

Ottawa Journal: Working with the United Kingdom and France on key issues

I recently had the opportunity to accompany Prime Minister Stephen Harper to London, United Kingdom and Paris, France for his working visit to Europe. The trip was successful in increasing the dialogue on how our countries can work together on important issues, such as strengthening the global economy, enhancing transparency and accountability, as well as international security. Canada had a great deal to contribute to these discussions, which resulted in many important announcements by Prime Minister Harper.

While in London with Prime Minister Harper, I participated in a business roundtable with leaders in the extractive sector. Following this roundtable, the Prime Minister announced that our Government will be establishing new mandatory reporting standards for Canadian extractive companies, which aim to enhance transparency on the payments these companies make to governments.

I also attended the Prime Minister's Address to the Parliament of the United Kingdom during the visit to London. In his Address, Prime Minister Harper highlighted the close bilateral relationship Canada and Britain share, both past and present, the mutual focus on the economy, and our two countries continued shared values of freedom, democracy, and rule of law.

Following London, I traveled with Prime Minister Harper to Paris, France, where I accompanied him to Élysée Palace. There, we both met with François Hollande, the President of the French Republic. During this official visit, Prime Minister Harper announced the launch of an Enhanced Cooperation Agenda (ECA) with France. The ECA provides a strategic framework for implementing further economic, social, political, and security initiatives between Canada and France. Our countries will use the ECA as a means to facilitate our co-operation in areas such as: sustainable economic growth, international security and defence, as well as human rights.

While accompanying the Prime Minister to both London and Paris, I reflected upon another important issue in both Canada and across Europe - youth unemployment. Many countries across continental Europe are contending with considerably high rates of youth unemployment, such as Italy, which has a rate of 40 per cent. Here in Canada, the youth unemployment rate for those aged 15 to 24 is much lower at 13.6 per cent. This, of course, is still a concern for Canada. Many of the youth from those countries experiencing high youth unemployment rates, apply to Canadian embassies for temporary work permits to participate in the Working Holiday program. The program provides participants with the opportunity for temporary paid employment to help pay for their travel in Canada for up to two years. Canada has reciprocal youth mobility agreements with countries in Europe and around the world to provide Canadian youth with similar work and travel experiences.

In order to ensure jobs are available for Canadian youth, our Government has established quotas for the countries where mobility agreements are in place. The program is immensely popular with thousands applying for limited spots so they may have a Canadian experience, which underscores the appeal and greatness of our country to the world. Furthermore, it makes us appreciate our wonderful country even more. We are truly the envy of the world and we have so much to be proud of as Canadians.

The time I spent with Prime Minister Harper during his official visits to London and Paris deepened my appreciation of our country and what we represent as a nation. It was also a privilege to participate in discussions on how Canada, the United Kingdom, and France can continue to work together on key issues which led to important announcements by the Prime Minister.

By David Tilson, M.P.