



Chambre de commerce
du Montréal métropolitain
Board of Trade of Metropolitan Montreal

January 26, 2004

Mr. William Cusano
Chairman of the Commission de la culture
Secrétariat des commissions
Pamphile-LeMay Building
1035 des Parlementaires St. 3rd Floor
Quebec City, Quebec G1A 1A3

Dear Sir:

The Board of Trade of Metropolitan Montreal, on behalf of its some 7,000 members, is participating with interest in the general consultation regarding the three-year immigration plan (2005-2007) and the consultation document entitled *La planification des niveaux d'immigration 2005-2007*, tabled in the National Assembly last December by the Minister of Relations with the Citizens and Immigration (MRCI), Michelle Courchesne.

Immigration: an essential ingredient in the development of Quebec and its metropolis

The Board of Trade approaches the issue of Quebec immigration with two important parameters in mind. The first, as stated in the Board of Trade's *Policy Statement for the Development of the City of Montreal*: "Montreal boasts a cultural and linguistic diversity that is unique in North America, a powerful asset in terms of competitiveness and openness to the world." Clearly, immigration is the best way to maintain this diversity. The second pertains to the important contribution of immigrants – be they refugees or entrepreneurs, skilled or not – to the Quebec economy that the Board of Trade examined in the consultation document published by the MRCI. For the Board of Trade, it is important to take into consideration the lasting, long-term effects of immigration, namely, the children of immigrants, who will have been educated and trained here and will likely participate much more actively than their parents in the social, cultural and economic development of Quebec.

Quebec is facing major labour and demographic issues. In fact, according to the 2001 Statistics Canada census and the Institut de la statistique du Québec's demographic projections for 1991-2046, Quebec's population will likely age faster than elsewhere in Canada and the U.S. In addition, in the next few years, Quebec will have to deal with the retirement of many baby boomers, which will create a growing and urgent need for human resources.

In this regard, Emploi-Québec recently reported that between 2002 and 2006, more than 345,000 jobs will have to be filled in the greater Montreal area, of which 169,000 will be newly created.¹ For Quebec overall, 640,000 positions will require employees.²

¹ Emploi-Québec, *The Labour Market in the Montréal Region – Job Prospects 2002-2006*, 2003, p. 3

In this context, the Board of Trade finds it difficult to envisage a reduction in immigration levels. As for stabilizing immigration, the Board of Trade believes that this option will not be able to fully meet the economic and demographic requirements of Quebec and its metropolis.

Therefore, of the three admission volume scenarios for the period contemplated in this consultation, the Board of Trade prefers the third, which provides for an increase in volume. As the MRCI's consultation document states, adopting the third scenario would increase Quebec's selection proportion by four percentage points, raise economic immigration by the same percentage and maintain the total proportion of immigrants who already speak French on arrival at 50%. For the Board of Trade, the impact of such a scenario on the future of Quebec and its metropolis, particularly in terms of economic development, is the most favourable.

That said, the Board of Trade encourages the government to also increase the number of immigrants in the business people category, especially entrepreneurs and self-employed workers because of the concrete and structuring contribution they make to the Quebec economy. In 2001, more than 4,000 people were admitted under this category. The 2004 plan sets the admission volume for this category at between 2,900 and 3,400, a decrease that the Board of Trade finds hard to understand. As well, the three scenarios proposed for 2005-2007 set this figure at 2,600 per year. Therefore, this category should be increased.

While it considers it wise and necessary to boost the level of immigration in Quebec, the Board of Trade understands there are still major challenges in terms of immigrant integration. Indeed, the Minister's commitment in this regard is commendable, namely, the action plan she is about to unveil containing a series of coherent measures aimed at better helping immigrants integrate into the job market and learn French before they arrive in Quebec. Given that the unemployment rate remains higher for the immigrant versus non-immigrant population and the problems associated with finding jobs, the Board of Trade believes that the increase in immigration levels should come with new strategies that help new arrivals integrate into the workplace and the Quebec economy.

In conclusion, the Board of Trade is particularly sensitive to the fact that immigration is a major challenge for Quebec. As such, we are willing to explore practical ways for us and the business community to help meet this important challenge, in the interest of Quebec's growth, prosperity and competitiveness, now and in the future.

Yours truly,

The president,



Benoit Labonté

c.c. The Honourable Michelle Courchesne, Minister of Relations with the Citizens and Immigration
Sonia Grenon, Secretary of the Commission de la culture

² Data reported by the Population and Research Branch of the Ministère des Relations avec les citoyens et de l'immigration, *La planification des niveaux d'immigration 2005-2007*, Government of Quebec, 2003, p. 19.