

Luc Dupont:

CANADA AND BULGARIA SHARE MORE AFFINITIES THAN CONTRASTS



P. Luc Dupont was recently awarded the Golden Laurel of Honour by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Bulgaria for his exceptional contribution to increased relations between the two countries as Regional Manager for Southeast Europe (from 2000 to 2004) at Export Development Canada (EDC). EDC provides trade finance and risk management services to Canadian exporters and investors in up to 200 markets. Mr. Dupont has been actively involved in international negotiations for more than 25 years. At the moment he is a Regional Manager for China and India at EDC. He was instrumental in EDC's business successes in Mexico and major markets in Latin America. He has also been involved in major transactions in North and West Africa and North Asia. Mr. Dupont holds a Master's degree in Business Administration from the University of Ottawa, and has undertaken doctoral studies in the field of International Business. He is fluent in French, English and Spanish. He is the author of books and numerous articles pertaining to international development, education and business.

April 25, 2005 marked a turning point in the development of Bulgaria for it was on this date that the Treaty of Accession to the European Union was signed which provides for Bulgaria's entry into the EU on January 1, 2007. This historical date offers us the opportunity to turn our attention to this country, which by dint of courage and determination, has been able to rise to the challenges of change. A new Bulgaria is emerging from the ambitious reform program embarked on by the country in order to integrate into its statutory, legal, institutional, social and economic framework the vested community rights. When completed, such transformations should allow the country to successfully evolve in the new environment created by globalization.

Despite the differences of language and culture between Bulgaria and Canada the numerous affinities we share, coupled with an environment that is open to investments and to the dynamic energy of young Bulgarians, should be an incentive for Canadian investors to take greater interest in this future member of the European Union. Such efforts will allow them to gain greater international influence, while providing them with privileged access to the European economic space as well as the entire Balkan region.

Canada and Bulgaria are two countries whose relations have not been helped by geography or the close links which are usually created by proximity. In fact, Canada has historically been orientated to the U.S., but also towards France and Britain, from whence came the first immigrants who contributed to the building of this country. Bulgaria for its part was turned towards the countries bordering on the Black Sea, the Aegean and the Adriatic. In the aftermath of the Second World War, when Bulgaria was part of the Soviet sphere of influence, Canada maintained modest but cordial relationships with Bulgaria. Canada viewed this country at that time as one of the windows that allowed it to dialogue and deal with the communist world. It was a time when Canada sought to contribute to the spirit of detente, which began to characterize the development of relations between East and West.

With the fall of the Iron Curtain in 1989, Bulgaria entered into a period of radical change that transformed its institutions and its economy, which until that time was deeply integrated into the Comecon (the political and economic space of the East). The social and economic crisis that erupted from the fall of the system created a volatile environment in which the imperatives for survival were demonstrated in a variety of ways. The transition to a market economy, beginning in the early 1990s, was long and was contested but finally was successful, despite the geopolitical environment that was affected by the strife in Serbia and Kosovo. Despite the volatility throughout the region, Bulgaria had a positive impact with respect to regional security, by displaying tolerance and good will towards its neighbouring countries.

45 years of communism and totalitarianism left their marks of mistrust and suspicion. Thus Bulgarians in general, and especially those whose careers spanned the Iron Curtain years, do not appear to Canadian eyes to be overtly spontaneous, to the point where the first contacts with Bulgarians might leave them perplexed. This tends to leave a hermeneutic quality to all dialogue and attempts at inclusion are hazardous at best. A particular feature is worth pointing out. In Bulgaria, shaking the head up and down means no, but from left to right means yes, which is the exact opposite of what we are used to in Canada.

The determination and the energy of the new generation, which emerged after the communist era, are not dissimilar to the wave of change which came with

the Quiet Revolution. There is a sense of determination, coupled with a new openness to the world and a desire to build a better future, steeped in the same values of the European Union, of freedom, democracy, respect and the development of the human person.

Bulgaria is also in many ways similar to Canada in terms of the deep attachment of Bulgarians to their national identity, the defence of their language and even of their religion over many centuries, despite their minority status. Canada is an officially bilingual federation, consisting of ten provinces and three territories, with a population of about 32 million. It is a pluralist county, given the origins of its numerous inhabitants. While Canadians share common values, the expression of their identity varies from region to region, as do the geography, the climate, and even the legal framework, given the division of powers between the federal and the provincial governments. Many Bulgarians are bilingual, speaking their native tongue and at least one other language (at one time French, now English, but



EDC and BIBA organized a Business Breakfast on November 12, 2004 at Sheraton Hotel Sofia on the topic: "Financing solutions for the Bulgarian private sector".

likewise Spanish and Russian). While Canada is a constitutional monarchy, Bulgaria, despite its status as a republic is not indifferent to the monarchy, from which is descended its current Prime Minister, Simeon of Saxony-Cobourg Gotha (former King Simeon II of Bulgaria).



The award was presented to Mr. Dupont in Ottawa at the Bulgarian Embassy.
B. Daignault - Senior Vice President, EDC, L. Voucheva - Economic Counsellor, Embassy of Bulgaria, I. Dantchev - Consul of the Embassy of Bulgaria, P. Luc Dupont, Gilles Ross - President of EDC (left to right) at the ceremony in the Bulgarian Embassy.

The tradition of state that has characterized the country for several centuries and its European spirit have contributed to Bulgaria's openness to the world. This must not make us forget its contribution to civilization notably as the birthplace of the Cyrillic language, which is used in Bulgaria today as well as in Russia.

Despite the contrasts that characterize both Canada and Bulgaria, both countries share many common affinities: both are pacifist countries and have no ambition for political dominance; they both need to take on the challenge of globalization.