

# Quebec's Relations with the United States under Jean Charest

## *Building a Special Relationship*

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Quebec's relationship with the US is of vital importance. Louis Balthazar (2006), the researcher who has most analyzed the relationship between the US and Quebec, argues that Quebec's southern neighbour has been, "for better or for worse, an essential partner in Quebec's development" (115; author's translation). There is clearly no "special relationship" between Quebec and the US like the one between Canada and the US (Blanchard 1998; Paquin 2014a, 2016).

Still, if historically it was the France–Quebec relationship that favoured the construction of an international policy on the part of the Quebec government from the Quiet Revolution of the 1960s onwards, the US has gradually become a central object of concern. Today, the budgets Quebec allocates to Quebec–US relations have grown to exceed those for France–Quebec relations. This has been the case since the early 2000s, around the time Jean Charest became premier of Quebec (2003–12).<sup>1</sup>

Prior to the 1960s, the Quebec government had little interest in what was happening south of the border. Quebec's "mini-embassy" in New York City, which was established during the Second World War mainly to attract tourism and investment, was virtually powerless until the early 1960s. It was under a Union Nationale government in the late 1960s that Quebec expanded its network of delegations to the US. Under Robert Bourassa, at the beginning of the 1970s, the importance of economic and financial issues compelled the Quebec government to restructure its policy toward the US. However, it was during the

first term of the Parti Québécois (PQ), which had promised to hold a referendum on sovereignty-association, that the Quebec government grasped the importance of implementing a sustained and coherent US policy. The election in 1976 of a sovereigntist government that had a program advocating for neutrality in international relations and that wished to withdraw a sovereign Quebec from the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD) had the potential to worry the US government in the context of the Cold War. In addition, the big banks in New York had been lending heavily to the Quebec government for hydropower projects since the 1960s. Here too, the concern was palpable. Free trade negotiations with the US in the late 1980s and the second referendum of 1995 made economic and trade issues still more important; the 9/11 terrorist attacks in New York and Washington, DC, then added security, energy, and environmental issues to the mix.

Oddly enough, Quebec's international policy toward the US took a major step backward after the 1995 referendum and the austerity policy implemented by the PQ government of Lucien Bouchard (1996–2001) (Paquin 2006). It became clear, however, in a context where Quebec's economic growth increasingly depended on its exports south of the border, that this strategy was ill-advised. After its re-election in 1998, the PQ decided to revive its international relations in general and its international initiatives toward the US in particular. The renewal of Quebec's presence in the US began gradually in the late 1990s after Lucien Bouchard began trade promotion missions there. Jean Charest then built on this momentum, raising the relationship between Quebec and the US to an unprecedented level.

What explains the Quebec government's international activism under Premier Jean Charest, and specifically toward the US? This chapter hypothesizes that the premier's exceptional leadership on international policy issues, more than any other factor, was key to this development. In this chapter, I attempt to explain why Quebec was so active under Charest's leadership; I base my findings on the results of anonymous semi-structured interviews with four senior Quebec government officials, a former Quebec delegate, two former political advisers to Charest, a senior official from the European Commission, and Charest himself. I then explore in more detail Quebec's US policy – the building of a special relationship – under Charest.

## The International Activism of the Charest Government

During Charest's time as premier, the Quebec government's international policy was the most dynamic it had ever been. None of his predecessors had participated in as many activities abroad as Charest (Richer 2011). In this regard, he even rivalled the heads of state of the G7 countries. Charest's legacy is indeed significant: he was instrumental in launching trade negotiations between Canada and the European Union (EU) (the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement [CETA]), the Entente Québec–France sur la reconnaissance mutuelle des qualifications professionnelles (Agreement between Quebec and France on the Mutual Recognition of Professional Qualifications),<sup>2</sup> and an ambitious new international policy toward the US. The Charest government also left its mark on the international environmental scene, as evidenced by Quebec's participation with California in what was, at the time, the second largest carbon market in the world, the Western Climate Initiative.

Charest has been praised for his international actions even by his political rivals, despite the controversies that surrounded his government, notably around allegations of corruption that led to a public inquiry. According to Gérard Deltell, a former Coalition Avenir Québec MLA, and now a Conservative MP, "our current premier [Jean Charest], in international affairs, acts with stature, dignity, and talent" ("50 ans de Présence" 2011; author's translation). Jean-François Lisée, Quebec's former Minister of International Relations and Parti Québécois leader, went so far as to award Charest the "Most Outstanding Parliamentarian Outside Quebec Award." Lisée, whom one would hardly expect to be generous toward a federalist former premier, wrote that "once he crosses the border, Jean-Charest-the-partisan becomes Jean-Charest-the-great-ambassador. The members of Quebec's small but dynamic diplomatic corps (and foreign diplomats) tell you privately: he is perfect" (Lisée 2009; author's translation). Bernard Landry, former premier and Charest's rival in the 2003 election campaign, strongly supported Charest's initiative on the free trade agreement with Europe (Robitaille 2008). Sylvain Simard, Quebec's Minister of International Relations under the PQ in the 1990s, commented thus on France–Quebec relations: "I believe that the Premier of Quebec has followed in the footsteps of all the great premiers of Quebec in his relationship with France, he has deepened

this relationship, and I think that we can be proud of this” (Robitaille 2008). For his actions on the environment, the former premier won the South Australia International Climate Change Leadership Award; he was also praised by Al Gore, the climate activist and one-time US vice-president (Journet 2010; Chaloux, Séguin, and Paquin 2015).

None of Charest's predecessors as Quebec premier had travelled so much abroad. Between 2003 and 2011, he undertook sixty-two international missions – an average of eight trips per year. He thus crossed Quebec's borders almost twice as often as his two predecessors,<sup>3</sup> Lucien Bouchard and Bernard Landry, combined (thirty-two trips in seven years) (Richer 2011). Premier Charest travelled twice as often on official missions to France as Lucien Bouchard and Bernard Landry, both of whom are known to be Francophiles. French President Jacques Chirac, on vacation in Quebec in 2003, even went to the premier's residence for a private dinner, an unprecedented event in Quebec history. Premier Charest attended the World Economic Forum in Davos more often (six times) than Lucien Bouchard and Bernard Landry combined (five times), and it was because of his personal interest in climate change issues that he attended the UN Conference of Parties on Climate Change twice (Chaloux, Séguin, and Paquin 2015). Charest travelled far more often than the premiers of Alberta (Ralph Klein and Ed Stelmach), even though Alberta is the richest province in Canada on a per capita basis. Between 2003 and 2011, Klein and Stelmach went on twenty-two missions abroad, visiting fifteen countries and thirty-six cities. Charest completed almost three times as many missions, visiting sixteen countries and fifty-one cities (Richer 2011).

Charest's international travels put him on a par with several Canadian prime ministers and heads of state of G7 countries. According to data obtained from the Privy Council Office of Canada under the *Access to Information Act*, Canadian prime ministers Jean Chrétien (1993–2003), Paul Martin (2004–05), and Stephen Harper (2008–14) travelled an average of nine, eleven, and ten times per year, respectively, during their terms in office. In France, former French prime ministers Jean-Pierre Raffarin (2002–05) and Dominique de Villepin (2005–07) travelled outside of France only six times per year during their respective terms (Jeudy 2008). Even former US president Barack Obama left his country an average of only seven times per year between 2008 and 2014 (Department of State 2022).

Charest was also the most quoted Quebec personality outside Quebec. A study commissioned by the Ministère des relations internationales et de la Francophonie (MRIF) in 2012, of which I have obtained a copy, shows that toward the end of Charest's government, between 2010 and 2011 (i.e., before the 2012 student strike), the premier was the most quoted Quebec personality in the major newspapers of twelve selected states (US, Mexico, France, the UK, Spain, Belgium, Germany, Italy, India, China, Japan, and Brazil).<sup>4</sup> Indeed, Charest accounted for 44 per cent of all mentions, well ahead of the usual traditional ambassadors, such as the *Cirque du Soleil* (6 per cent) and the Montreal Canadiens players (5 per cent) (Influence Communication 2012).

This is paradoxical, because one would expect a federalist provincial government to accept the primacy of the Canadian government on international issues, or to seek to limit the possibility of conflict with the federal government in order to demonstrate that federalism works. One might also expect a federalist provincial party to be less aggressive on international issues than a sovereigntist party, whose fundamental objective is to make Quebec a sovereign country (Fry 2000; Noda 2001).

Yet the facts show otherwise. Under the Charest government, Quebec's international agenda expanded considerably – especially compared to the PQ under Lucien Bouchard and Bernard Landry (Paquin 2006), and to Robert Bourassa's government from the mid-1980s onwards; indeed, on many occasions the Quebec government under Charest set itself in opposition to the Canadian government's own position on important international policies, such as climate change and carbon pricing. And on many issues, the Quebec government has exerted great influence on the Canadian government, for example, on the question of Quebec's place in UNESCO or in trade negotiations with the EU. Regarding relations with the US, the Quebec government has greatly expanded its actions south of the border.

How can the Charest government's international activism be explained? Since that government was more active than any previous government – indeed, more active than any of its successors – in comparable international contexts, one must rule out systemic factors such as globalization or internationalization as an explanation. The sovereigntist/federalist factor can also both be ruled out, given that Charest's government was more active on the international scene than

the PQ governments of Pauline Marois (2012–14), Lucien Bouchard (1996–2001), and Bernard Landry (2001–3), as well as René Lévesque (1976–84), despite its unconditional support for Canadian federalism.

The factor that explains Quebec's activism on the international scene was more related to the personality of the premier and his interest in international issues. For Charest, it was not incompatible for Quebec to have its own international policy and to defend the province's interests within the framework of Canadian federalism. This was stated by several sources. According to one political adviser, "he saw it as a way for Quebec to stand out, to develop, to show an openness to the world ... It is really a priority for him" (anonymous interview; author's translation). Another source said,

Every Monday morning, Mr. Charest would arrive with 12, 15, 20, sometimes 30 articles cut out, annotated with questions, a request for an opinion, a follow-up or a request for a recommendation. These articles came from the *New York Times*, *The Economist*, *L'Express*, and so on. One wondered if he had done anything else on the weekend besides read the news. Mr. Charest would underline the important parts of the article and in the margin, he would indicate his questions and ask for a follow-up.  
(Anonymous interview)

According to several sources, the premier was strongly aware of international political and diplomatic trends. He knew the facts and was constantly on the lookout. He regularly sent letters to foreign heads of state (or sub-state), corresponded with them, and proposed international projects. A great many initiatives with an international scope came directly from him. The labour mobility agreement between France and Quebec that he presented to Nicolas Sarkozy is one example. According to a top senior public servant, those present in Paris at the bilateral meeting were surprised to learn of such a project at a joint press conference between Jean Charest and Nicolas Sarkozy, the French president. John Parisella, the former Quebec delegate general in New York and former chief of staff to Robert Bourassa when he was premier, maintains that Charest was behind various international environmental initiatives; for example, his connection with Arnold Schwarzenegger led to the Western Climate Initiative (Parisella 2016).

According to one senior official, the premier personally and often, if not weekly, followed up on high-priority international issues. One senior official testified that in his nearly thirty-year career as a civil servant, he had never known a premier to be so directly involved in international issues. Whereas in the past in Quebec, premiers gave a great deal of leeway to ministers to manage international policies, Charest personally set the direction of the government.

Charest also had a strong network of contacts abroad. During his time in Rio de Janeiro as chair of the Canadian delegation to the Earth Summit, he befriended an Indian minister, Kamal Nath. When he became premier of Quebec, he used this personal relationship to undertake trade missions in 2006 and 2010 to India. He also established ties with US governors, notably the governor of Vermont, and also with high-level politicians in France and in the French-speaking world, including former presidents (Jacques Chirac and Nicolas Sarkozy), former prime ministers (Jean-Pierre Raffarin and Alain Juppé), and the head of la Francophonie, Abdou Diouf (Richer 2011).

According to several sources, the premier's leadership was decisive for Quebec's activism on the world stage. From the moment he took office, he expressed international ambitions for Quebec. His interest in this subject stemmed from his experience as a minister on the federal scene, notably during the Jeux de la Francophonie, and then as federal minister of the environment during the 1992 Rio Earth Summit. MPs in Ottawa are more aware of the importance of international issues than are MLAs in Quebec City. He was also very interested in the US while in the Canadian government. When he was elected premier of Quebec, he brought his interest in international issues to the Quebec government.

In terms of vision, Premier Charest arrived on the provincial scene without any "complexes" regarding Quebec's international relations. He never hesitated to assert Quebec's international character and to push the Gérin-Lajoie doctrine of 1965. As Charest himself stated,

I have no inhibitions in my relationship, in my desire to do international relations. There is nothing holding me back in my own mind. Whereas my predecessors, consciously or unconsciously, saw themselves as the head of a provincial government and not of a country, and did not see themselves playing a role on the international level. I saw things quite differently. In our federal system, the provinces have very

important jurisdictions, and when Quebec's jurisdictions were exclusive, the government also had to have a full dimension at the international level, they had to be expressed outside Quebec. Gérin-Lajoie's speech resonated for me, and I fully assumed it in a relaxed manner. Going abroad and asking for a meeting with a head of state or government was normal for me and I was not inhibited. And I found out in the trial that when a premier of Quebec asks for a meeting, most of the time the answer is yes. Foreign leaders meet with you ... If you are a true federalist and understand how things work in the federal structure [you will know that provinces are] not the federal government's sub-government. We are equals in our respective areas of jurisdiction. So you have to approach it like that. (Interview with Jean Charest, quoted in Jeyabalaratnam and Paquin 2016; author's translation)

In his approach to international relations, Premier Charest went beyond the Gérin-Lajoie doctrine, dealing with issues such as trade negotiations between Canada and the EU that went well beyond Quebec's jurisdiction. The Gérin-Lajoie doctrine had been based on Quebec's constitutional jurisdiction; the "Charest Doctrine" went beyond that and was based on Quebec's interests.

According to several sources, even though Quebec's international policy created friction with the Canadian government on various issues (especially environment), Charest felt that the federal government and its institutions (embassies, consulates) had to work in support of the Quebec government's actions. Thus, it was very common for Quebec to ask for support from federal public servants and the Canadian diplomatic corps. The premier also did not hesitate to call upon the private sector, notably the powerful Desmarais family, which had close ties with Nicholas Sarkozy, when it was useful to his government. The transformations in the relationship between Quebec and France are also due to Charest. He believed that the issue of sovereignty made it more difficult to create projects between France and Quebec and that the Quebec Liberal Party had given up and left the field to the PQ. Even in opposition, Charest wished to "remove the constraint on this issue in the relationship between Quebec and France, which in a way cast a shadow on the types of projects we could do together" (interview 2015; author's translation).

## Quebec–US Relations under Charest

In its *2001–2004 Strategic Plan*, adopted under Lucien Bouchard, the Quebec government made its relationship with the US the priority of its international relations (Government of Quebec 2001, 37). After that, Quebec redeployed its network in six US cities, following the closure of thirteen Quebec offices abroad between 1996 and 1997. Offices were opened or reopened in Boston, Chicago, and Los Angeles, and a small office was opened in Miami (in 2006, the Miami representation was closed, but one was reopened in Atlanta). The Quebec government also created research chairs focused on the US within Quebec universities.

The Charest government, then, accelerated the development of a Quebec policy toward the US. It has left an important legacy in international policy and specifically policy toward the US. Unlike France–Quebec relations, relations between Quebec and the US Executive Branch have always been considered difficult, if not practically non-existent.

Relations between Quebec and the US under Charest do not follow the same logic as the France–Quebec relationship, as several French presidents and prime ministers have maintained direct and privileged relations with Quebec premiers (Bernier 1996; Paquin 2022a). John Ciaccia, former minister of international affairs under the Bourassa government (1989–94), even maintained that if Quebec wants to go to Washington, it must go with the Canadian government. According to Balthazar and Hero (1999), for the US government, Canada's federal government is the sole Canadian interlocutor.

There are of course a few exceptions. Jean Charest had a one-on-one meeting with US Secretary of State Colin Powell soon after he took office. In 2005, during another trip to Washington and Virginia, he met with three senior members of the Bush administration: Secretary of Homeland Security Michael Chertoff, Secretary of Commerce Carlos Gutierrez, and Secretary of Energy Samuel W. Bodman (Paquin 2016). Charest is notably responsible for the creation of a true Quebec political office in Washington, DC (rather than a simple tourist office), something that no Quebec government, even under a PQ government, had been able to do because of Ottawa's obstruction (Paquin 2014a).

Still, relations between Quebec and the US are less about developing bilateral relations between the premier and the president or members

of the Executive Branch than they are about developing relations with the governors of US states. It is also about building connections with US civil society and with the business community. Since Quebec has very little access to the federal government, the dominant strategy under Charest was to insert Quebec into networks of important federal states and to maintain bilateral relations with key US states.

Under Charest's leadership, the Government of Quebec published two key documents with regard to Quebec's policy toward the US. The first was *La politique internationale du Québec: la force de l'action concertée* (Quebec's International Policy: The Strength of Concerted Action; 2006); the second was *Stratégie du Gouvernement du Québec à l'égard des États-Unis* (The Quebec Government's Strategy towards the United States; 2010).

The first document, for which Charest wrote the preface, laid out the most comprehensive international relations policy ever produced to that point. It was accompanied by an action plan (a first). The themes addressed included strengthening the state's capacity for action and influence (concerted action); the economy and investment; security, identity, and culture; and international solidarity. No prior international policy Quebec had crafted had gone so far in terms of analyzing and integrating government actions. However, it should be noted that several themes were not treated separately: education, the environment, and immigration, unlike the previous themes, were not given individual chapters. This is surprising given the importance of environmental issues, especially the carbon market with California, for the Charest government. In precision and consistency, this document surpassed the international policies adopted in the past (Criekemans 2010). The previous international policies, published in 1985 and 1991 by Minister of International Relations Bernard Landry and Minister of International Affairs John Ciaccia, were more narrowly economic in orientation, and in 1999, the PQ government did not adopt an international policy statement, only a strategic plan (MRIF 1985, 1991, 2001).

The Quebec government's policy toward the US has become much more professionalized and goes beyond trade promotion, as evidenced by the second document, published in 2010 (MRIF 2010). That document explained why the US is an important strategic partner and confirmed that, in addition to long-standing policies for export promotion and investment attraction, new themes in the relationship with the US are

emerging, such as Quebec's leadership in energy and the environment, and its contribution to the security of the North American continent (Leblond 2011; MRIF 2010, 21–30).

Quebec's 2010–13 action plan regarding the US proposed five broad objectives and thirty-eight concrete measures aimed at promoting economic exchanges, ensuring Quebec's leadership in energy and environmental matters, contributing to the security of the continent, promoting Quebec's culture and identity, increasing Quebec's capacity for action, and supporting the development of expertise (Bernier, Blouin, and Faucher 2011).

In these documents, the Quebec government argued that the increasing interweaving of the Quebec economy with the US economy ensured that Quebec's economic destiny would be tied as closely to the northeastern US as it was to central Canada. Quebec would therefore set out to forge closer ties with the US states, be it bilaterally or in the context of multilateral forums of federated states (Chaloux 2014).

Under Charest, the Government of Quebec increased its participation in more than a dozen multilateral cross-border groupings, such as the Conference of New England Governors and Eastern Canadian Premiers and the Eastern Regional Conference of the Council of State Governments. It also maintained important bilateral relationships with several states, such as New York and Vermont (Paquin and Chaloux 2011).

According to the MRIF, since 2003, "members of the Quebec government have undertaken several missions to the United States. The Premier has been there more than 20 times and the Minister of International Relations more than 10 times. Some 20 other members of the Cabinet have made at least one mission to the United States" (MRIF 2015).

Under the Charest government, Quebec co-founded, with Georgia, an alliance of the southeastern US states and Canadian provinces. This alliance is an economic forum that promotes trade and investment and strengthens technological and scientific exchanges among members. It was launched in Montreal in 2007 with the signing of a joint declaration (SEUS-CP 2007). The association brings together six southeastern US states (Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, Tennessee, Mississippi, and Alabama) and seven Canadian provinces (Quebec, Ontario, Manitoba, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, and Newfoundland and Labrador). This association hosts an annual

meeting, alternating between a Canadian province and a US state. The last meeting was in Savannah, Georgia, in May 2022 (SEUS-CP 2022).

In 2007, Quebec also joined the North American Strategy for Competitiveness, a coalition of government, business, and education representatives working together on energy, trade, and transportation issues in the three NAFTA states. Premier Charest participated in several meetings and hosted the annual conference in June 2009.

With Charest in power, Quebec was more prominent than any other government in Quebec on environmental issues. While the Government of Canada under Stephen Harper was accumulating Fossil Awards at the Paris Conference of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (a “lemon” award given by the Climate Action Network, which brings together 400 NGOs), Charest was praised by Al Gore and was presented with the South Australia International Climate Change Leadership Award. A portion of forest land on the outskirts of Adelaide, Australia, was even renamed in his honour (Journet 2010).

Quebec has also been very active in the fight against climate change. Under Charest, Quebec was active in several institutions such as the Climate Group, the Network of Regional Governments for Sustainable Developments, the International Carbon Action Partnership, and the International Emissions Trading Association, as well as many other institutions, notably in relation to the Organisation internationale de la Francophonie.

In North America, Quebec is an observer in the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative, which brings together several states in the US northeast and aims to cap and trade greenhouse gas emissions. It has also participated in the Climate Registry since 2007. The goal of this not-for-profit entity is to create a voluntary registry to record and validate greenhouse gas emissions and carbon credits. This member-driven registry can be used in the event that regional carbon markets are organized. All Canadian provinces, no less than thirty-nine US states, and six Mexican states are official members (Paquin 2016, 280).

The Charest government was also a founding partner in the Western Climate Initiative with California, starting in 2008. The Government of Quebec has linked its cap-and-trade system to California's. This carbon market is the largest North American carbon market and, at the time of its creation in January 2014, the second largest in the world after the EU (Chaloux 2014). The association, created in 2007, eventually

brought together several Canadian provinces, Mexican states, and US states; however, several of the latter (Arizona, Oregon, Washington, New Mexico) quickly withdrew, using the economic crisis of 2008 as an excuse. In Canada, British Columbia, Manitoba, Ontario, and Nova Scotia also joined the initiative at first. However, the election of Doug Ford would end Ontario's participation. Conservative Brian Pallister's Manitoba also withdrew from the organization, in 2016. British Columbia no longer sends a representative to the board and does not participate in emissions trading. Nova Scotia, meanwhile, joined the organization in 2018 and has been participating in the carbon market since 1 January 2019.

## Conclusion

Charest's international policy was clearly exceptional in terms of Quebec's international relations. This raises a question: How did the Canadian government respond to this strong activism? Charest saw three Canadian prime ministers during his tenure: Jean Chrétien (for a few months), Paul Martin (2003–06), and Stephen Harper (2006–15). Relations between Quebec and Ottawa on the issue of Quebec's international relations improved significantly compared to the previous period when the Parti Québécois was in power. Thus, after the strongly conflicted relations between Quebec and Ottawa on issues of Quebec's international relations in the referendum and post-referendum years, the situation between Quebec and Ottawa changed dramatically with the arrival of Charest, an unquestionably federalist premier, despite the strained personal relations between Charest and Harper (Paquin 2006, 2014b). The relationship between Quebec and Ottawa can even be considered exceptional during the negotiation of the free trade agreement between Canada and the EU, and Charest's role in that effort is recognized by all parties that have come to power in Ottawa (Paquin 2022b).

Paul Martin showed himself open to the idea of giving the provinces a role in international negotiations, after a formal request by the Quebec government under Charest. This change of direction by the Liberal prime minister was noteworthy, given that the Chrétien government had refused in October 2002 to allow Quebec's minister of international relations, Louise Beaudoin, to speak for Quebec at UNESCO. Paul Martin's position marked a historic break with his party's policies, given

that the Liberals since the 1960s had been against the idea of giving the provinces a role in international relations (Paquin 2022a).

Harper, for his part, broke with his predecessors regarding the provinces' role in international negotiations by granting Quebec a place on the Canadian delegation to UNESCO. This gesture set a precedent, even if it only formalized what by then was a standard practice. It was, indeed, very common for Quebec and the Canadian provinces in general to participate in Canada's activities at UNESCO, since this international organization touches on the provinces' fields of competence. The most significant precedent was the collaboration between Louise Beaudoin, then minister of international relations, and Lisa Frulla, minister of Canadian heritage, to adopt the Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions in 2005. Even so, Harper's move was courageous, considering the state of public opinion and the hostile editorials in the Canadian press on the issue (Paquin 2014b, 2022c). The historical significance of this Quebec–Ottawa agreement should nevertheless be qualified. From the outset, what Harper proposed was more a continuity with the Mulroney years, rather than in rupture. Mulroney had expressed openness regarding France–Quebec relations and Quebec's place in la Francophonie (Paquin 2022a). Moreover, Harper's actions were quite limited. The prime minister did not wish to negotiate an agreement for the participation of the provinces in all international negotiations that affected their areas of jurisdiction; his decision applied only to a rather peripheral international organization (Paquin 2014a, 2022c).

Moreover, the Harper government went against well-established precedents that favoured the presence of Quebec representatives in Canada's international climate negotiations. In the case of trade negotiations, it was only because it is a requirement of the EU that the provinces participate as part of the Canadian delegation in Canada–Europe negotiations that this role for Quebec and other provinces was conceded by Ottawa (Paquin 2022b).

Overall, Charest's international policy was without equal in the history of Quebec. Since his departure, no premier has been as active as Charest was during his years in office. The minority PQ government of Pauline Marois did not have time to leave its mark on Quebec's international relations with the US; the Liberal government of Philippe Couillard (2014–18) later set Quebec's international relations

back. Couillard made the same mistake as Lucien Bouchard in 1996–97, namely, he implemented an austerity policy that significantly weakened Quebec's international policy. However, after two years of severe austerity, the Couillard government, like the Bouchard government, revived Quebec's international relations, albeit too little too late, for that government earned only one mandate. The election of Donald J. Trump to the US presidency and his demand that NAFTA be renegotiated confirmed, as if it were necessary, not only the importance of a separate international relations policy for Quebec but also the need to place the US at the forefront of those relations (Paquin 2022b).

After the October 2018 Quebec provincial elections, the Coalition Avenir Québec, led by François Legault, succeeded Philippe Couillard's Liberals. In 2019, the MRIF minister Nadine Girault released a revision of Quebec's international policy document (previously published by the Couillard government) so as to focus it more on the economy. This revision was released under the title *Vision Internationale du Québec (VIQ) – Le Québec: Fier et en affaires partout dans le monde* (Quebec: Proud and in Business around the World). This reorientation of Quebec's international activities was conveyed through a triptych promoting the province's economic development beyond its borders. This new version differs from its predecessor in that it strengthens economic activity at the international level, relies more on networks as economic levers, and modernizes international action.

The strategy toward the US promulgated by Legault's government identifies priority sectors to be exploited, namely trade and investment; energy, environment, and climate change; and cross-border issues. Moreover, market diversification is a primary objective of the strategy developed by the Quebec government. In terms of energy, Quebec is promoting the export of its hydroelectricity through projects such as the New England Clean Energy Connect in the states of Maine and Massachusetts and the Champlain Hudson Power Express in New York State. Moreover, the Legault government is calling for a renewed focus on trade and investment issues and energy exports in order to make Quebec the "green battery" of the US northeast.

Because of COVID-19, the dynamism of the relationship between Quebec and the US waned considerably relative to the Charest years. Since Charest, no premier has shown as much interest in international issues. During the 2022 election campaign, four of the five parties in

the race had nothing to propose in terms of international relations. François Legault's party proposed continuing to implement economic diplomacy; the Quebec Liberal Party made a brief mention of its past actions (referring to the Charest years but without mentioning him); and the Conservative Party made no mention of the subject at all.

Even one of the two sovereigntist parties, Québec solidaire, has little to say on the subject. Québec solidaire wants to withdraw from trade agreements, such as the US–Mexico–Canada Agreement and CETA, as well as from military agreements (such as NATO and NORAD) if Quebec becomes sovereign, which seems unlikely. Only the Parti Québécois wants to see Quebec be more active in the world. To do so, it plans to double the number of Quebec delegations and offices abroad.

Decidedly, the Charest years are over.

### Notes

- 1 Some of the data in this article comes from Jeyabalaratnam and Paquin (2016) and Paquin (2014a).
- 2 *Entente Québec-France sur la reconnaissance mutuelle des qualifications professionnelles*, Quebec and France, 17 October 2008.
- 3 Figures for the Bourassa government are not available.
- 4 The majority of the quotes were related to the Plan Nord, a vast development plan for Northern Quebec launched in 2011 at the initiative of Jean Charest.

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