

CANADIAN QUEBEC: THE WAYS TO INDEPENDENCE

Typically by independence of a country we understand a distinct group of people living in a specific region, similar in terms of race, ethnicity, culture or any other significant factor binding them together. Many countries seek independence, but sometimes people within one country want to have some more autonomy. For example, in Canada there is the Quebec sovereignty movement, aimed at either attaining independent statehood or some degree of greater political autonomy. What are the arguments supporting many Quebecers' wish for sovereignty?

Quebec's pro-sovereignty movement is based on the need to defend the French language and promote Quebec culture. The assimilation of French-speakers living outside Quebec has reached alarming proportions. In Quebec, in theory, the Canadian government promotes countrywide bilingualism, while in practice, this leads to almost total English unilingualism outside Quebec and relative bilingualism in Quebec. Moreover, the immigrant assimilation rate is lower in Quebec than anywhere else in Canada, and this works to the advantage of the English-speaking community. French is Quebec's official language. Still, some people regard the measures taken to protect French as excessive and systematically fight against it with the aid of the Canadian government.

The referendum of 1980 was to conclude a process of national affirmation that had begun in the 1960s and resulted in defeat for the sovereignists, who won 40 % of the vote, as opposed to 60 % for the supporters of federalism. The results of the referendum of 1995 were 50,6 % for the “no” side and 49.4 % for the “yes” side. If no significant changes are made to the federal political system, it seems increasingly likely that the pro-sovereignty side will win the next referendum.

The Quebec nation is an open, pluralist and multi-ethnic society. Most Quebecers have always accepted cultural diversity and the enrichment it brings. They have long considered it an advantage to identify with both Quebec and Canada, thereby being citizens of a multinational state. Canada, however, fails to protect the French language outside Quebec, and refuses to fully recognize the Quebec government's authority and autonomy in matters of language and culture within Quebec territory. These are the reasons why a growing number of Quebecers favour political sovereignty.

To sum it up, even though considerable progress has been made, the position of French in Quebec remains uncertain, especially since Quebec does not have the legislative and administrative powers necessary to correct the situation. Nowadays, when so many close, mutually advantageous economic ties already exist, complete separation is not desirable. There can be a political union instead of Quebec's separation, where the differences between citizens are neither eliminated nor developed in isolation from each other, but work towards a common goal, the development of Quebec. Furthermore, although the opinion of the minority must not determine the orientations of the majority, it must still be listened to and respected. The union with Canada would allow those who feel Canadian first and foremost to maintain a sense of belonging to a single political entity that would resemble Canada as it currently stands.