other hand, they often felt torn between a desire to belong to a French-speaking community and the need to join the labour market, which calls for a solid command of English. Learning English is a priority.

This feeling of divided loyalty catches newcomers off guard. They did not expect to have to choose between English and French—they thought they would benefit from both languages and cultures. Many of participants said that Canada’s linguistic reality caught them off-guard. The impression they had of Canada before arriving was that all Canadians spoke English and French fluently. They did not expect to find themselves in a majority-minority situation, with two language communities developing separately alongside one another.

Participants also found that rural communities are sometimes less open to newcomers than urban centres are. Newcomers did not appreciate being constantly asked “Where are you from?” This question implies that they are different, that they are from somewhere else and that they are not part of the community. Different French accents also pose some problems in understanding, which on some occasions makes integration into the workplace more difficult.

Generally speaking, entering the labour market is a source of frustration. The participants feel that employers place too much emphasis on Canadian experience and do not give sufficient consideration to qualifications and professional experience acquired in other countries.

Despite all these challenges, many participants said that they chose to immigrate to Canada because of the quality of life, the green spaces and the respect for human rights. In this regard, they do not regret their decision.

Values

The participants said that French-speaking newcomers share many values with the Francophone and Acadian communities, including the importance of family, helping one another, love of the French language, simplicity, curiosity and openness. They appreciate the role of volunteering in their adopted community, seeing this as a strong, positive value.

While individual freedom is a highly appreciated Canadian value, the participants do not necessarily share the individualist values of Canadian society. Many said their values were more collectivist.

Participants also noted how elders do not occupy a very important place in the community and in the family, contrary to their country of origin. They were critical of the fact that age is not valued in North America and that elders are often excluded from participation in community life.

Living in French

The point was raised that it is hard to find the Francophone community in major centres like Halifax and St. John’s. Newcomers take part in and contribute to Francophone and Acadian communities mainly through volunteering or through their workplaces. Participation begins and then continues with sports, cultural and community activities.

Schools are often very important as the first point of contact between newcomers and the Francophone and Acadian host communities. There, parents have the opportunity to meet each other and develop relationships. Schools are also a good place to access information about community organizations. The children’s successful integration into school life plays a major role in building their sense of belonging, and seems to lead to more actively involved parents.

Participants did point out, however, that while Francophone communities may be counting on immigration to keep their French schools in the Atlantic provinces, the structures for welcoming and supporting new students and their families remain inadequate. For example, some parents who come from a Francophone country, but do not speak enough French to help their children with their homework, say they are left to cope on their own. It was mentioned that some French-language schools do not offer as much as the English-language schools, for example in terms of equipment. Also, since there are fewer French-language schools, and each one covers a larger area than the English-language schools, the bus trips are longer.

Workshop 2 – Linguistic duality and cultural diversity: Perceptions, challenges and advantages

The purpose of the second workshop was to identify opportunities and challenges for Francophone newcomers given that they find themselves at the intersection of linguistic duality and cultural diversity. Participants were asked to discuss their relationship to linguistic duality as members of Canada’s minority language group who are also members of a cultural minority.
The role of linguistic duality in the local community
Almost all participants agreed that there is a gap between Canada’s aspirations in terms of linguistic duality and the day-to-day reality. One participant mentioned the example of Nova Scotia, where the Francophone community is ghettoized and French is hardly spoken anywhere else. The same is true in Newfoundland and Labrador and Prince Edward Island, according to participants from these provinces. New Brunswick, the only officially bilingual province and the one with the largest proportion of Francophones, seems to be the exception, despite the differences between the mainly Anglophone and mainly Francophone areas of the province. The precarious state of the Francophone and Acadian communities, namely owing to their small demographic weight, was mentioned several times.

Participants expressed a need for a better understanding of what is meant by linguistic duality and bilingualism. They find these notions rather vague and believe there are several interpretations. Some associate linguistic duality with rights or service in the official languages, while others associate it with recognition and appreciation of the two cultures. Still, everyone acknowledges that linguistic duality is an asset in the Atlantic region and that it is important in the current context of globalization.

Participation in linguistic duality
Several points raised at the first workshop were repeated here: the challenge of living fully in French in the Atlantic region, the need to be proficient in English for economic reasons and the feeling of divided loyalties between the two dominant communities or cultures.

Participants clearly expressed their support for linguistic duality and said duality was now one of their own values. They made a number of suggestions on how duality could be a bigger part of everyone’s lives, Anglophones, Francophones, newcomers and others. They mentioned the importance of Anglophones valuing French and of giving Anglophones more opportunities to learn French and interact with Francophones in French. Also mentioned several times was the importance of newcomers having access to courses in the language of their choice, regardless of their mother tongue, and the importance of being able to learn both languages rather than having to choose between them.

The participants said that, for them, the equal status of the two languages is a given. While they are aware of the conflicts that have marked Canadian history, they want to set that aside and start fresh with the two languages on equal footing.

At the same time, they recognize the predominance of English and the minority status of French in the Atlantic region. Like the Acadians, they fear being assimilated by English culture because English is used in their workplaces, because of the lack of French-language resources and because of the dominance of North American popular culture, which their children often prefer.

Linguistic duality and cultural diversity
Some participants said that, while they speak French, they do not have the same relationship with the language as the Acadians and Francophones for whom it is part of their cultural heritage. French is a language that has been imposed on them or that they chose to learn. However they feel that belonging to an ethnic or cultural minority does make them more sensitive to issues relating to linguistic duality and respect for the rights of minority Francophones.

Certain participants felt that the strong English-French dynamic in the Atlantic region leaves little room for other cultures, and that the region is becoming more bicultural than multicultural. They said that linguistic duality should not be in opposition to cultural diversity, but rather an integral part of it.

Participants pointed to the need to protect and strengthen French so that the arrival of newcomers would not undermine the linguistic weight of Francophones.
2.2 Session for English-speaking Canadians of diverse backgrounds

The second day of the forum brought together representatives of ethnocultural groups, multicultural associations and organizations that serve newcomers. Unlike the first day, the participants were not necessarily immigrants. Many were born in Canada.

**Workshop 1 – Changes in Canadian society: Values and perceptions of cultural diversity**

Participants in this first workshop talked about how they understood Canadian society’s core values and discussed the meaning of the term “cultural diversity.”

**Core values of Canadian society**

Participants recognized the same values and positive features of Canada as the participants in the first day of the forum: the importance of family, helping one another, volunteering, openness to diversity and tolerance. To these they added recognition of Canada as a constitutional state where human rights and individual freedoms are strongly entrenched. They see Canada as a genuine democracy where a person can grow and contribute independently of social class, ethnic origin or family affiliations. Universal access to education and health care was also mentioned several times as a fundamental characteristic of Canada.

**Cultural diversity**

Compared to other countries, Canada has always been recognized for its tolerance and openness. Participants see positive changes in Canadian society regarding openness, the status of other cultures and the integration of people of diverse backgrounds. They also see changes in the nature of Canadian identity. In their opinion, Canadians previously saw their country as basically bicultural. Today, while the English and French cultures remain central to their identity, Canadians seem to see their country as more multicultural and recognize the contributions of other ethnic and cultural groups.

People now have more opportunities to discover other cultures through activities that are multicultural in nature. However, some participants feel that such interactions are relatively superficial and that opportunities for intercultural rapprochement in everyday life are few and far between.

Even Canadians from diverse backgrounds who have lived in Canada for a long time, and members of visible minorities who were born in Canada, sometimes find it hard to feel like full-fledged citizens. Asking someone “Where do you come from?” may seem inoffensive and simply show an interest in getting to know a person better, but when Canadians of diverse backgrounds are asked this question repeatedly, it makes them feel they do not fully belong to the community and are not “real” Canadians. The “Come From Away” phenomenon is still a reality in some communities, though according to participants it is more prevalent in rural communities in the Atlantic region and in Newfoundland and Labrador and Prince Edward Island, insular provinces that, until recently, had populations that were fairly homogenous, culturally speaking.

Finally, participants who were born abroad expressed frustration in their attempts to enter the workforce. They feel potential employers place too much emphasis on Canadian professional experience when evaluating immigrant applicants, as compared to their other qualifications. Some went so far as to say that this criteria is used as an excuse not to hire newcomers.

**Workshop 2 – Linguistic duality and cultural diversity: How to strengthen the connection**

The second workshop focused on linguistic duality and its interaction with cultural diversity. Participants were encouraged to share their personal experience with linguistic duality and cultural diversity and suggest measures that could be taken in the future.

**The status of linguistic duality**

Participants recognized linguistic duality as a fundamental value of Canadian society. However, it has little to no meaningful expression in everyday life. Differences between New Brunswick and the other Atlantic provinces were mentioned. Being an officially bilingual province, New Brunswick differs from the other provinces in that all government services are available in both languages. Even in New Brunswick, however, it is possible to live one’s life almost entirely in English, and have little interaction with the Francophone and Acadian communities.
**Manifestations of linguistic duality**

The lack of interaction between the language communities and opportunities to learn French seem to be a great source of frustration for the English-speaking participants from diverse backgrounds, whether they were born here or immigrated. Before coming here, many thought all Canadians spoke both English and French and that the two languages and cultures had equal status. Since arriving in the Atlantic region, they have found that this is unfortunately not the case.

Frequently mentioned during the discussions were the importance of linguistic duality and participants’ desire to become proficient in both official languages. They were critical of the fact that Canada’s welcome and settlement services are not conducive to learning both English and French. Language learning programs for newcomers force them to choose one of the official languages. They were also critical of the lack of resources for newcomers wishing to learn or improve their proficiency in both official languages. As things stand, newcomers more often choose to learn English to enhance their prospects in the labour market.

Some participants who had managed to locate a Francophone or Acadian community within the larger Anglophone community nevertheless find it difficult to establish connections if they are not fluent in French. They feel there is a lack of openness on the part of Francophones, even when they show sincere interest in French culture and a desire to understand and participate in it.

**Linguistic duality and cultural diversity**

On the whole, participants feel that linguistic duality and cultural diversity are complementary and that speaking both official languages is an asset. However, they were critical of the fact that responsibility for learning the two languages is left up to the individual. For children of English-speaking newcomers, access to French immersion is not uniform from one province to another. As a result, they have to content themselves with the French courses given in English schools. This limits opportunities to practise French outside class. Also, for some parents, learning French as a second language conflicts with the preservation of their own mother tongue and their passing it on to their children. They have the impression that linguistic duality creates a hierarchy of languages and cultures.

Some of the immigrant parents present said they were frustrated by the fact that their children, who speak French, are not entitled to a French education because it is not their mother tongue or the mother tongue of either parent. These parents resent not being able to choose the language in which their children will be educated.

**Potential measures**

Based on the two days of discussion, some ideas emerged regarding measures that could be taken. The first would be to increase the resources devoted to the official languages and access to language training. For example, expanding Citizenship and Immigration Canada language programs to include access to training in the second official language would be useful, according to the participants. They feel the federal government and the provincial governments in the Atlantic region should play a leadership role in this regard, in terms of both the requirements related to linguistic duality in schools and immigration.

To achieve this, they do not think it is necessary to reinvent the wheel by creating a new action plan. One participant suggested following up on a study carried out in 2004 for Canadian Heritage, Plan Twenty Thirteen (2013) – Strategies for a National Approach in Second Language Education, which sets out an excellent action plan to improve the level of bilingualism in the country and boost linguistic duality.

The participants believe that learning French should be a compulsory part of the curriculum in English schools, just like mathematics and history. Resources should be allocated to allow newcomers to learn both English and French, rather than obliging them to choose one or the other. They feel there should be better access to education in French for everyone in the Atlantic region, and second-language courses should be available and accessible to adults.

Also, the Office of the Commissioner should play a key role within multicultural communities by following up on the Halifax forum. It should promote linguistic duality in these communities and equip them so that they can contribute to and strengthen duality.

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3. ANALYSIS

It was clear that all participants in the forum have a profound appreciation of linguistic duality as a fundamental Canadian value and embrace it wholeheartedly. Duality for them is not based on historical or legal considerations, but rather is central to Canadian cultural diversity.

The discussions gave us a better awareness of how foreigners might see Canada: as a country where human rights and individual freedoms are strongly entrenched and where excellent living conditions are accessible to all. While newcomers may be surprised or even disappointed by the majority-minority dichotomy, and by the fact that the two linguistic communities often live alongside each other but separately, they still have a positive opinion of Canada.

Participants were frequently critical of the fact that, in some ways, French has a secondary status in the Atlantic region. They attribute this to the general public's lack of openness and to Francophone and Acadian communities lacking visibility outside the French-speaking community.

The French-speaking participants made some observations that were different from those made on the following day:

Except in New Brunswick, Francophones and their institutions are not very visible to newcomers. This can be explained in part by a lack of information both before newcomers leave their country of origin and upon arrival in the Atlantic region.

In light of the lack of resources for learning both official languages, newcomers feel obliged to learn English in order to enter the labour market.

It is sometimes hard for French-speaking newcomers to get involved in the local Francophone and Acadian community without actively campaigning for the Francophone cause.

The English-speaking participants made the following observations:

The Francophone community is seen as being closed in on itself and English-speaking newcomers do not feel welcome to take part in their social and cultural events.

For those whose first language is neither English nor French, the priority is to learn English for economic reasons. There is also a desire to preserve their mother tongue for cultural and family reasons. This explains why learning French is not necessarily a priority.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings from the forum speak strongly to the need for concrete action to fully integrate linguistic duality and cultural diversity as two fundamental Canadian values. An analysis of the discussions has made it possible to establish recommendations for the Office of the Commissioner and for other government and community bodies.

Recommendation 1
There is a great need for rapprochement between the two language communities. For example, organizations that deliver services to English-speaking newcomers and those serving French-speaking newcomers would benefit from working together more.

To this end, the Office of the Commissioner could do more to raise awareness of and promote linguistic duality to these service providers and to ethnocultural organizations. It may also be useful to draw up a list of best practices related to linguistic duality within ethnocultural communities.

Recommendation 2
There must be better access to language training in both official languages for newcomers, particularly adults. Participants recommend looking at the possibility of expanding or improving existing programs to encourage newcomers to learn both languages. Existing programs and resources available to newcomers for learning the other official language should also be promoted.

Recommendation 3
The final recommendation concerns the information made available to immigrants prior to their arrival in Canada, and the Atlantic region in particular. An information kit for newcomers that paints a more accurate picture of the linguistic situation in each province should be developed.
5. EVALUATION OF THE FORUM

Twenty-five of the participants responded to the evaluation form that was sent to them after the forum. The aim was to measure performance with regard to the organization of the event, achievement of objectives and the short-term impact. The forum fell under two of the Office of the Commissioner’s priorities: promoting linguistic duality to both official language communities as a key factor in Canadian identity, and supporting official language minority communities so as to foster their long-term vitality and development. Respondents believed that the forum had achieved its objectives. It allowed them to share their experiences and perceptions with respect to linguistic duality, cultural diversity and the integration of cultural diversity in official language communities. They gained a better understanding of the realities and perceptions of people of diverse backgrounds regarding linguistic duality and cultural diversity, and became more aware of the importance and value of linguistic duality and bilingualism. They also learned more about the Office of the Commissioner’s role.

With regard to the short-term impact, the respondents said their involvement in the forum led them to think about linguistic duality and cultural diversity and talk about it within their personal, professional and community environments. They had discussed it with people they know, who had benefited from hearing about it; had discussed it with friends, family and at work; had informed colleagues; and had spoken about it to employees. While fewer respondents said that attending the forum led them to take action related to linguistic duality and cultural diversity, some said they intended to do so, for example by establishing a list of services available in various languages, producing materials in several languages, or incorporating linguistic and cultural diversity into school projects.
CONCLUSION

The Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages is responsible for protecting language rights and promoting English and French in Canadian society. Recognizing that Canada is increasingly diversified ethnically and culturally, the Office of the Commissioner wanted to gain a deeper understanding of the perceptions of Canadians of diverse backgrounds and the challenges they face. During this third of four forums, Canadians of diverse backgrounds from the Atlantic region had an opportunity to share their experiences and their understanding of linguistic duality in Canada. The forums in Halifax and elsewhere will enable the Commissioner of Official Languages better focus his recommendations for the federal government to enhance the vitality of official language minority communities. The discussions in which they participated concern the future of Canada as a multicultural country where the national dialogue takes place in both official languages.

As Sir Wilfrid Laurier said in 1905, “We will welcome all the nations of the world. […] We will have a country in which all of us will never forget where we came from. We will always treasure that, but we will take our place in the present and our children will take their place in the future and everyone will become Canadians.” That is what Canadians of diverse backgrounds would like to see.

**APPENDIX A – AGENDA**

**Session for French-Speaking Canadians of Diverse Backgrounds**

**November 8, 2011 – Agenda**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10:00 a.m.</td>
<td>Registration and coffee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:30 a.m.</td>
<td>Opening remarks and roundtable Facilitator: Pauline Roy, Diversis Inc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:10 a.m.</td>
<td>Understanding the context Graham Fraser, Commissioner of Official Languages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>From Toronto to Halifax: The Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages’ approach</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Johanne Lapointe, Director, Policy and Research, Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Results of the pre-forum questionnaire and discussion themes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:30 a.m.</td>
<td>Workshop 1 <em>Immigrating to a French-speaking or Acadian community in Atlantic Canada: Challenges, opportunities and relationships with the community (in small groups)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:30 p.m.</td>
<td>Lunch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:30 p.m.</td>
<td>Presentation <em>Francophone spaces and linguistic duality: Experience and vision of an engaged youth</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:00 p.m.</td>
<td>Workshop 2 <em>Linguistic duality and cultural diversity: Perceptions, challenges and advantages (in small groups)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:00 p.m.</td>
<td>Break</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:15 p.m.</td>
<td>Plenary session Highlights of workshop discussions and thoughts on next steps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:15 p.m.</td>
<td>Next steps Johanne Lapointe, Director, Policy and Research, Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:30 p.m.</td>
<td>End of session</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Session for English-Speaking Canadians of Diverse Backgrounds**
### Agenda

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8:30 a.m.</td>
<td>Registration and breakfast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:00 a.m.</td>
<td>Opening remarks and roundtable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:45 a.m.</td>
<td>Understanding the context</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:15 a.m.</td>
<td>Break</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:30 a.m.</td>
<td>Workshop 1: Changes in Canadian society: Values and perceptions of cultural diversity (in small groups)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:45 a.m.</td>
<td>Lunch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:45 p.m.</td>
<td>Plenary session: Highlights of Workshop 1 discussions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:30 p.m.</td>
<td>Presentation: Linguistic duality and cultural diversity: Experience and vision of an engaged youth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:45 p.m.</td>
<td>Workshop 2: Linguistic duality and cultural diversity: How to strengthen the connection (in small groups)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:45 p.m.</td>
<td>Break</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:00 p.m.</td>
<td>Plenary session: Highlights of Workshop 2 discussions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:10 p.m.</td>
<td>Next steps and closing remarks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:15 p.m.</td>
<td>End of forum</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Facilitator: Pauline Roy, Diversis Inc.

Graham Fraser, Commissioner of Official Languages

Linguistic duality and cultural diversity: Then and now

Johanne Lapointe, Director, Policy and Research, Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages

Results of the pre-forum questionnaire and discussion themes