



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

September 6, 2007

Mr. Sylvain Simard
Chair of the Committee on Culture
Secrétariat des commissions
Pamphile-LeMay Building
1035 rue des Parlementaires
3rd floor
Québec, Quebec G1A 1A3

Dear Mr. Simard:

The Board of Trade of Metropolitan Montreal is pleased to participate in the general consultation on the three-year immigration plan for 2008-2010 launched in June by Yolande James, Minister of Immigration and Cultural Communities, with the tabling in the National Assembly of the consultation document titled *La planification de l'immigration au Québec pour la période 2008-2010*.

Immigration: essential to the development of Quebec and its metropolis

The Board of Trade approaches the question of immigration to Quebec with two important considerations in mind. In the first place, the Board of Trade considers Montréal's cultural and linguistic diversity to be a major asset in North America, contributing to both its openness to the world and its capacity for competitiveness and innovation. Immigration is a valuable means to maintaining that diversity and contributes to the positioning of Montréal as an international city, renowned for its tolerance.

In the second place, the Board of Trade wishes to highlight the important contribution of immigrants to Quebec's economy, as outlined in the document produced on that subject by the Ministère de l'Immigration et des Communautés culturelles (MICC). Our organization believes that immigration has a positive impact on Quebec society, helping to rectify our demographic situation and filling our needs for skilled labour. In addition, we must remember an important fact: the children of immigrants, who will be raised and educated here, will integrate Quebec society more easily and thus participate fully in its social, cultural, and economic development.

Quebec faces a major challenge in terms of its population and its labour force. The most recent demographic projections by the Institut de la statistique du Québec indicate that Quebec's population may age more rapidly than populations elsewhere in Canada and in the United States. In the coming years, Quebec will thus have to deal with numerous retirements, generating a high demand for replacement workers. The Régie des rentes du Québec predicts that more than 440,000 workers will swell the ranks of retirees by 2010¹.

...2

¹ Emploi-Québec, *Le marché du travail au Québec, Perspectives professionnelles 2006-2010*, 2007, p. 3

Emploi-Québec reported recently that, between 2006 and 2010, more than 325,000 positions will have to be filled in Greater Montréal, 140,000 of which will be created². During this same period, the province will have to fill 680,000 positions, 240,000 of which will be created³. Given the low birth rate, it is not surprising that, within a few years, 100% of the net growth of Quebec's labour force will depend on immigration. Moreover, in 2005, the Institut de la statistique du Québec predicted that Quebec's working-age labour force will shrink by 10% between 2013 and 2031. Meanwhile, the proportion of people aged 65 and up is expected to double by 2040.

For the Board of Trade, a reduction in immigration levels thus appears undesirable. It also believes that stabilizing immigration would not fully meet the economic and demographic needs of Quebec and its metropolis. For this reason, the Board of Trade believes that an increase in volumes is critical to the competitiveness and development of Quebec.

Nevertheless, while a steep increase in immigration volumes, as proposed in the fifth scenario, might be a desirable objective in the long run, it may not correspond to our collective ability to quickly and efficiently integrate new arrivals. We must unfortunately acknowledge that the unemployment rate is higher among immigrants than among the non-immigrant population. In addition, we must consider the government's financial capacity and that significant public expenditures are necessary to increase immigration volumes while maintaining effective, high-quality francization and employment integration services.

Among the five scenarios respecting changes to immigration during the period under consideration and adopting a pragmatic approach while still believing that Quebec is capable of successfully rising to the challenge of integration, the Board of Trade favours the fourth scenario, which suggests a moderate increase in current admission volumes, or an objective of 55,000 admissions in 2010, compared to 44,686 in 2006. As shown in the consultation document produced by the MICC, adopting the scenario of a moderate increase during the period from 2008-2010 would increase the share of Quebec selection from 68% to 72%, increase the share of economic immigration from 60% to 64%, and increase the proportion of immigrants that already speak French upon their arrival from 59% to 61%⁴.

We believe this scenario represents the best balance between the future needs of Quebec and its current capacities. For the Board of Trade, the repercussions of such a scenario on the future of Quebec and its metropolis – particularly with regard to economic development and integration – are the most promising. Of course the Board of Trade recommends that the government adopt the scenario of a moderate increase in immigration insofar as the resources allocated for integrating and francizing the new arrivals increase sufficiently in relation to the increases in immigration volumes.

We must also remember the importance to Quebec of continuing to welcome skilled immigrants in accordance with our true labour requirements and the sectors of economic activity in demand. It appears to us that greater efforts should be made to systematically select immigrants in accordance with specific labour needs, including in sectors experiencing serious shortages, in the metropolitan area and throughout Quebec. In addition to the strategic selection of immigrants, we believe it is necessary to make a greater effort to improve the process of integrating these new arrivals within the various professional bodies.

...3

² Emploi Québec, *The Labour Market in the Montréal Region, Job Prospects for 2006-2010*, p.3

³ Emploi-Québec, *Le marché du travail au Québec – Perspectives professionnelles 2006-2010*, 2007, p. 5

⁴ MICC, *Public consultation regarding the three-year plan on immigration levels for 2008-2010*, p.68

The recent announcement by Yolande James, Minister of Immigration and Cultural Communities, that financial support will be granted to efforts by professional bodies to facilitate recognition of the qualifications of these new arrivals is highly appropriate. We do not believe there can be any doubt that the implementation of measures facilitating the integration of new arrivals to the various processes linked to the regulated professions should be encouraged and continue.

That said, the Board of Trade also encourages the government to aim for an even greater increase in the number of immigrants in the business category because of their concrete contribution to the development of Quebec's economy. Even the scenario of high immigration growth between 2008 and 2010 allows for an increase in immigration from 1600 to just 2100 business immigrants, which to us seems inadequate.

This low volume of business immigrants is addressed in the MICC's consultation document. On the one hand, the number of applications for admission by self-employed workers and entrepreneurs is very low. These two categories account for just 30% of the admissions from the business immigration program⁵. On the other hand, investor immigrants account for the lowest number of immigrants to Quebec, as these immigrants often prefer to move to Toronto or Vancouver, even after receiving a certificate of selection from Quebec⁶. As mentioned in the MICC's consultation document, therefore, the increase in admissions of business people will necessarily depend on the improved performance of Quebec when it comes to attracting and retaining business immigrants.

While believing it to be judicious and necessary to increase the level of immigration to Quebec, the Board of Trade recognizes that major challenges remain to be met in terms of integrating immigrants. Indeed, as we have already mentioned, the problem of employment insertion remains, with consequences for the unemployment rate.

The Board of Trade thus salutes the MICC's intention, as specified in its action plan "Shared values, common interests," to implement a series of concrete measures to promote the employment insertion of immigrants while supporting an improved service offer for the francization of immigrants beginning as soon as they are selected abroad.

The Board of Trade's contribution to receiving and integrating immigrants

The Board of Trade considers it important to accompany the increased immigration levels with the implementation of new strategies promoting the integration in employment and economic activity in Quebec. We believe that all components of society – including our organization – should strive to optimize the positive contribution of immigration to both Montréal and Quebec as a whole.

Over the past three years, in accordance with an agreement concluded with the MICC, the Board of Trade of Metropolitan Montreal has organized activities to receive and support prospective immigrants and immigrants in the business person category. Individuals referred to the Board of Trade by the MICC have been offered a range of services including a guided tour of the city of Montréal, a presentation on Montréal's economy, networking activities with local entrepreneurs, and personalized advice concerning their business plan.

...4

⁵ id., p.46

⁶ ibid

In addition, the Board of Trade is more interested than ever in continuing to raise awareness among Montréal's economic players of the importance of integrating immigrant workers within our society. We have observed that Montréal business people are increasingly aware of the importance of attracting foreign talent and integrating it within their work teams to the benefit of more innovative and competitive companies. The Board of Trade is thus proud to collaborate with the MICC in offering traineeships to qualified immigrants referred by the Ministry. Board of Trade members are thus encouraged to welcome immigrants within their work teams. There is no doubt that this three-year program is in line with a collective desire to integrate foreign talent within the labour market in an efficient and sustainable way.

In conclusion, the Board of Trade is particularly sensitive to both the importance of immigration to Quebec and the challenge it represents. In this regard, we wish to assure the Quebec government of our willingness to explore any means by which the Board of Trade and the Montréal business community can make a tangible contribution to meeting this important challenge. This is in the interests of the growth, the prosperity, and the competitiveness of Quebec – and its metropolis – for today and for the future.

With highest regards,



Isabelle Hudon
President and CEO

c.c. Yolande James, Minister of Immigration and Cultural Communities
Lise St-Hilaire, Secretary for the Committee on Culture