

Standing Committee on Finance (FINA)

Pre-budget consultations 2012

Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne (FCFA) du Canada

Responses

1. Economic Recovery and Growth

Given the current climate of federal and global fiscal restraint, what specific federal measures do you feel are needed for a sustained economic recovery and enhanced economic growth in Canada?

At the Summit of Francophone and Acadian communities in June 2007, nearly 800 French-speaking citizens from all regions of the country, representing the greater Francophone community of nine provinces and three territories, reaffirmed their wish to live in French and to take charge of their own development. On that occasion, 33 community development organizations and institutions signed a declaration in which they committed to working together over the next 10 years to make the vision of the Summit a reality. In September 2011, the Forum of Leaders, representing 43 organizations and institutions, was still committed to implementing the Community Strategic Plan. As the main representative of the Francophone communities in nine provinces and three territories, the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne (FCFA) du Canada bases its actions on the vision of the Summit and the objectives of the Community Strategic Plan. The economic development of the Francophone and Acadian communities is an integral part of the Strategic Plan's success. As part of the Our Development component, the communities' objective is to address issues associated with the aging population and rural depopulation and to stimulate employment and economic growth. They want to do this by relying on the dynamism of their networks, their private and collective entrepreneurship and innovative local development strategies to reinforce human capital, acquisition of the necessary skills for the success of all concerned and the recognition of foreign credentials. The Roadmap for Canada's Linguistic actuality, a federal government initiative supporting the development of official language minority communities and the promotion of linguistic duality, will expire on March 31, 2013. It has provided for significant investments that have enabled the community to make advances, for example, in the areas of economic development, literacy and skills development, health and immigration. Those advances, all related to the economic development of our communities, have better equipped their members to contribute to the development of their communities, of their provinces and of Canada as a whole. To ensure economic growth in our communities, it is essential that the Roadmap be renewed and, in particular, that it include investments in manpower training, both in essential skills such as literacy and in postsecondary education. It is also important to support entrepreneurship and cultural and heritage tourism initiatives.

2. Job Creation

As Canadian companies face pressures resulting from such factors as uncertainty about the U.S. economic recovery, a sovereign debt crisis in Europe, and competition from a number of developed and developing countries, what specific federal actions do you believe should be taken to promote job creation in Canada, including that which occurs as a result of enhanced internal and international trade?

Some of the major job creation issues identified by the organizations in our communities with an economic development mandate are as follows: facilitating financing for businesses and venture capital investment through tax incentives and lower business credit costs; promoting dialogue among the various orders of government and, in cooperation with them, putting in place financial support policies

and programs adapted to the specific needs of the various regions of the country (for example, the Canadian government could implement an action plan, including a timetable, promoting interprovincial/interterritorial cooperation); reducing regulatory disparities among the provinces/territories, thus facilitating access to new domestic markets; promoting interprovincial trade by supporting the introduction of market development tools and tools for networking among the chambers of commerce, regional government economic development agencies and NGOs, as well as businesses; develop more bilateral international trade agreements with countries and groups of countries; and encourage social economic initiatives that both meet specific needs in the sector and create jobs in the communities.

3. Demographic Change

What specific federal measures do you think should be implemented to help the country address the consequences of, and challenges associated with, the aging of the Canadian population and of skills shortages?

The Francophone and Acadian communities are among those most affected by the aging of our population. For that reason and others, the FCFA has been working with Citizenship and Immigration Canada and several other federal, provincial/territorial and community partners over the past 10 years to attract, integrate and retain Francophone immigrants in the communities. The Francophone immigration issues that stakeholders face are obvious in various areas, the first of which is newcomer recruitment. It is essential to make use of existing selection tools and those that are being developed to help achieve the target of having Francophone immigrants represent 4.4% of total immigration by the year 2023. This can be accomplished, for example, by mainly targeting Francophone countries in recruitment efforts. It is important to note that the largest Francophone immigration pool, apart from Europe, is Africa. Recruitment entails preparation for arrival in Canada. Our experience in recent years has taught us the importance of orientation and pre-departure sessions for candidates to facilitate their economic and social integration in Canada. We know that sessions are offered in China, India and Great Britain. However, none are provided in Francophone countries, and this is definitely a deficiency that should be corrected. We believe it would be beneficial for Canada as a whole to give priority to the recruitment of French-speaking newcomers. This would give businesses the competitive advantage of two official languages afforded by Francophone immigration to Canada. The recognition of prior learning is a crucially important aspect of economic integration. The government of Canada must ensure it considers the specific needs of the labour market in the Francophone and Acadian communities in order to focus its efforts on occupations sought by its employers. It is essential that we make every effort to correct the situation. Lastly, greater cooperation among all partners, among the federal and provincial/territorial governments, and with the communities themselves, is absolutely essential on a number of issues: recruitment targets, promotion of the Francophone and Acadian communities as receiving communities, selection and recruitment, intake, settlement and integration. These communities have taken charge of their development and have made considerable progress in recent years. We must now continue in that direction by maximizing the new economic immigration tools.

4. Productivity

With labour market challenges arising in part as a result of the aging of Canada's population and an ongoing focus on the actions needed for competitiveness, what specific federal initiatives are needed in order to increase productivity in Canada?

Hundreds of organizations dedicated to the development of Francophone minority communities across Canada develop and deliver programs, activities and services for Francophone citizens, in all aspects of their daily lives, at lower cost than if those services were provided directly by government institutions or the private sector. Whether in health, education, the economy and job creation, access to justice,

literacy, youth culture or intake and integration services for immigrants, these organizations address local and regional challenges while increasing the capacity to live in French across the country. Consequently, the funding that the government of Canada invests in these organizations in our communities, whether through Official Language Support Programs (Canadian Heritage), the Roadmap for Canada's Linguistic Duality or other programs of various departments, generates tangible results for Francophones and the community as a whole. However, the inferior working conditions prevailing in the organizations in our communities have resulted in abnormally high staff turnover rates. This situation vastly undermines the productivity of those organizations, and we will see a decline in services as inflation erodes their financial capacity. Ultimately, the government's commitment to supporting families and communities and the development of official language minority communities will be at risk. It is therefore important for the initiative that follows the Roadmap to address the issue of strengthening the associations and organizations that, across the country, focus on citizens and are in the best position to deliver services at lower cost. It is also important that the government invest in manpower training, either directly through programs for youth and newcomers or by encouraging businesses and public organizations to provide better training for their human resources.

5. Other Challenges

With some Canadian individuals, businesses and communities facing particular challenges at this time, in your view, who is facing the most challenges, what are the challenges that are being faced and what specific federal actions are needed to address these challenges?

The F CFA would be hard-pressed to deny the fact that many communities in Canada are vulnerable in the present economic circumstances. How, for example, can we pass over in silence the major challenges facing many Aboriginal communities? We must note, however, that the members of the Francophone and Acadian communities are still far from genuine equality when it comes to the variety and quality of services they are offered. The Roadmap for Canada's Linguistic Duality has definitely had a tangible impact, for example, in health and immigration. However, while the Roadmap's emphasis on the delivery of services to citizens is welcome, its support for the organizations and institutions that are called upon to deliver those services is still a weak point that must be addressed in the future initiative. Last year, we made two recommendations to the Standing Committee on Finance for the next federal budget. We wish to reiterate them this year. We recommend that the government renew the Roadmap for Canada's Linguistic Duality 2008-2013. That government initiative has been and still is of the utmost importance to our communities for the creation and expansion of services, activities and programs in key sectors. We also recommend that the government enhance its investments in support of the organizations and institutions of the official language communities. Strategically increasing those investments or, at the very least, maintaining them at current levels would enable the government to continue meeting its commitments, at lower cost, to Francophone minority citizens seeking and requesting services in their language. Enhancing investments in this manner would be a significant positive measure consistent with Part VII of the Official Languages Act. We also note that we would be very much interested in filing a brief and appearing before the Finance Committee as we have done in the past.