

## From Quebec, two bad ideas

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As a former provincial minister under Robert Bourassa and Daniel Johnson, Liza Frulla is well-versed in the sort of soft nationalism that was the Quebec Liberals' stock-in-trade. But one might have assumed that, since her appointment as federal Heritage Minister, Ms. Frulla would put such leanings aside. Unfortunately, comments made this week suggest otherwise.

Speaking at a news conference at the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in Paris, Ms. Frulla seized upon the recent federal-provincial health deal's endorsement of "asymmetrical federalism" to suggest that Quebec Culture Minister Line Beauchamp could now speak on Canada's behalf at UNESCO.

"Line couldn't be here, but I could," Ms. Frulla said. "I attended the meeting and I will call her. But there will be times when I won't be here or I will be in Parliament, so Line could attend these meetings. We have a modus operandi. Line can speak for both of us very well. We'll agree beforehand."

For anyone uncertain of why it is that much of Canada -- particularly west of Ontario -- feels disconnected from Ottawa's decision-making process, Ms. Frulla's comments are instructive. The notion that Quebec is willing or able to represent the cultural interests of Alberta, Manitoba or Newfoundland on par with its own is plainly false. And it is equally absurd that a single province would be granted such higher status at international meetings than all the rest.

Ms. Frulla's plan comes at a particularly bad time, since Quebec Premier Jean Charest has already responded to the health care accord by suggesting that Quebec might now be able to participate in international meetings typically reserved only for national representatives. That Mr. Charest made such a suggestion is unsurprising, since Quebec provincial governments are always on the lookout for ways to increase their clout. But now that she's in the federal realm, Ms. Frulla would do well not to add credibility to this attempted power grab. Like every other country, Canada must speak with a single voice at the international level.

If Ms. Frulla's proposal was ill-advised, ideas put forward by Action démocratique du Québec leader Mario Dumont this week were downright laughable.

Speaking on the eve of his party's convention in Drummondville, Mr. Dumont outlined his plans to have the ADQ adopt an "autonomist" agenda. Some of his proposals, notably ignoring the Canada Health Act in favour of private medicine, might actually be worth adopting; but most, including the adoption of a separate Quebec constitution, are not. Particularly goofy is his proposal to rename the province "the autonomous State of Quebec" -- an idea that sounds like it was borrowed from the 1990s-era revolutionary manifesto of some central Asian former Soviet republic.

A couple of years ago, Mr. Dumont held considerable promise as a serious Quebec leader committed to modernizing the province's economy and shrinking its government. And we used this space to praise many of the free-market ideas that were then the basis of his platform. That he is now reverting to soft-nationalist sloganeering vindicates the critics who claimed all along that he was simply a political opportunist with no real ideological moorings. In retrospect,

Quebecers and other Canadians alike should consider themselves lucky that the brief wave of momentum he enjoyed in 2002 did not bring him to power.

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