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Mr. Pablo Rodriguez

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• (0900)

[Translation]

The Chair (Mr. Pablo Rodriguez (Honoré-Mercier, Lib.)): Good morning to all and welcome to this meeting.

It is 9:02 a.m. We will be disciplined and start straight away.

Our colleagues will be joining us in due course, because we have very little time this morning. That being said, it is a pleasure today to welcome Ms. Adam, the Commissioner of Official Languages, as well as members of her team. Unfortunately, Ms. Adam will only be with us until 9:50 a.m., because several of you have expressed the desire to be in the House at 10:00 a.m. sharp for the tabling of the mid-term report by Mr. Bélanger. So, we have until 9:50 a.m. If we don't manage to cover all issues, I suggest we call on Ms. Adam to reappear before our Committee.

I'll stop at that and take this opportunity to welcome you all.

Ms. Adam, you have the floor.

Ms. Dyane Adam (Commissioner of Official Languages, Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages): Thank you, Mr. Chairman and honourable members.

Let me begin by thanking you for giving me the opportunity to present to you the highlights of my 6th annual report, tabled on March 31. It is already slightly dated.

I am aware that we have very little time, I will therefore be brief. I would however invite you to read the text you have before you. It is far longer than the message I will be delivering to you this morning. This should allow you more time for discussion and question period.

Let me start by saying that this most recent annual report consists of two volumes. The first sets out an overview of 35 years of progress achieved in the area of linguistic duality in the country, the second deals with the government's performance in 2004-05.

[English]

I shall quickly go over the two volumes of the annual report and then conclude with a brief look at this year's work, which is well under way.

Let's start with volume I. A review of the past 35 years reminds us that the history of linguistic duality in Canada has been marked by stops and starts, epic battles, spectacular breakthroughs, and small steps forward, but the end result is one of real progress in all sectors. This situation can be seen as a glass that is still only half full. At the outset the glass was practically empty, and then as the years passed the glass filled up slowly but surely.

The first volume of our annual report shows that 35 years of effort has made it possible to improve daily life in our society in a multitude of ways. For example, there's now increased bilingualism, especially among youth; development of minority official languages communities; progress within the federal government with regard to language of work and language of service; progress regarding the language used in the courts; and integration of newcomers into the two official language communities. This progress has also made a major contribution to the recognition of Canada as a leader in respect for minorities and human rights on the international stage.

Of course, every coin has two sides, and despite progress toward the true equality of the two language communities, there remain a number of challenges ahead. There needs to be more support for second language training across the country, the culture of the federal public service must truly integrate the use of both official languages into day-to-day work, and more partnerships between governments in minority official language communities must be established in matters that affect the vitality of these communities.

• (0905)

[Translation]

Volume II of the report deals with fiscal year 2004-05, which ended in March 2005.

In my previous reports, I noted that implementation of the official languages policy appears to have plateaued over the last decade, especially in terms of services to the public. Our federal institution report card, released for the very first time this year, confirms this finding.

Where it is required service is provided in both languages only three times out of four, a rate similar to that observed by various studies conducted by my Office and the Treasury Board over the last several years. It is no exaggeration to speak of stagnation. In addition, the active offer of bilingual service is still made by staff only one time out of four.

These national statistics conceal a very unequal reality. While the federal agencies generally succeed very well in offering quality service in both official languages in Quebec and in the National Capital Region, our data indicate that, in some regions, service is provided in both languages less than 50 per cent of the time and the active offer of service is almost non-existent.

One of the concerns of Canadians is of course the accountability and transparency of public institutions. In this context, the mid-term assessment of the action plan for official languages is, in my view, a very important exercise.

I have also emphasized the importance of clarifying the scope of Part VII of the Act, as provided for in Bill S-3. I believe that your work on this bill has resulted in a clear legislative text.

Moreover I am happy to report that the government has responded to most of the recommendations of my previous report including the review of official languages policies by the Treasury Board and the inclusion of language guarantees in the Air Canada bill.

Of the 11 recommendations made in my previous annual report, more than two-thirds have been implemented at least partially or are in the process of being implemented.

[English]

To conclude, when you get to the age of 35—and I guess that's most of us here—you look at the lessons to be learned from your experience so far. In the case of official languages I see two main lessons.

First, political leadership from the highest level is vital. The experience of the past 35 years shows that the big steps forward in official languages were made at times of strong federal political leadership. Leadership that is vigorous but also sustained is necessary if we are to achieve the equality of treatment of both official language communities.

The second lesson learned is that cooperation between the levels of government has yielded remarkable results, especially when the minority official language communities were involved as partners. One of the best ways of moving these communities forward is to equip them in such a way that they can generate their own development and contribute fully to Canadian society. If a societal project of this scope is to move ahead, if the glass is to be finally full, we must take a fresh look at the results of our official languages policy and update federal government practices in order to break through the ceiling that exists at the present and better meet the changing needs of our society.

To start with, we must immediately take a look at the impact of changes in government service delivery in the two official languages—I am thinking of the arrival of Service Canada—and the relocation of institutions in the regions if we proceed as planned.

● (0910)

[Translation]

So, to provide food for thought, and to stimulate further action, this fall we had three discussion forums on issues that are key to Canadian linguistic duality. We addressed issues dealing with the regulatory framework of official languages, joint governance mechanisms between government and the communities, the various factors and mechanisms that foster the vitality and development to the official language communities, and the links between linguistic duality and Canadian diversity.

These issues will be addressed in my next annual report, which I hope to have the opportunity to present it to you next spring.

Thank you. I will be happy to answer any questions you may have.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Madam Adam.

[Translation]

As always, excellent work.

We will now proceed to a question period. Because we only have 45 or 50 minutes, I suggest we do our first round, five minutes each.

[English]

Is that okay? Is everybody comfortable with that?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: We'll start with Monsieur Lauzon.

[Translation]

Mr. Guy Lauzon (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

To start, I would like to welcome Maxime Trottier, he is a coop's student and a representative of the minority language community in my riding. Maxime will be spending the day with me on Parliament Hill.

Ms. Adam, welcome, to you and your colleagues.

Over the last 35 years we have tried to improve the situation with respect to official languages in our country. I'm not very impressed with the progress achieved to date. You've just told us there were more complaints this year than last, 12 per cent more.

Is there a reasonable explanation for this increase?

Ms. Dyane Adam: There may be several reasons for the increase and complaints this year. Let's start by talking about election years. Whenever there are elections, there is an increase of the number of complaints. This is an issue the committee could eventually look into.

Although Elections Canada is responsible for monitoring elections, it isn't necessarily responsible for the hiring of people who work in polling stations. These people are appointed by the various parties. The linguistic capacity to offer services in both official languages is not necessarily a criterion.

Every four years, or whenever there are elections, we often receive well founded complaints largely due to the fact that staff in these polling stations in some cases truly do not have the required linguistic skills. It is a vicious cycle, at this point I'm saying so because you may be part of the solution of this problem.

The other reason is because of Air Canada's restructuring, it came under bankruptcy protection pursuant to the Companies Creditor Arrangement Act. Over that period, as you already mentioned, one of the judges who had heard the matter had asked monitoring officers to curb their enthusiasm and not investigate some complaints.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: Do you get more complaints from certain regions?

Ms. Dyane Adam: Last year, I think the breakdown was rather—

Mr. Michel Robichaud (Director General, Investigations Branch, Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages): For the most part, complaints come from the national capital region and New Brunswick.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: All right. The increase in the number of complaints from anglophones is higher than from francophones. Is there a reason for that?

• (0915)

Mr. Michel Robichaud: We believe that the increase in the number of complaints from anglophones is due in large part to the government's new policies on imperative staffing.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: Do you have any figures on that? Is that the only reason?

Mr. Michel Robichaud: No. There are the reasons that were mentioned by Ms. Adam. Actually, this isn't a very specific percentage. But, a good part of the increase in the number of complaints comes from this group.

Ms. Dyane Adam: With your permission, Michel, two things happened last year. As you know, Treasury Board strengthened its policies regarding hiring practices and language training. Some people had to respect the deadlines in order to meet the language requirements for their job. We received complaints, especially from some anglophones, regarding the exam itself and the new policies.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: Has the test been changed?

Ms. Dyane Adam: We did not change it, because we are not responsible for it. We found that the complaints were baseless.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: You mentioned Service Canada. Do you think that there will be more complaints, because Service Canada may not be able to easily provide bilingual services nation-wide and in the bilingual regions?

Ms. Dyane Adam: Past experience often helps to forecast the future. The changes that the government made when the programs were adopted during the 1990s were disastrous for official languages. This was a set back for official languages. It led to the adoption of the Action Plan for Official Languages. We will soon be discussing the mid-term report regarding this implementation.

Service Canada is another change brought about by the government. This might be an opportunity to improve our services, if it is well thought out. The official languages issue is raised right at the outset of the development of the service. If it is added later on, and we try to patch the whole thing together, as has sometimes been the case, we will have problems.

The Chair: I must interrupt you.

Mr. Côté, you have the floor.

Mr. Guy Côté (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, BQ): Thank you once again for coming, Ms. Adam. I'll be pleased to share my time with my colleague when she returns.

I will be brief. As mentioned earlier, I must add that a fellow MP told me, just a few days ago, that during an Air Canada flight, he asked one of the kind flight attendants for a glass of water in French. She was simply unable to give him an answer. This is still going on, even for things as simple as a glass of water.

I give the floor to my colleague.

Ms. Paule Brunelle (Trois-Rivières, BQ): I am sorry. Ms. Adam is not the only one who has many things to do.

Yesterday evening, there was a meeting between the ministers and minority groups in Canada. They dealt with the report on the Action Plan for Official Languages. In your report, it says that the political leadership must come from the highest level. We felt that the ministers were beginning to show some concern. I think it was interesting, even though I feel that there is still a great deal to do.

How should we go about spreading the good news that French is important in Canada, that it is a great asset and that its very presence sets our cultural identity apart from that of the United States?

There are two aspects to this: firm political leadership and a true active mentality. This is your job, and you are doing it well, but we will certainly have to take a look at the way we can improve the public image.

I am also worried about the fact that the bilateral agreements with the provinces are difficult to reach, which is understandable when you are dealing with many partners. They still have not been signed. What do you think of this, and what could we do to set things in order?

• (0920)

Ms. Dyane Adam: You are talking about framework agreements and the negotiations going on between the federal and provincial levels regarding education? Are you? All right.

Let me, as it were, make a comment on your comment. In my opinion, every elected representative—and it goes without saying that this applies specifically to the government, the Prime Minister and the ministers—has a crucial role to play in promoting French and English. Each time a minister speaks to Canadians, he should do it in both official languages. It is as simple as that. Leadership consists in constantly showing a bilingual face to Canadians. When this is done systematically, it saves much money on promotion. A good example is much more convincing for bringing about linguistic duality than just talking about it.

Regarding the framework, let me say that all the negotiations are lagging behind. Things are progressing slowly. The negotiations began at a time when federal-provincial agreements had almost expired. Every four or five years, we run into the same situation when resuming negotiations.

In my opinion, we must think of a new way of doing things. We must make sure that we get an early start. These issues should be studied much more regularly. Moreover, there must be a true spirit of cooperation among the various partners and the community should also participate in this exercise. Often, the communities are the victims of all these delays. Now this is not at all what we want for our communities. We want them to be truly in charge of their future development.

The Chair: Let us continue with Mr. Godin.

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Good morning, Madam Commissioner. I am always pleased to see you. Too bad that we have so little time: There are so many things to discuss!

I'll speak to you of the large number of complaints coming from New Brunswick. You spoke of elections, and I must say that I do not agree with you on this matter. I do not know where you get your information from. In my opinion, the large number of complaints received this year is partly due to all this propaganda made about the Dion plan. This has greatly raised the expectations of the communities, and as they are not being met, there are complaints. I think that this is one of the reasons but I may be wrong.

In New Brunswick, for instance, we now have the Forum des maires de la Péninsule acadienne. Municipalities are really monitoring the developments, and when they notice something wrong, there are complaints. The complaints are much more frequent than before. It would seem that the municipalities are participating more closely and they are making sure that their rights are not infringed upon. I cannot say that elections have nothing to do with this, but I would say that we are striking a fair balance. People are really filing complaints nowa days. They find that it is unacceptable to be served in this way in Canada where there are two official languages.

Let me make some comments. For instance, a week or two ago, when I missed my plane for Bathurst, I had to stop in Moncton. When I arrived, at 9:00 p.m., the lady at the Air Canada counter—and here I am not talking about an airport employee but an Air Canada employee—was unable to speak to me in French. As for me, I only spoke to her in French. Finally, another Air Canada employee, dressed in a jogging suit, came to serve me. She was getting ready to go home, but she had to come and serve me in French. This was not included in her job description. I found all this very disappointing.

Here we are talking about a New Brunswick municipality that is now officially bilingual. Now the first person who served me was unable to do so in French. We can imagine that this was someone whom Air Canada had requested to come in as a volunteer... Basically, the situation is not changing, and complaints are still coming in. I complained to Air Canada. In its publication *enRoute*, the company states that it respects official languages. For the past six months we have not even been able to find this publication. It has been withdrawn. Besides, the forms used for filing complaints, which used to be in the seat pocket, can no longer be found on any Air Canada airplane. I also complained about this to the company.

Now let me ask you a question. With regard to the Dion plan or the government in general, minority francophone communities find that despite all the promises, the money does not come in, if it does, it comes in too late, only in the fall. To enable the communities to do the job they must do in their regions, they must have the money at the outset. As you were doing your report and your research, did you notice any complaints from the communities regarding this situation?

• (0925)

Ms. Dyane Adam: Yes, absolutely. This morning I spoke about our annual report which covers the period from April 1, 2004 to March 31, 2005. We discuss the implementation of the action plan and we highlight the same problems that you have discovered: slow delivery and inertia have real consequences for communities and create impatience.

As for Air Canada, Mr. Godin, the airline is currently appealing the *Thibodeau* case, here in Ontario. The decision had more or less been in favour of the complainant. We are also acting as interveners in this case. The Court recognized that, under the Official Languages Act, Air Canada had an obligation to provide these services.

Moreover, the airline cannot use the collective agreements to escape this obligation. That is an important victory. The commission had long sought to convey that message to Air Canada. Unfortunately, the company is appealing the decision. It will take a little longer before the airline is in compliance with the Act and truly meets its obligations. The President of Air Canada has appeared before this Committee in the past. If you consult your archives, you will see what the president said about the collective agreements and the obstacles that they represented. The judgment goes against Air Canada, but it is appealing, namely because of the obligation to achieve a result.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Godin. Mr. Godbout will finish off the first round.

Mr. Marc Godbout (Ottawa—Orléans, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Welcome, madam Commissioner. I would like to deal with another subject this morning, namely the CBC. It is not so much the fact that it is bilingual: there is still an English network and a French network. However, I sense a progressive deterioration within the French-language network. I don't mean our regional stations, they do good work. I am referring to what is called the national network. This network seems to cover mostly Quebec. I have nothing against that, but the rest of Canada seems to be neglected. And it has a national mandate.

Do you intend to look into this and publish a report? Frustration is brewing among francophone communities. When we turn on the radio a 9 o'clock, the national network signs on and wishes good day to Quebec. That is rather insulting. When we hear the news relating to the federal government, it always involves a Quebec issue. The Quebec ministers are often shown, and that's fine, but we hardly ever see any others, unless they are somehow related to something that will impact Quebec. It might be a good idea for you to take a look at this problem. You might have already done so. I didn't see very much about Radio-Canada in your report.

Ms. Dyane Adam: In the special 35th anniversary edition of the annual report, we talked about the history of Radio-Canada. It is interesting to note that Radio-Canada and the CBC originally were more or less a bilingual corporation. But gradually both entities grew apart. Of course, there was the unilingual French Radio-Canada and CBC Toronto, which became more anglophone. Over 35 years, regional stations were gradually added. But there were none in the beginning. Then there was a period where reporters were withdrawn from the regions, only to be sent back afterwards. So the history of Radio-Canada/CBC is an example of a corporation which moves forwards and backwards depending on its budget.

Over the years, the Office of the Commissioner has spoken out, and often it was with regard to the CRTC. Indeed, criteria regarding digital or analogue signals are determined by the CRTC. The Office of the Commissioner has always believed—I'm speaking in general terms here—that bilingual Canadian signals should receive top priority. In other words, foreign signals should only be considered afterwards. However, people did not always listen when we spoke out, but the situation is slowly improving.

Are we planning on taking a closer look at this situation and on studying it more thoroughly? Have we already done so? I don't think so. There have been complaints, and it is on the basis of those complaints that we reviewed Radio-Canada/CBC policies under Part VII. However, we never really insisted on conducting a more in-depth study.

That's probably an issue my team could study, along with culture, for example.

● (0930)

Mr. Marc Godbout: I think that would be interesting and appreciated.

I don't like to refer to your "black list", but after what you saw in each government department and agency you studied, which ones need to do a better job with respect to official languages? I know that you have a list of people to congratulate, but you surely also have another list of people who are not doing so well.

Ms. Dyane Adam: This year, we introduced in our report on the government's performance something we call report cards. Twenty-nine institutions were evaluated for the first time. As far as Part VII of the Official Languages Act is concerned, Canada Post, the Canada Revenue Agency and the Business Development Bank of Canada all received excellent results; well, I should not say excellent, because no one was excellent, but they all did very well. Those who did less well were the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, the Department of Transportation, the Canadian Tourism Commission and NAV Canada.

As far as service to the public is concerned, performance varied. Revenue Canada did very well.

The Chair: I believe we also have that information.

Ms. Dyane Adam: Yes, it is contained in pages 20 and 21 of the French version of the annual report, and on pages 21 and 22 of the English version.

The Chair: Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Godbout. It was kind of you to let us continue.

Mr. Goodyear.

[English]

Mr. Gary Goodyear (Cambridge, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Congratulations, Madam Commissioner, on your excellent report.

One of the concerns I have is this. I've noticed that in a number of different areas you've noted an increase in admissible complaints. I would have thought by now we would have had this thing solved, yet government seems to be moving slowly. Indeed, you mention in fact some discouragement with the pace of the government. I notice there are three new areas of complaint in your report: Elections

Canada, Canadian Heritage, and Canadian Air Transport Security. Clearly, for Canadian security we shouldn't be having any complaints, in my opinion.

The one that concerns me is Canadian Heritage. I understand that in March of 2003 there was an action plan that was kicked off by the government; about three-quarters of a billion dollars was dedicated to that. I do note in your report that you are quite critical of the Department of Canadian Heritage. I guess they don't have all of their agreements signed and they're moving rather slowly.

My concern, and perhaps you can address this, is about these delays in implementing the education sector. Do you feel they jeopardize the success of the overall action plan? How do you feel the—for lack of a better word—delinquency of this department and perhaps the government in general is affecting what should be moving forward?

● (0935)

Ms. Dyane Adam: Half of the new funding that was promised in the action plan relates to education and teaching of the second official language, French as a second language or English as a second language. This part of our action plan has an objective to double the number of young bilinguals in Canada over 10 years. If the Department of Canadian Heritage does not really sign the agreements with the provinces, this objective is certainly jeopardized.

The provinces are really ready to get involved. I have met ministers in some provinces who were really frustrated by the fact that the federal government had announced that money, yet they were still waiting. As you know, in B.C. there is a strong demand for immersion programs; parents have to line up to get their child registered, so it's not that the demand isn't there.

I think there is an opportunity here for the federal government to make a difference. They did identify those objectives as true priorities and they were right in doing that, but if they're slow in really implementing it, the impact can even be negative because you're raising expectations and you're not acting and delivering.

Alberta, by the way, is also one province that is quite frustrated by the way it is being implemented.

Mr. Gary Goodyear: Thank you.

I am curious about why these new institutions received complaints. What is the nature of complaints for Elections Canada and Canadian Heritage? Do you see a difference?

Ms. Dyane Adam: Yes, they are definitely different.

Monsieur Godin did mention that communities are more aware of their rights and also, because of the action plan, expect the federal government to act and are less patient towards it. Part VII complaints target most of the time Canadian Heritage—those are the complaints he was referring to—and obviously the particular institutions that may be involved in that complaint.

Elections Canada—that's a bit typical of an election year, when citizens go to the polls and evidently don't find service in the language of their choice. It is an obligation of our federal institutions to provide that.

[Translation]

The Chair: Mr. D'Amours.

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you, madam Commissioner. Earlier, in your presentation, you mentioned the 35th anniversary. Did you see me smiling when you read that? It will take me another few years to get there.

Ms. Dyane Adam: You're not there yet.

Mr. Yvon Godin: You are far too young to be here.

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: That may be, but youth does not mean that one cannot be a good member of Parliament. It is a good idea to include younger people, with new ideas. That is important.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. D'Amours. We are out of time.

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: Time really flies!

Ms. Dyane Adam: It flies even more quickly as you get older.

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: Madam Commissioner, we have had an opportunity to welcome you on numerous occasions during my time here on the Official Languages Committee. Of course, nothing is perfect when it comes to official languages. We have to keep working at it in order to gain the respect of the country. That is obvious. Nobody will ever say that this problem has been settled once and for all.

However, after hearing you today, I have a feeling that things are improving and I think that is what you implied in your speech.

I was surprised, earlier, to hear about certain problems in my province, New Brunswick, since efforts are being made to provide bilingual services.

I think your authority goes beyond evaluating situations. You do have some legal powers. Can you tell us if, in recent years, you have had to take legal action against any group?

Before allowing you to answer, I would also like to mention that I will not be speaking about Air Canada, as my colleague Mr. Godin did earlier. However, I wholeheartedly agree with him. So I have no comments to make on that subject because I did so last time, and I received a few letters about it. I will keep them for another occasion.

● (0940)

Ms. Dyane Adam: To my knowledge, the Office of the Commissioner has not taken any legal action on behalf of a complainant in the past year. We did so in other years, but not recently. However, we have intervened in a number of cases to support an individual or a group of citizens.

Let me give you some examples. I mentioned Mr. Thibodeau, a citizen who sued Air Canada. There is also the *Forum des maires de la Péninsule acadienne vs. Canada (The Food Inspection Agency)* in New Brunswick, your province. We know that this case was heard by two courts and it is about to be heard by the Supreme Court of Canada. Moreover, last week we intervened in the Supreme Court of Canada in the *Charlebois* case, another one from New Brunswick.

Therefore, the office of the Commissioner must intervene in about 10 active applications in order to clarify the obligations of the federal government. There have been at least three or four decisions over the past year, almost all of them coming down in favour of the Commission's interpretation. Very rarely are all of the decisions positive, but in general, most of them are.

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: Thank you.

I will allow someone else to use what is left of my time, since I was given some leeway when I began my intervention.

Hon. Raymond Simard (Saint Boniface, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

In my view, there will always be complaints in a bilingual country like ours. I believe that is quite normal. It is a challenge we have to deal with, but nonetheless it is an important factor that makes it possible for us to measure progress.

With respect to Air Canada, I believe that this committee could conduct an in-depth study on that corporation alone. I share Mr. Godin's frustration. Every week, I travel from Winnipeg. For a francophone, travelling with Air Canada is extremely frustrating.

In my view, last evening's discussions showed that the Action Plan for Official Languages had nonetheless made it possible to establish structures important to francophone communities in a variety of areas. I believe it is quite natural for the process to take some time. Moving beyond the Action Plan, I believe that the responsibilities of departments to francophone communities should be standardized. In health, for example, the structure established made it possible to train 1,000 professionals, and is prepared to train 1,000 more. Now, in our francophone communities, we have Immigration offices to handle francophone immigrants. As for early childhood, budgets have been set aside for francophone communities.

I agree that this has taken too long. In my view, no one is arguing that. However, establishing these structures does take some time.

● (0945)

The Chair: That is all the time you had.

Hon. Raymond Simard: Thank you.

The Chair: We have to be fair with everyone with regard to time.

Mr. Côté.

Mr. Guy Côté: Thank you.

I would like to come back to Mr. Godbout's earlier comment about the CBC. In my view, the CBC is a very good reflection of linguistic duality. There is a sociological fact here. There are two official languages in Canada, but one of them is a minority language, and you know better than I do that the language is French. Nonetheless, the political reality is that French is the minority language in Canada as a whole, while English is a minority language in Quebec. In my view, RDI much more accurately reflects the circumstances of francophones outside Quebec. At least, that is how I see it. Tell me whether I'm wrong. Am I wrong? I see. In that case, we'll talk about this again.

Ms. Adam, in your report, you said, out of the 10 institutions about which most of the complaints were laid, seven had been in the same position last year. Earlier, we talked about Air Canada. Since this is a relatively new issue for me, I would like to ask whether these institutions regularly receive a high number of complaints. Are they receiving a high number of complaints for two years running because of some random factor, or are they simply not fixing the problems? If so, what can we do about it?

Ms. Dyane Adam: Air Canada remains a private institution which is fully subject to the OLA. In addition, it is constantly in contact with Canadians, unlike other federal institutions. These factors have to be taken into account. That said, there is no doubt that Air Canada is one of our most delinquent—if we can put it that way—institutions. Clearly—and the attempted measures demonstrate this—Air Canada resists the notion that the OLA should be applied to it. In its case, I believe that "resist" is the right word. That resistance is manifested in a number of ways, be it the number of complaints or the absence of services. The studies, complaints and observations on the ground confirm this. We have conducted a series of observations over three years, and these observations have shown that Air Canada is not changing. Air Canada is stagnating.

We would be pleased to help you in your efforts. In my view, efforts by parliamentarians on this issue should be much more assertive.

Mr. Guy Côté: When it comes to National Defence, we regularly hear that services in French are inadequate. Do anglophone in military bases located in Quebec have the same problem?

Ms. Dyane Adam: If the issue is the language of work, that is, the opportunity for Canadian Forces personnel to work in their own language, I should point out that all regions of Canada are not designated bilingual. However, in Quebec, in regions that are designated bilingual, things are much better than they are in other parts of the country—if that was your question.

Mr. Guy Côté: Yesterday, we attended the meeting for the mid-term report on the Action Plan for Official Languages. The Minister of Canadian Heritage made it a point to remind everyone how significant she considers official languages. However, if I understand correctly, you have come to a different conclusion.

With regard to Canadian Heritage, what, in your view, is the major problem at present?

Ms. Dyane Adam: Some members of your committee mentioned it a few moments ago—the main problem is the lack of coordination among federal institutions, those institutions that have made a commitment and that have a more significant role to play in implementing the OLA—particularly Part VII—the Privy Council, which is also a central agency and plays a key role, Treasury Board and the Public Service Human Resources Management Agency of Canada, which plays a central role within the federal government. All those entities should be working together. Cooperation and coordination are key to success.

As members have said, the structure takes a long time to put in place. Moreover, bringing decision-makers and officials to the point where they can genuinely work together towards common goals requires time, since the whole machinery is used to operating vertically, by department, when these are horizontal issues.

If we could improve the situation, we could get some very good results.

• (0950)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Côté.

We will finish with Mr. Godin.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

With respect to Air Canada, I also find Mr. Thibodeau's story unfortunate. He landed up in the hands of the police at Ottawa Airport because he asked for a can of 7Up in French. And I thought "7Up" was English! This became a topic of discussion in the plane because Mr. Thibodeau was stopped by the police. The sadest thing is that Air Canada did not take its medicine—or its can of 7Up—nor did it concede it had made an error. That is truly unfortunate, and that is what I deplore this morning.

Air Canada is at fault on all counts, regardless of the complaints already made against it. Air Canada came before this committee and said that all the complaints it received came from francophones, except for verbal complaints about the fact that French was used onboard. Imagine that! What dreadful complaints!

Mr. Simard said that he agreed with having a bilingual country that would encourage complaints. Unfortunately, 81 per cent of complaints are laid by francophones. If half the complaints were laid by francophones and half by anglophones, there would be a balance, but that is not what we see. There is absolutely no balance, and that, Ms. Adam, is very unfortunate.

I am worried because everything points to the fact that the Dion plan—which we are now implementing—is an honest one. It looks good in the press, we might say, but things are still happening. Take the Meteorological Service of Canada office in Fredericton, which was moved to Halifax. At 6:00 a.m. the day before yesterday, the French radio station in our area could not obtain service in French from Halifax because the lady who answered has a C classification. I don't know what that means—you know that better than I do. But it appears that one can work with a C classification. However, the lady in question answered she did not feel comfortable enough to speak French on the radio. So francophones received weather information on Hurricane Wilma only three hours later, at 9:00 a.m. I am worried about this government reorganization. Our complaints are about moving the Moncton offices to Halifax. The government said that the positions in question are bilingual, but after some checking, we see that they are not.

The same thing happened with the vessel *Opilio*. They said that the position should be bilingual, and when the captain failed the exam, he was replaced by an anglophone. That is in your report, Commissioner. This is a very serious issue.

At present, we have border stations at Saint John, Woodstock and Edmundston. They would like to eliminate the Edmundston station. Leaving only Saint John and Woodstock. What will the result be in the long-term? Services in English again. However, they could have kept both the Edmundston and the Saint John stations, but prefer to keep those in the anglophone regions.

For the reasons I have mentioned, Commissioner, these situations should all be considered at the same time. Whenever the government says it will do one thing in the communities, it actually does something else on the ground.

As long as departments do not leave the bilingualism issue in the hands of people who really believe in it and can bring it to communities, we will continue to wage this battle and 81 per cent of complaints will come from francophones.

Ms. Dyane Adam: The problem you raised is that of relocation, government reorganization and the impact on services. Pursuant to the policy the government put in place several years ago, a policy that is to be applied by Treasury Board, any government reorganization or change in the delivery of service should be very closely examined, as should the impact on official languages. Is that done?

• (0955)

Mr. Yvon Godin: But we also have to look at the communities. If we take services away from minority communities and offer those

services to majority communities, there will be losses in the long-term, as with the meteorological services.

Ms. Dyane Adam: Mr. Godin, if the policy exists but is not applied, if the work is not offered, that is when problems arise and there are genuine losses. You're quite right, there are genuine losses in some cases.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Godin.

Ms. Adam, we would like to thank you and your team for being here today. It is always a pleasure to have you with us.

I would invite my committee colleagues to go over to the House of Commons for activities associated with the tabling of the mid-term report for official languages.

The meeting is adjourned.

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