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Chair

The Honourable Robert Nault

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•(0845)

[English]

The Chair (Hon. Robert Nault (Kenora, Lib.)): Colleagues, I want to bring this meeting to order. Pursuant to Standing Orders 110 and 111, this is on the order in council appointment of the Honourable Stéphane Dion to the position of ambassador. This was referred to the committee on Friday, February 24, 2017.

We're going to move this along at a fairly good clip. We'll let the Honourable Stéphane Dion, our new ambassador to Germany, make some opening comments, and then we'll get right into questions. As you know, there's a vote this morning. As usual, it will interrupt our proceedings. We'll try to manage the clock as best we can.

First of all, I want to introduce our witness and the ambassador, Mr. Dion, and his colleague Alexandra Bugailiskis. She is the assistant deputy minister of Europe, Middle East, and Maghreb. She'll be here to answer some of the technical questions, if Mr. Dion doesn't know everything that we think he does. That won't be a problem for Alexandra this morning.

I'm going to turn the floor over to the Honourable Stéphane Dion for opening comments, and then we'll go into the usual practice of Q and A.

Mr. Dion, the floor is yours.

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Ambassador-Designate, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development): Thank you very much.

[Translation]

Mr. Chair, ladies and gentlemen members of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development, I want to thank all of you for having invited me this morning.

I am happy to be joined by Ms. Alexandra Bugailiskis, Assistant Deputy Minister at Global Affairs Canada for Europe, the Middle East and the Maghreb.

I am sure you will all agree that the relationship our country entertains with the European continent will be particularly crucial in next few years, both because of the opportunities Europe offers us and the challenges we will both have to face. We will meet these challenges more effectively if Canadians and Europeans work closely together.

I will begin by speaking of the opportunities.

[English]

Europe is nothing less than the world's second-largest market, with over 500 million consumers and a GDP of \$21 trillion. We are speaking about the world's largest importer of aerospace products, fish and seafood, oil and gas products, telecommunications, and computer and information services. It's the world's second-largest importer of automotive goods, and Canada has less than 1% of that business today. It is the second-largest importer of medical devices and pharmaceutical products, and our second-largest customer of metals and minerals.

We need to make sure that the comprehensive economic and trade agreement is a success, not just a signed agreement. It must be a reality on the ground that will provide jobs for our workers and investments for our economy.

Today only 26% of EU tariff lines on Canadian goods are duty free. With CETA, 98% of EU tariff lines will be duty free for Canadian goods. For example, after tariffs as high as 10% are cut, exporters of Canadian forestry products will have an opportunity to increase their EU market share.

CETA will open new agriculture and agri-food market opportunities for Canadian exporters, with almost 94% of EU agriculture tariffs becoming duty free. The EU annual infrastructure outlay is estimated at \$400 billion, larger than that of the United States. The EU has earmarked hundreds of billions of euros for transportation, energy, and broadband projects by 2020. CETA is, for us, a golden opportunity to succeed in this huge market.

CETA is more than a welcome lever for our economic growth. It is also the opportunity to show our population and the world that trade and societal progress may go hand in hand. There is no need to choose between trade and progress. It is the way to pull together our ability to share the best practices for social justice, environmental sustainability, labour rights, food safety, and so on.

•(0850)

[Translation]

I will now move from the opportunities to the challenges.

Those the European Union faces were summarized quite recently by Mr. Donald Tusk, President of the European Council, and I quote: "The second threat, an internal one, is connected with the rise in anti-EU, nationalist, increasingly xenophobic sentiment in the EU itself. [...] A decline of faith in political integration, submission to populist arguments, as well as doubt in the fundamental values of liberal democracy are all increasingly visible."

Ladies and gentlemen members of Parliament, Canada and Europe are facing issues that know no borders, and which they will resolve better together.

Our demographic weight is declining in the world, and our population is aging. Consequently, our productivity and efficiency have to increase.

Our populations are becoming more diverse and more heterogeneous. In light of that, let us make diversity our strength, more than ever before.

Gender equality has not yet been achieved. Consequently, let us find inspiration in the best breakthroughs in Canada and in Europe.

The globalization of markets and automation are leaving behind whole categories of workers. Consequently, let us find a path together to inclusive growth.

Our planet can no longer tolerate the ravages of self-destructive development. Consequently, let us together find a path to sustainable development.

Our vast common neighbour, Russia, worries us. Consequently, let us strengthen our common defence with the United States, while resolutely conducting the necessary dialogue. Let us also strengthen co-operation in order to meet the common terrorist threat.

Not only will our free trade agreement help us, Europeans and Canadians, to meet these challenges together, but of the fact that Europeans and Canadians are now officially strategic partners will also help us to do so.

[*English*]

Indeed, in addition to CETA, we have also just concluded a strategic partnership agreement. This agreement encompasses key parts of our bilateral and multilateral co-operation, such as peace and security, clean energy and climate change, the promotion of human rights, sustainable development, and science and innovation.

As we can see, the relationship between Europe and Canada is truly at a crucial time. To maximize our chances of success, the Prime Minister is convinced that a new resource is needed: a senior diplomat to Europe playing an overarching role in advancing Canada's interests throughout Europe, ensuring coherence across the activities of Canadian diplomatic missions, and providing guidance to the Prime Minister.

The Canadian presence in Europe is presently in 32 countries through 36 bilateral missions, in addition to eight multilateral missions. The Prime Minister wants the senior diplomat to help him, the government, the foreign affairs minister, and all our ambassadors and missions pull together Canada's pan-European efforts. The Prime Minister wants this diplomat to be posted in one of the key European countries, and from there, ensure a more cohesive diplomacy aimed at advancing our shared interests with the whole of Europe.

[*Translation*]

Among these key European countries, Germany is an excellent choice in which to anchor this new diplomatic resource, if only

because it is Europe's leading economic power: its GDP of more than \$4 billion represents 21% of the GDP of the European Union.

● (0855)

[*English*]

As a G7, G20, and NATO partner, Germany co-operates with Canada across a range of issue areas, such as transnational relations, Russia and Ukraine, counterterrorism, the global fight against Daesh, and migration. As the ambassador to Germany, I will be working extremely hard, supported by our strong and professional mission, to strengthen this key economic and political relationship, which is key not only for our goals in Europe but in fact across the globe.

[*Translation*]

The Prime Minister has asked me to be this principal diplomat, as ambassador to Germany and as his special envoy to the European Union and Europe. I have accepted that responsibility. I have prepared actively for it over the past weeks, and I am anxious to leave for Europe and undertake this important task, for the prime minister, the government, and my country. I know that expectations are high, not only in Canada, but also in Europe.

[*English*]

In the letter they just wrote to the Prime Minister to welcome my appointment, the presidents for the European Council and for the European Commission, Donald Tusk and Jean-Claude Juncker, said that this appointment “affords us the chance to take those relations to a new level” and to “champion our shared values of freedom, human rights and democracy as well as our shared dedication to the market economy, so as to drive forward our common interests in a period of unprecedented challenges.”

I will do everything I can to rise to these expectations. I am eager to take up my responsibilities and I know that in this journey, I will always benefit from the advice and hard work of this committee.

Merci beaucoup. Thank you very much. *Danke schön.*

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ambassador. Those were good opening comments.

I'm going to go, as I said, quickly to the Q and As to keep us on time.

Mr. Kent, go ahead, please.

Hon. Peter Kent (Thornhill, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Ambassador-Designate, thank you for being here this morning.

[*English*]

Mr. Dion, we're all aware of secondary ambassadorial representation to smaller countries from a primary diplomatic post, but can you please tell us who came up with the bizarre concept of having a Canadian ambassador represent two major governments? Was it your condition to the Prime Minister's appointment after the cabinet shuffle? Was it in the Prime Minister's condition?

Hon. Stéphane Dion: I never made any condition to the Prime Minister. You don't ask anything to a Prime Minister. You listen to what he wants you to do, and you—

Hon. Peter Kent: Sometimes you negotiate.

Hon. Stéphane Dion: I never did it, never. I never ask for anything in politics.

Hon. Peter Kent: Okay. Who came up with the concept for the Prime Minister?

Hon. Stéphane Dion: The Prime Minister told me—and he said the same thing publicly—that under the new circumstances in which we are and in which Europe is, he felt the need to strengthen our ability to address these challenges through a new diplomatic resource, and he asked me to be that. That's really the way it has been communicated to Canadians and to me, the same way.

Hon. Peter Kent: Your appointment to both the EU and Germany provoked outspoken and widespread criticism from retired Canadian diplomats, and I am well aware of some seething frustration within the Global Affairs department today. We've also experienced in our meetings with the EU delegation here in Ottawa an awful lot of head shaking in trying to understand exactly what this concept was meant to deliver in terms of a message. It turns out in the end, unfortunately for you, that critics of this double appointment have been proven correct.

For those of us who have been around for a while—and I haven't been around as long as some on this committee have—it was a real head-shaker that anyone would have made this bizarre appointment and that no one with experience had raised concerns before it was made.

What are your thoughts?

• (0900)

Hon. Stéphane Dion: I'm aware that discussions happen, some positive, or a different view from the one you expressed. I'm accustomed to that. Since I am in the public service, I've already been around some very lively discussions about me and what I am doing for my country. I'm convinced that what the Prime Minister is proposing may be new but is needed, and I will do everything to make him right and to work closely with you and with this committee to be sure that this will be an addition to our ability to address, with Europe, the challenges that I just described in my presentation.

But you're right; it's a new way to address new challenges.

Hon. Peter Kent: Aside from your rejection by the EU, I'd like to explore another set of relationships you will have, not only as special adviser to our ambassador to the EU. As you know, Pierre Pettigrew is performing ad hoc diplomatic envoy service in pursuit of the ratification of CETA. I'm just wondering how you will relate to him. What is the division of responsibilities? What are the reporting lines between the ambassador to the EU, you as a special adviser to the EU, and Mr. Pettigrew?

Hon. Stéphane Dion: Mr. Kent, I know that you want CETA. I want CETA. We'll work together to be sure that it will work well for our economy and our people and our relationship with Europe. Mr. Pettigrew is doing that. I will do it as well. The Minister of Trade, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Prime Minister, and the opposition are all in the same boat trying to make it work well for our country. We will work closely with you on that.

I have met with Mr. Pettigrew more than once in the last weeks to discuss where we are and how we can make progress. I know Pierre very well and I'm sure we'll work very closely together.

Hon. Peter Kent: Finally, I would like to ask what exactly is the definition of your special adviser role. This is a very unique role to the EU.

Are you back-seat driving the ambassador to the EU? Will you have special access to members of the EU or to the EU leadership? Please offer us a definition.

Hon. Stéphane Dion: Since it was the Prime Minister's idea, I think it's good to stick to his own words. His words have not changed over the months; it's always the same thing. If I may quote him from last January, he said, "Mr. Dion will play a central role in advancing Canada's interests...ensuring coherence across the activities of Canadian...missions, and providing strategic guidance to the Prime Minister". Mr. Dion's position will be an "enormous strategic benefit" for Canada. It will engage with European partners, the highest levels on behalf of the Government of Canada, spending his time in both Brussels and Berlin, and everywhere in Europe.

It will be very demanding, but I'm in good health. I will do everything to deliver on what the Prime Minister is asking me to do. I know that this committee will also be a good adviser to me.

Hon. Peter Kent: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Kent.

We'll go to Mr. Fragiskatos, please.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos (London North Centre, Lib.): Thank you very much, Chair.

Monsieur Dion, thank you so much for being here today.

In your book *Straight Talk*, which was admittedly written a number of years ago but I think is still highly relevant, especially for addressing a number of challenges that the world is facing today, you wrote that our linguistic diversity has helped Canada become a model of openness celebrated throughout the world.

With the rise of xenophobic sentiment in a number of European countries, I wonder if you could speak to Canada's role in terms of telling our story of diversity, our linguistic diversity, multicultural diversity, and how we can serve as a model, if you like, or as an example, for a world that is grappling with so many challenges right now.

Hon. Stéphane Dion: It is true that we are perceived this way. In many corners of the world, they see Canada as a country of tolerance and openness. I think it's because of our history, which has been very difficult, with a lot of dark pages, but at the end of the day, we had to invent other models than assimilation and it helped us to welcome the world. This being said, we are not as good as the model describes us; we have a lot of progress to make.

When I was in politics, I did my best to make improvements to our ability to be at the scope of the model we are identified with. However, around the world, they look at us, and our Prime Minister, our Parliament, and all of us, as an inspiration in some ways. We should avoid lecturing the world. We should avoid pretending that we are much better than others, but we should share the best practices, the best ideas, the best values. Europeans are eager to do that.

It is something that I would be very pleased to participate in.

• (0905)

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Can you talk about that? I've often wondered about the tension that exists sometimes when a country such as Canada is trying to show itself as an example but trying to avoid imposing its model or its story.

Can you talk about how a country such as ours can avoid imposing, and instead engage and encourage?

Hon. Stéphane Dion: Yes. I think when we go to a country, let's say Germany, they had to accept almost one million people, without any filter, over one year. Imagine that in Canada. When our Prime Minister said we'd welcome 25,000 refugees from Syria, Canadians knew it would not be 250,000. They knew that we'd look at who we are welcoming. If we didn't have this ability to handle our immigration and our refugee policy, I think we would be much more nervous about all these issues.

We need to understand the context in Europe. This being said, we should have zero tolerance for intolerance. There are so many Germans who share this view—zero tolerance for intolerance—but we need to work together with them, with a deep understanding of the challenges they are facing.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: You talk about the experience of accepting Syrian refugees here in Canada, and I want to build off that if I could.

Do you think there is an opportunity in your role to share best practices with European countries in terms of what we've done here in Canada? I note also, at least as far as I understand, Britain is looking to Canada's private sponsorship system as a way to approach accepting refugees and expanding its system along those lines.

I wonder if you could speak to those points.

Hon. Stéphane Dion: Yes. Precisely because we are one of the few developed countries that has the ability to handle our immigration policy, we are an inspiration for many countries that are not surrounded by oceans and a big buffer, which is the richest country in the world, south of our border. We need to show that we have the ability to use this opportunity in a positive way to welcome the world and to be strong through our diversity.

As much as we share these challenges and solutions that we find working, we'll have a lot of interest around the world, especially today in Europe, to have an exchange about that. An aspect of our partnership strategic agreement is on these issues. I will make sure that it's well coordinated, that it's more than just talk, and that it will result in the best policies both for Canada and for Europe.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Fragiskatos.

We'll now move to Madam Laverdière.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Hélène Laverdière (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, NDP): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Mr. Ambassador-Designate, for being here with us, and for your interesting words.

I agree entirely with the fact that this is a particularly crucial moment, one that contains opportunities, but also enormous challenges. Currently, our relationship with countries like Germany, or with the European Union, are more important than ever.

I'd like to go back to what my colleague Mr. Kent said. A lot of people were deeply concerned or asked themselves some serious questions, including several experts, veterans of diplomacy and myself—even though I am not a veteran of diplomacy—in the wake of this unprecedented double assignment, during such a crucial period. I think we all heard about the surprise of the European Union representatives. I was in Germany two weeks ago, where I also heard comments, which were never directed against you as an individual, but questioned this dual assignment.

That said, I was wondering if you had already been accredited as ambassador to Germany.

• (0910)

Hon. Stéphane Dion: Yes, indeed.

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: Very well.

I would like to better understand your role as special envoy. My question may seem stupid, but I would like a clarification.

Are you a special advisor for Europe or for the European Union?

Hon. Stéphane Dion: I am the Prime Minister's special envoy to the European Union and Europe.

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: Europe as well?

Hon. Stéphane Dion: Yes.

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: So you are the Prime Minister's special envoy to the European Union, the Prime Minister's special envoy to Europe, and Canada's ambassador to Germany?

Hon. Stéphane Dion: That is correct.

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: In light of my experience in foreign affairs, all we can do is wish you good luck, because that seems to be a lot of hats for one person to wear, especially, as we were saying, during a very critical period.

I would like to understand the situation correctly. The current ambassador, Daniel J. Costello, will remain in Brussels. What will be your working relationship with Ambassador Costello? Will he be keeping all of his current duties?

Hon. Stéphane Dion: Yes. He does an excellent job, and so this will make mine easier. The excellence of our current diplomatic team on site, including in Germany, where there is a very strong mission at this time, will be of great assistance to me. The number two person in Germany—since the ambassador, Ms. Marie Gervais-Vidricaire, will be leaving her post—Ms. Jennifer May, is really very good. You know her. This will help us enormously. Mr. Costello is very effective.

What the Prime Minister is asking me to do—and I have discussed this with those two people, Ms. May and Mr. Costello—is to see how I can add to the dynamic so as to build a European approach. Our problem at this time is that we are very involved in our relationships with each country and with the European Union as the authority in Brussels, but it remains difficult to develop a European approach. Even the Europeans have trouble developing one, as you know.

This is not something we have focused on much up till now, because we had very few tools to do it, among other reasons. Now we will have the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement, or CETA. We are now officially strategic partners, and that is very important. Europeans have had a tendency to forget us a bit in the past, because they have a lot of problems to solve amongst themselves, and because they had a vital relationship with our neighbour to the south. Now we are officially a strategic partner, and I will have the responsibility of adding to this by devising a European approach.

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: Fine.

I'd like to go back very briefly to the relationship you will have with Ambassador Costello, with regard to the division of powers. I am really intrigued by that question.

However, first I would like to ask how you intend to divide your time between Berlin and Brussels respectively. How often will you travel? How do you intend to organize your work, practically speaking?

Hon. Stéphane Dion: I will adjust. I have not taken on my duties as of yet. I think it is entirely doable. I have a great capacity for work, and I suppose that is in part why the Prime Minister chose me.

I will fulfil all of my responsibilities as ambassador to Germany, supported by the strong mission we have there. I will also be present in Brussels and elsewhere in Europe when ambassadors request my presence in various countries. On various important occasions, in each of these countries, I will attempt to find the European dimension that the country represents.

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: Let me remind you that this is not directed at you personally, but to my knowledge the work of ambassador to Germany is a full-time job. It is not a 35-hour a week job, it is a 50 or 60-hour a week position.

I think it might be interesting for the committee to have you here again so that we may understand how all of this can be organized. It could even be done via video conference. We will try not to make you travel too much, because I get the impression that there will be a lot of travel in your future.

I'd like to go back to the relationship between you and the European Union ambassadors, and those of other European countries.

Hon. Stéphane Dion: Yes.

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: Will there be some sort of relationship of authority?

Hon. Stéphane Dion: We will have complementary relationship aimed at strengthening the European dimension of our work. When

you are in a country like Germany, as you just said, you are kept very busy by the activities in the country in question.

Increasingly, there are European stakes that are of great concern to Canada and Canadians. We must not lose sight of those European stakes. My responsibility will be to see to it that we never lose sight of them, so that we can move our interests and values forward in Europe.

In doing that, I believe that the complementary nature of the responsibilities the Prime Minister has entrusted to me will help me a great deal. While working to strengthen the coherence of Canadian efforts in Europe, I will also serve our interests in Germany. Thus, when I have the pleasure of being invited by your committee, I think you will see that that innovation by the Prime Minister was a necessary one.

● (0915)

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: I would also like to speak about the G7 and your perspective on the next meeting.

What are, in your opinion, the important issues that will be discussed at the next G7 meeting?

Hon. Stéphane Dion: Since I am no longer the minister, I would prefer that the minister answer your question herself.

I think we can guess at what the issues will be, but I think that that information should be provided to you by the minister.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Laverdière.

[*English*]

We'll go to Mr. Levitt, please.

Mr. Michael Levitt (York Centre, Lib.): Thank you.

Ambassador Dion, thank you for appearing here today. Congratulations on your appointments. It's been a pleasure to work with you over the years, over about 10 years. I have no doubt that you're going to do Canada proud in your activities in Germany and in Europe more broadly.

If I can ask you a little bit about multilateralism, keeping in mind the growing protectionist sentiment in Europe and the upcoming Brexit negotiations, what do you see as Canada's role in supporting multilateral institutions as Europe continues to go through this more protectionist dynamic?

Hon. Stéphane Dion: I think it's a key role. In Canada—and it's beyond political parties—we know that we are a trading nation, that we need trade. We have also the duty to show that, if it's well negotiated, a free trade agreement is not a race to the bottom on social justice, environmental protection, workers' rights, and food safety. It's way to spread the best practices.

Let's talk a minute about the environment, if you'll allow me. It's clear that we have self-destructive developments too often, as human beings, in our relationship with the planet. In order to shift it toward sustainable development that will protect the ability of the next generations to have development, we need to spread the best practices and to speed up innovation. If we have protectionism, that will not be possible. Canada being open to Europe, and Europe to Canada, is the best way, if it's well negotiated—and I think CETA has been well negotiated by both Canada and Europe. It's the best way to address the environmental challenges, which don't know any borders. Canada must show that's the case when we negotiate with Europe, or with the United States, or with Asia.

Mr. Michael Levitt: Thank you.

I want to move to a topic that I know is very important to you. It's certainly one that's been a focus for my work in Parliament. It's the topic of international human rights. Certainly Germany, where you'll be serving as ambassador, is a leading country in that regard. Of course, you'll also be working with other European countries who will have great concerns over some of the international human rights abuses we're seeing around the world, where Canada can play a strong voice, and is playing a strong voice, in terms of messaging the importance of speaking out against the situations as they exist.

I'm looking at the continuing human rights abuses that we're seeing developing in Russia, as an example. We've seen a flare-up recently in Chechnya. Even beyond just the European borders, as we get into other parts of the world, how do you see your being able to deliver and work with these new European partners on upholding international human rights across the globe?

Hon. Stéphane Dion: It will be at the core of what we need to do with the Europeans. You mentioned the challenges they are facing within Europe. I just quoted EC president Tusk—I prefer to use his words instead of putting words in his mouth—who said that xenophobia is on the rise in Europe. There's protectionism and populism. There's this view of society that the people are facing an elite who's controlling the institutions, so then you need control of the institutions by choosing a leader who will be the people. This kind of illiberal democratic model is strong in some countries in Europe already. It's something that is a concern for Canadians and for Canada.

We need to work with Europe to be sure that strong liberal democratic values, the ones that Mr. Tusk mentioned, will succeed in Europe and around the world. When we speak about Europe, and when we speak about the EU especially, it is the first donor of international aid around the world. Too often we work in parallel with them instead of working with them for human rights, for development, for environmental policies. We have an opportunity, now that we are an official strategic partner of Europe, to be sure that each time humankind needs a strong relationship between Canada and the EU, it will happen.

● (0920)

Mr. Michael Levitt: We've talked about the opportunities. There are many opportunities for you to be able to make a real difference on the ground in Europe. What do you think are the main challenges you will be facing? What are the real uphill battles that you will dig in on, and where do you see those coming?

Hon. Stéphane Dion: You will need to invite me again, as Madame Laverdière said. I am eager to start. The Prime Minister said the beginning of May, and we're at the beginning of May, so it will happen pretty soon. I have had a lot of exchanges with European officials about what we can do together. It's something that I'm eager to do.

What will be the main challenges? We'll see. For now, I see the main opportunities. If I may, perhaps I have time to sum up three priorities.

Mr. Michael Levitt: Please.

Hon. Stéphane Dion: These are not my priorities but the Prime Minister's priorities, since I am his special envoy.

The first one is to make sure that our trade agreement will succeed for Canadians. The second one is what we just discussed, which is how Canada can support Europe in the values that we share. The third one is how we can strengthen our relationship with Europe when we work elsewhere in the world, including for the challenges you mentioned with our neighbour Russia, or development in Africa, or emerging economies in Asia.

We need to work with Europe on all of this, because we're in the same situation they're in, in so many ways.

Mr. Michael Levitt: Thank you very much.

Hon. Stéphane Dion: There's also our relationship with the United States.

The Chair: Thank you, Ambassador.

Hon. Stéphane Dion: It doesn't take very long, when you talk with them, before they raise this issue.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Levitt.

Mr. McKay, please.

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

Congratulations to my friend and colleague of many years. I don't share the skepticism of my opposition colleagues with respect to the wisdom of your appointment, particularly with respect to its strategic position. Frequently, ambassadors are focused on their own domains, and as I would understand your position, it is to take a bit of a 35,000-foot look, if you will.

The Prime Minister is fond of saying that our unity is in our diversity. In Europe, it seems to work in the reverse, or at least right now it seems to be working in the reverse, and you come in at a time when the European Union is undergoing significant stresses and strains.

One of the strains at a very high level is whether it continues to be an Atlantic relationship or whether it spins off, if you will, in some parts, to the south or to the east, particularly with Russian influence. The Atlantic relationship is a non-starter unless the Americans are vigorous in their pursuit of Europe. Under the current administration, the Americans seem somewhat less enthusiastic about Europe. In particular, their not pursuing the trade agreement would be an example. This has enormous implications, probably within your term.

My question is about whether you've had any conversations with our American counterparts about the role that America chooses or doesn't choose to play in this Atlantic relationship.

• (0925)

Hon. Stéphane Dion: Do you mean my European counterparts?

Hon. John McKay: No, the American counterparts.

Hon. Stéphane Dion: If I discuss with American counterparts what Canada is doing in Europe...?

Hon. John McKay: No, what America is prepared to do in Europe, and whether there is a changed relationship between America and Europe that, in effect, will affect the overall Atlantic relationship.

Hon. Stéphane Dion: Okay, I'm not sure on what you call my counterparts, because I changed jobs recently, so I don't have the same counterparts that I did some months ago. Also, the American administration has changed in the meantime.

I've had a lot of discussions with Americans about the relationship between the United States and Europe and in what way Canada may be helpful in this relationship, and a lot of discussions with the Europeans themselves. We are in the same situation. We want to keep an open relationship with the United States, especially for trade. We want to avoid any trade disputes, and this committee is working on that issue as well.

I might tell you that when you sit down with an European official, it's not very long before they raise this issue and ask how we as Canadians will cope with it, as the United States is 75% of our trade market. They ask what kind of approach we have to this problem, how we can solve it, and what we can learn from it. We'll try, we Canadians, to learn from what the Europeans do, especially Germany, which has been identified by the President of the United States as a key aspect of the relationship with the United States regarding trade.

To strengthen our relationships with Europe can only help in the challenges we have to face in keeping a very strong and positive relationship with the United States.

Hon. John McKay: We have frequently found ourselves as intermediaries between the U.S. and others. Based upon body language, if you will, between Chancellor Merkel and President Trump, that's a critical relationship that doesn't appear to be going as well as one would hope. Germany is going through an election, and I have no insight as to how that's going to turn out. Describe how your role as a strategic adviser would unfold in that kind of dynamic.

Hon. Stéphane Dion: I was with the Prime Minister in Germany some weeks ago, and I can tell you how much the Germans want to share with us any understanding we may have of the relationship

with the United States. It's key for them. They have a lot of interest in that and in the capacity of Canada to be working with the United States while staying Canada. That will certainly be a large part of my ability to reach the officials in Germany and elsewhere in Europe and to have a very dynamic relationship with them.

About the United States, the more we show that we are improving our ability to be strong in Europe, the more it will help us to negotiate with the United States. If you look at it as having no other solution, it doesn't put you on a strong footing as a country, but Canada being stronger with Europe, stronger with Asia—Ambassador McCallum will be with you just after me—I think is key for the future of our country.

Hon. John McKay: Finally, Russia seems to be stirring the pot. I don't know whether it's having some success, but it certainly is stirring the pot.

Germany is uniquely positioned as, if you will, the most European of nations up against the east European nations and then Russia. Describe what you have learned about Russia's role not only in Germany but in the European Union, which has surprised you or not, since you have taken on this position.

• (0930)

Hon. Stéphane Dion: What we look at in this situation is to be sure that our European allies will stay very strong. There are links with Russia for the economy, especially the ability to receive the natural...

Hon. John McKay: The natural gas.

Hon. Stéphane Dion: Yes. It is very demanding for some of these countries, and we don't want them to mollify, in order to stay united and strong in the difficult relationship with Russia.

Also, some of these countries have a very important dialogue with Russia, and I think, as you know, we Canadians have an interest to be well aware of that, because the NATO official policy and actual policy is both deterrence and dialogue. Dialogue is something that is key for the future of this very complex relationship we have with our neighbour, Russia.

By the way, this leads me also to mention that Germany, as you say, is at the core of these discussions with Russia, and is key to keeping a strong deterrence. Germans will be in the Baltic countries with us. For me to be then the special envoy of the Prime Minister in addition to being an ambassador will be, I hope, an asset for our country from this perspective.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. McKay.

We'll go to Mr. Kmiec, please.

[Translation]

Mr. Tom Kmiec (Calgary Shepard, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Dion, several people have used different titles: special adviser, strategic adviser, ambassador, special envoy. I would like to continue in the same vein as Ms. Laverdière and my colleague Mr. Kent, regarding your role of special envoy to the European Union and Europe.

According to the Prime Minister's press release, there was an exchange of correspondence with the President of the European Council and the President of the European Commission on your role as special envoy. Are you aware of the content of those letters?

Hon. Stéphane Dion: I have them right here. I can give them to the clerk of the committee. In my presentation, I quoted the main excerpts that show that the European Union is pleased to work with this new diplomatic resource we now have, for which I will be responsible.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: We have established that the Prime Minister had the idea of this role of dual ambassador at the outset. This is what you said. Was the idea of appointing a special envoy also the Prime Minister's, or did it come from the European Union, from Mr. Juncker or Mr. Tusk?

Hon. Stéphane Dion: The Prime Minister's idea never changed; it is still the same responsibility he gave me at the outset. The designation changed because it better expresses what the Prime Minister had in mind in the beginning.

This is going to help me. When I arrive in a European country, I will be his special envoy in addition to being the ambassador to Germany. It is clearer than saying that I'm also Canada's ambassador to the European Union, because the European Union only refers to the European Union authority.

The challenges we have been discussing for close to an hour now incorporate much more than the European Union authority. Certain ambassadors may want me to go to their country, for instance Italy, Spain, Poland or Georgia. Some of these countries, however, are not members of the European Union. And so we also have to cover that very European aspect.

We just spoke of the tensions between Russia and Ukraine. These countries are not part of the European Union, but they represent an essential European dimension. Switzerland and Norway are not in the European Union, but Canada must nevertheless maintain a strong relationship with those countries. The whole issue of the Arctic goes far beyond the European Union, but it has an important European dimension for Canada.

I think the designation we now have reflects what the Prime Minister had in mind at the outset much more precisely.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: You said that the title of special envoy was clearer. In that case, why were you not given that title in the beginning? As you said, it would have been much clearer at the outset, and would not have created a diplomatic and political issue in Canada and in Europe, as Ms. Laverdière, Mr. Kent and others have said; that is also what the media reported. This created a diplomatic shock in some countries, and for certain people in Europe.

Why was it not established right from the beginning that you would be called a special adviser, with special responsibilities to the Prime Minister, rather than trying to create a new ambassadorial position to the European Union and Europe?

• (0935)

Hon. Stéphane Dion: It's much better like this now. It's an improvement which is the result of internal discussions as well as talks with our European colleagues. This went very well and I'm very pleased with the result. These responsibilities will allow me to

explain very clearly in one sentence what Canada expects from its relationship with Europe.

[English]

Mr. Tom Kmiec: I'll switch to English now.

The EU never extended to you a diplomatic invitation to become an ambassador—agrément. Doesn't that undermine your credibility then? Do you believe it undermines your credibility with the European Union and with our European allies?

Hon. Stéphane Dion: No, and in which way would it? I don't understand the question.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: If they would not take you as an ambassador, then I don't really understand what this role of special envoy would be. I also don't understand the limits of this European mandate that you've been given. Does it include Russia? Does it include Turkey?

Members here have talked about human rights worldwide, and they've talked about relationships with America. I'm trying to understand the confines of this role that you have. If you put everything into it, then you have no role. If you put a very restricted mandate to it, and it's less than an ambassador, then it's something else.

I'm trying to understand. Did Canada hurt its credibility by trying to appoint two ambassadors in the beginning, instead of appointing a special envoy from the start, providing a very strict mandate, and explaining it to our European allies, coming up with stuff by ourselves and then telling our European allies how it's going to be?

Hon. Stéphane Dion: No.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: That's not it...? Please explain.

Hon. Stéphane Dion: I don't think so. You're entitled to have your own concerns, but I don't think they are shared at all by our European allies. On the contrary, as you will see in the letters that are tabled now for this committee, their reaction is very positive, and it reflects exactly what the Prime Minister had in mind at the outset.

When you have challenges like what is happening in Turkey or in Russia in its relationship with European neighbours, there is a European perspective on it that is in many ways shared by Canada, and it's difficult to address it only through a bilateral relationship with every country. You need to have a European perspective, and it will be my responsibility to develop that.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: What are the confines to your mandate? Does your Europe include Russia? Does it include Turkey?

Hon. Stéphane Dion: It does not include Russia, but it includes the Russian dimension of the European challenges.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: When you were shuffled out of cabinet, there were a lot of media reports that said you took weeks to decide whether to take on this role to become ambassador to Germany, to become ambassador to the European Union, I guess Europe as well. Is that correct? Did it take you weeks, and was part of it the trepidation of—you said—your workload? You obviously seem in good health so you can take this on, but what was it about the roles originally that made you take several weeks to decide whether to take this on?

Hon. Stéphane Dion: I don't know. If you went home and said to your wife, "Darling, we are going to Berlin", what would be her reaction?

Mr. Tom Kmiec: My wife would be very happy.

Hon. Stéphane Dion: Some discussions would be needed. It took some weeks. I also had an offer from the Université de Montréal, and the prospect of being home every evening for the first time in over 21 years was interesting. It was a very generous offer. I love being a teacher and I love being in the public service for Canadians, so I needed to make a choice, and it took some time.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: If I could just go back to the reporting relationship that you will have with the ambassador to the European Union, you said you're a special envoy for the Prime Minister. I'm trying to understand if you will be reporting to Ambassador Costello, or are you co-operating with him? Are you coordinating with him, or is there some type of reporting relationship to him? If not, is your reporting relationship solely to the Prime Minister?

Hon. Stéphane Dion: I will work very closely with Ambassador Costello. He is an easy person to work with. I'm sure we'll have a very collegial relationship that will be of benefit to Canadians.

I will have some responsibilities that are beyond those of an ambassador in a country or in an international organization like the European Union. To give an example, the Prime Minister asked me to have a yearly meeting of all heads of missions in Europe and afterwards to report to the cabinet. It's not something other ambassadors will have to do, but it shows that, indeed, the Prime Minister felt that something was lacking, a kind of European dimension of our efforts on the continent.

● (0940)

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Okay. Is there a reason why the Minister of Foreign Affairs can't be doing that?

Hon. Stéphane Dion: The Minister of Foreign Affairs will be well involved in all of this. We'll work very closely with Minister Freeland, and I'm very pleased to do so. She's welcoming the ability to have a special envoy of the Prime Minister helping to pull together all of our efforts in Europe.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Okay.

The Chair: Colleagues, we're going to wrap it up and take a five-minute suspension as we go to our next witness.

On behalf of the committee, Ambassador, I want to say thank you very much. We will take you up on your offer, and you can table that information for us. This has been very informative.

Hon. Stéphane Dion: I have copies for everyone.

The Chair: Okay, very good. Thank you.

To both of you, thank you very much for participating, and good luck with your very important role in Europe, and Germany particularly.

Thank you, Ambassador.

Colleagues, we'll suspend for five minutes.

● (0940)

_____ (Pause) _____

● (0950)

The Chair: Colleagues, we'll bring this meeting back to order.

As is the process, pursuant to Standing Orders 110 and 111, we are here on the order in council appointment of the Honourable John McCallum to the position of Ambassador to China.

Welcome, Mr. McCallum.

With Mr. McCallum is David Hamilton, deputy director, greater China division.

Welcome, Mr. Hamilton.

As per usual, Ambassador, you'll get some time to make some opening comments, and then we'll go right into questions from our colleagues around the table. We're well warmed up now. We've had Mr. Dion here, so we're in the groove. We're looking forward to spending some time talking to you about your important role vis-à-vis China.

I'll turn it over to you, Ambassador, for your opening comments, and we'll go from there.

Hon. John McCallum (Ambassador of Canada to the People's Republic of China, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. It's a real pleasure for me to be back. I've been in China for five weeks. I think it's a great position, but this place gets in one's blood a bit, so I'm always pleased to return. I guess my theory is that part of my job is persuading China, but part of my job is persuading Canada. It's good to be in both places. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to all of you today.

To get to the core of things, it's a fantastic time for Canada to strengthen its ties with China. As I'll explain, we have much to gain through building stronger ties with China, and the Prime Minister, the cabinet, and stakeholders across the country are keen to do just that. It takes two to tango, and I have a strong sense that the Chinese are also keen to work with us. Since the stars will not always be aligned so positively, now is the time to seize the moment and be ambitious. Now is the time to act. That, with the support of the government, is exactly what I am planning to do.

Let me start at the beginning. Within 24 hours of arriving in China I was invited to present my credentials to President Xi Jinping. I conveyed to him a message from our Prime Minister that can be summarized in three words, "More, more, more", or in Mandarin, "*Gèng duo, gèng duo, gèng duo*". I'm having six hours a week of Mandarin lessons to improve my skills in that area. We want, in both directions, more trade, more investment, more tourists, more students, more co-operation in every conceivable area. The president seemed to like that sentiment.

I would point out to you that "More, more, more" also translates into more jobs for Canadians, because every time we have more tourists from China, more exports to China, more investment in Canada from China, that has a strong tendency to create jobs in Canada.

I also explained to the president, in my very poor Mandarin, something that some of you may have heard, that my affinity to China can be explained by three numbers: 100, 50, 40. My wife is 100% Chinese, my three boys are 50% Chinese, and the good people of Markham, who elected me for 16 years, are 40% Chinese. The president smiled and he said, "No need for translation", I subsequently learned, so I like to think he understood what I said.

Look, China's a two-way street. Before elaborating on why I think there's so much to gain, I also want to comment on the fact that there are many issues on which Canada and China disagree. We disagree on the death penalty. We disagree on some aspects of the rule of law, and privately and publicly on how the Chinese government treats human rights advocates. We have a continuing keen interest in the integrity of Hong Kong's autonomous institutions under the "one country, two systems" formula. That's why the consular side of my job is critical, and also why, in my first six weeks on the job, I spent time meeting and supporting an LGBTQ group in Shanghai, female entrepreneurs in a group working to counter domestic violence in Beijing, and a woman called Ching Tien, whose organization, Educating Girls of Rural China, has done fantastic work in educating low-income girls over many years.

That side of the job is very important, but in particular I'd like to take this opportunity to address head-on an issue that has generated some controversy among Canadians, namely, Canada's decision to discuss extradition issues with China. While we are a long way from negotiating an extradition treaty with China, we've agreed to talk about the issues that need to be addressed for China or any other country to meet our high standards. This includes things like the death penalty and the importance of high standards of evidence in court proceedings. We lose nothing by explaining our system and talking about the values we hold dear.

Let me now come to the other side of the coin, the more positive side as to why China is important to Canada. China is the world's largest emitter of CO₂, but it's also the world's biggest investor in renewable energy, investing \$103 billion U.S. in 2015, which is more than two and a half times what the United States invested.

● (0955)

If Canada is serious about climate change, which we are, and if we're serious about selling our clean-tech innovations to the world, which we are, then we have no choice but to engage China. China also has 20% of the world's women and girls, and China is increasingly a key player in places like Africa, which face real challenges to women's health and education. If we want to improve the plight of women and girls around the world, then China is a key partner. The same can be said on working with China in the area of peacekeeping.

Also, if we want to engage positively on North Korea and other regional and security issues, we need to work with China.

Fentanyl is the cause of a major public health crisis in Canada with over 1,000 deaths. Many of those drugs come from China. If we want to address this crisis, we must work with China. I might say, the Chinese government has co-operated well in working with us on this crisis.

Last but not least, if we want jobs and prosperity for Canadians, then once again China is an essential partner.

Whether we're talking about climate change, the plight of women and girls, the Fentanyl issue, peace and security issues, or the prosperity of Canadians, in all of these cases China is a key partner.

Let me turn quickly, because I think I'm running out of time, to some of the key economic issues.

[*Translation*]

In my opinion, tourism may be the priority. It's a matter of numbers. I visited Guangzhou, it is one of China's second or third major cities. It has a population of 10 million people.

President Xi has said that over the next five years, there will be 700 million Chinese tourists. Consequently, the opportunities for Canada are enormous, and it is absolutely clear that an increase in the number of Chinese tourists will create a lot of jobs in Canada.

● (1000)

[*English*]

I mention briefly other economic sectors that are of great importance. Wood products, Minister Champagne had a very successful and well-timed visit to China last week, where we spoke to a number of government and private sector wood people and I think we made good progress in terms of increasing Canada's exports of forest products to China.

On agri-food, we are number five now in China. We could become number three, if we work hard. There's a huge demand for healthy, nutritious food, such as comes from Canada.

Clean-tech and environment is another major opportunity. China and Canada are both signatories to the Paris agreement. China has important environmental and energy-efficiency objectives, so there are good opportunities in that area.

Education has always been a pillar of our relationship, and that is scoped to blossom even further.

Ministers Joly, Qualtrough, Philpott, and Sajjan are working to enhance our ties in their own areas of culture, sports, health, and defence.

Finally, e-commerce is critical. We all know that small and medium-sized companies don't often export very much, even to the United States, let alone to China. China is a leader in e-commerce. The Prime Minister has spoken to Jack Ma, head of Alibaba. I have spoken to him. We are working together to get more Canadian small companies to get onto the Chinese e-commerce system, which will be a very important way to increase exports to China.

Mr. Chair, I will leave it at that.

[Translation]

Thank you. I look forward to your questions.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much. As I understand it, we'll be able to complete our full time. I think the votes will take place around 11 o'clock, so we'll be fine.

We'll start right off with Mr. Kent, please.

Hon. Peter Kent: Thank you, Chair, and welcome, Ambassador.

Even as you begin your new assignment, China has appointed a new ambassador to Canada and Ambassador Lu Shaye is demanding that China be allowed to participate and invest in all sectors of the Canadian economy. He has said very bluntly on a number of occasions that security concerns about state-owned enterprises investing in Canadian companies and human rights concerns are not up for discussion.

Now, when you presented your diplomatic credentials directly to President Xi, and that's a very great honour, did you raise human rights concerns over the lack of due process? You mentioned this—the death penalty, extrajudicial abuse of anyone considered a pro-democracy challenge to the Chinese Communist government, the president's stated intention recently to outlaw foreign human rights activists and missionaries, and the Chinese hacking of a number of Canadian government departments. Were you able to raise any of those very legitimate tangible Canadian concerns with President Xi?

Hon. John McCallum: Let me just go back to your point about the new Chinese ambassador to Canada.

I've seen the transcript of his interview, and it was somewhat taken out of context by the media reports. That being said, it is very clear that national security concerns are of great importance to the government and that whenever a Chinese investment, or investment from any country, is proposed that carries security concerns, it has to go through rigorous review. That has not changed.

In terms of the rules governing state-owned enterprises in Canada that you mentioned, those had been changed by the previous government. They have not been changed back. That could be an issue in a free trade negotiation, but no decision at all has been made. That point has not been raised by the Chinese with me to date.

In terms of my conversation with President Xi, it was less than five minutes and it was largely scripted, so I did not specifically on that occasion raise the question of those issues that you raised. They are, nevertheless, of critical importance to the government, as I indicated in my remarks. I know that Prime Minister Trudeau raised those issues with his counterpart.

I have served three Canadian Liberal prime ministers in their cabinets, Chrétien, Martin, and Trudeau—Trudeau two—and I know that in each of those cases, they have spoken frankly and freely to their Chinese counterparts about Canadian concerns over human rights and other such matters.

• (1005)

Hon. Peter Kent: Now with regard to human rights—and you raised your consular responsibilities—we've just learned that a Canadian citizen named Qian Sun was detained during a visit to

China on February 19 this year, accused of being a Falun Gong practitioner. She is now being held in the Beijing first detention centre. Ms. Sun is a Canadian citizen whose home is in Vancouver, and she is vice-president of Beijing-Leadman Biochemistry Company Ltd.

Are you aware of her case and will you, within your consular responsibilities, raise her case with the Chinese authorities?

Hon. John McCallum: I am certainly aware of her case and other cases. I had several briefings on consular cases before I went to China and also before coming back here when I was in China. In all cases, we have regular consular visits to ensure that they are being treated properly, and that is the case in this person's situation.

When I said that I take my consular responsibility seriously, I was being serious. Some of these cases are elevated to a situation where even the leaders will have to deal with them. We are prepared to act where it is required. I am kept informed of the situation in each of those cases.

Hon. Peter Kent: In most cases involving human rights persecution in China for religious beliefs or philosophical beliefs or pro-democracy advocacy, it involves the little people, ordinary citizens of China. There is one more notable consular case, a very high-profile case, where the Canadian government, the Prime Minister's office, has called in former prime minister Mulroney, among others, to act.

I wonder if you can give us an update on the case of the Chinese Canadian billionaire, Mr. Xiao Jianhua, who was kidnapped from his residence in Hong Kong by Chinese security agents and transported to China for what seems to be extrajudicial prosecution for perceived white-collar crimes. Again, Canada seems to be doing more for this billionaire than for someone like Qian Sun.

Hon. John McCallum: I've certainly been briefed on that case, and we certainly have been in touch with that individual. I don't think it's a good idea, either for legal reasons or for the sake of the individuals in question, for me to comment publicly on individual cases. That doesn't always help the person in detention if we broadcast their situation in public. I think in those cases, almost all of the time it is better to proceed in a low-profile way in order to do the best we can to help those individuals.

Hon. Peter Kent: Although I know that, I certainly receive any number of messages, correspondence, from Canadian citizens who are expressing concern at what they consider to be an imbalance between the Canadian government's pursuit of trade and much less vocal specific or general discussion of Canada's very real concerns about human rights.

Hon. John McCallum: As I have said, I take that part of my job seriously. There was an issue involving criticism of the Chinese by a number of governments regarding possible torture, and this was something that the Chinese were not happy with us about. That's one very recent example of a case in which Canada has spoken out publicly. I'm telling you that while, in many cases, it doesn't serve the person in custody well, we do speak both privately and publicly on issues that are of concern to Canadians and we, as the government, hold these Canadian values dear and we are not shy to speak out on them.

In particular, we work very hard on any cases involving the death penalty. There are now five death penalty cases pending, and we are working very hard to persuade the Chinese authorities, as we would work hard to persuade any government authorities, including those of the United States, not to exercise the death penalty on Canadian citizens.

• (1010)

Hon. Peter Kent: While I certainly agree that there are times to be silent while negotiating the release of political prisoners, wouldn't you say that in the case of a recent high-profile individual who was arrested, detained, tortured with sensory deprivation in a variety of ways, and released to Canada, that Canada should then speak about the completely unacceptable way in which he was mishandled and abused by Chinese authorities?

Hon. John McCallum: I certainly think that in some cases that would be true. In other cases, there might have been an agreement that was a condition of his release. It will depend on each case.

The Chair: Thank you, Ambassador.

Mr. Saini, go ahead, please.

Mr. Raj Saini (Kitchener Centre, Lib.): Good morning, Ambassador. It's great to see you again.

Hon. John McCallum: Good morning.

Mr. Raj Saini: Good afternoon for you, probably.

Hon. John McCallum: It's evening in China.

Mr. Raj Saini: I want to ask you a question about the TPP and its demise. As you know and you're probably well aware, geopolitical calculations were made at the time to exclude China from that agreement. Now, as the United States has recused itself from participating in the TPP, there's still a lot of interest in pursuing that agreement without the United States, including by Canada and especially by the Japanese. Now there is great interest between Canada and China to formulate some sort of free trade agreement.

Do you think it would be more ideal to fold in those 10 countries that are still interested, and to have China take over the place of the United States? Or would it be better to have a separate deal with China, and maybe see if there's interest by the remaining countries that were originally part of the TPP?

Hon. John McCallum: That's a good question. My mandate as ambassador is simple. We are in exploratory talks on a free trade agreement with China. That's a bilateral arrangement. I can answer questions about that if you wish, but that is currently my mandate. If you look more generally, the Canadian government is in favour of free trade as a matter of principle. Speaking as an economist, I think the best free trade agreement is a global free trade agreement under

GATT, or what used to be GATT and is now WTO, but that has proven elusive to the world.

Countries have issued various forms of regional free trade agreements, including TPP, which is now seemingly not working. While my mandate is just this bilateral deal, I would say as a matter of principle that Canada is always open to various regional configurations on free trade arrangements, whether the TPP or some new configuration, given that the U.S. is apparently no longer interested. I'm sure that we as a government would be interested in exploring those. In terms of my specific job right now, it's really focusing on the China-Canada bilateral discussions.

Mr. Raj Saini: If we look at China's involvement now, you can see that it's evolved into having its own infrastructure bank, and if you look at its initiative within China to expand trade within China and outside of China with the "one belt, one road" initiative, to me it seems as though there is a very clear opportunity for Canadian high-tech companies, whether they're in aerospace or transportation, to somehow have a presence there to make sure that we participate in what I think is a grand venture the Chinese have started.

Do you think that there is some recognition of that, or —

Hon. John McCallum: I certainly think it's a good idea that Canada agreed, albeit belatedly, to join this infrastructure bank. It would have been better if we'd been a founding member, but that's now water under the bridge. It is good for Canada to be a member of that Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank.

We also are going to have participation in the one belt, one road conference, although we're not on the route, but many countries who are not on the route are nevertheless participating. One thing China and Canada have in common is infrastructure. This Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank is a Chinese initiative. We have our own infrastructure bank that is in the process of being set up. As you know, infrastructure has been a major part of the government's program to help create jobs. I think there's great scope for Canadian companies to get involved with the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, and I think there's a community of interest in terms of China and Canada both pushing infrastructure as major initiatives.

• (1015)

Mr. Raj Saini: Probably the final question I'll ask is a question based on the security of the South China Sea. As you know, there has been tension there. There was a recent announcement or a recent ruling that China does not claim the South China Sea. I'm just wondering, when you look at the tensions that are there, especially the importance of that seaway that \$5 trillion U.S. of trade goes down every year, is there any opportunity?

One thing Canada has always been very effective with is its track two diplomacy and making sure that we work behind the scenes to create some sort of dialogue or some sort of agreement. Do you think that in this situation going forward Canada would have or should have a role to play to mitigate the tension that might appear in that area of the world?

Hon. John McCallum: Our position has always been clear that we want China to respect the international law on this issue. As to whether there could be some quiet diplomacy in which Canada might have an impact, I certainly think that is a possibility. My counterpart, our ambassador at the UN, Marc-André Blanchard, is likely to be visiting China at the time of this one belt, one road conference. He, at the UN, is very seized of these issues, so I think his visit, as well as that of the foreign affairs minister, of course later on, provides opportunity for discussion of these regional issues that are of great importance to Canada, and I do think there's an opportunity for more interaction with China in those areas.

Mr. Raj Saini: I have just one last quick point.

Just as a comparison with Australia, it seems to me that, in terms of public opinion, the Australian public is a little bit more favourable to having Chinese investment in their economy. They look in a more favourable way at their impact in the world, and as compared with Canada, public opinion is much less here. What can we do, or what do you think your role is in highlighting the strategic importance of having strong relations with China?

Hon. John McCallum: I sometimes am guilty of what you might call a little bit of Australia envy. They have twice as many Chinese tourists as Canada does, and it's not that much further to get to Canada than to Australia.

Mr. Raj Saini: And more students also, I believe.

Hon. John McCallum: More students as well.... Now I shouldn't be too anxious about that in one sense because they don't have the United States. We have the United States right beside us, so geographically and historically, it's natural for us to do so much trade with the U.S., which Australia doesn't have. But nevertheless, I would say Australia is a role model for Canada in many ways in terms of the strength of the relationship they have created with China.

In terms of your question about public opinion, I think part of the reason I plan to come back to Canada every six to eight weeks is that I think there are as many challenges in Canada as there are in China in terms of getting done what I want to get done. It's to talk to people in Ottawa, to talk to stakeholders across the country, but also to try to talk to Canadians through the media about the importance of China in Canada's future, not shying away from the negative things about human rights, which we were talking about earlier, but being balanced. We have to look at both.

There are clearly important areas where we disagree with China, but at the same time, there's huge opportunity for Canada and for Canadian jobs to have closer ties with China, and I think that's the message that I'm trying to impart.

Mr. Raj Saini: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Saini.

We'll go to Madam Laverdière.

[Translation]

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[The member speaks in Chinese.]

Hon. John McCallum: [The witness speaks in Chinese.]

We have three languages.

[English]

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: It's very nice to have you here today. Thank you, *xie xie*, for your quite extensive presentation. In fact, you touched on most of the points I wanted to raise, as well as Mr. Kent, on human rights and consular affairs, but I still have a few points I'd like to raise.

Hon. John McCallum: Okay.

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: First, what's your perspective on China's current attitude towards North Korea?

[Translation]

Hon. John McCallum: That is a very good question. Since you have asked it in English, perhaps I am supposed to answer it in English as well.

● (1020)

[English]

I'm happy to do that.

Obviously, North Korea is a huge security concern for the whole world. It is also true that China is the principle supplier of materials, goods, and services to North Korea. China has more influence over North Korea by far than any other country. China doesn't have complete influence over North Korea. North Korea tends to march to its own drummer, but China has an influence. The issue is what steps China might take.

We have certainly been monitoring this very carefully. I have been in touch with my counterpart, Canada's ambassador to Korea. Events of recent weeks have been of great concern.

It's not really my area, because I'm in China, not Korea. I would just say that my sense is that China is in the process of taking stronger actions vis-à-vis North Korea. I think they were already on that path before the interaction with the U.S. government. My sense is that the two presidents meeting has tended to push China to be more proactive in terms of trying to rein in North Korea, but I think they were already on that path.

It remains an area that is difficult to predict, and of huge concern, obviously, to the people of South Korea but also to the whole world.

[Translation]

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: Thank you very much.

People always say that foreign languages interfere with each other. The few words of Mandarin I learned probably led me to English. In fact, in this case we are talking about a second language and not a foreign one.

Hon. John McCallum: Yes.

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: In your presentation you said that you held a seminar or meeting in China on LGBTQ rights, that is to say the rights of lesbians, gays, bisexual, trans and queer people.

Hon. John McCallum: Yes.

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: Could you tell us a bit more about the situation of LGBTQ communities in China?

Hon. John McCallum: Thank you very much.

In Shanghai, I had a very good conversation with three people who held demonstrations over the past nine years. They are coming up to their 10th year. Canada supported this group over the years, and wants to continue to do so.

The problem is the same as in Canada, but it is perhaps more difficult in China. The major problem for a gay person is announcing this to his family. It is particularly difficult in China.

Since I wanted to increase our support, I had a conversation with one of our members, Rob Oliphant, who spoke to a Chinese friend of his. They will soon be having a Skype conversation. The possibility has also been raised that a Canadian may go to China to discuss the situation with these people, and possibly provide advice. Mr. Oliphant has expressed interest in working on this.

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: Perfect.

My next question is much more technical.

If you include the consulates, how many missions do we have in China currently?

Hon. John McCallum: We have four; one in Hong Kong, and one in Shanghai, Chongqing and Guangzhou.

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: Fine.

Hon. John McCallum: The Hong Kong consulate differs from the others somewhat, but if we include it the total is four.

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: To get back to political matters, you spoke—and I appreciated this—of global or planetary issues we need to discuss with China and Africa, for instance, to see what we can do.

China has seemed to withdraw somewhat from the Syrian file. China has abstained from certain votes.

Have you had the opportunity of raising these issues with the Chinese authorities?

Do you know their point of view on the situation in the Middle East, or will this be raised later?

•(1025)

Hon. John McCallum: I have been there for five weeks and have had quite a few meetings, but I have not yet had the opportunity to discuss that.

This abstention regarding Syria is a very good gesture I think, as our Minister of Foreign Affairs has said; she will be in China over the next few months to discuss these issues. I may also have this opportunity.

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: Perfect, thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: We'll go to Mr. Sidhu, please.

Mr. Jati Sidhu (Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Good morning, Mr. McCallum.

Hon. John McCallum: Good morning.

Mr. Jati Sidhu: It's a pleasure to have you appear in front of the committee.

Also, congratulations on learning Mandarin within five weeks.

Hon. John McCallum: That's an overstatement. I say I have 10 hours a week of Mandarin, which means I'm making progress from a very low base.

Mr. Jati Sidhu: I give you full credit. At least you're trying.

Ambassador, you have spoken at length that any potential Canada-China free trade agreement must present tangible economic benefits to Canadians, especially with respect to new jobs. In an interview in March, you noted, "The crucial point will be whether we can persuade the average Canadian or the average Canadian worker whether it's good for him or her".

Can you speak a little more about this issue?

Hon. John McCallum: That certainly sounds like an accurate quotation. I did say that at the end of the day, the government has to determine whether this deal is good for the average Canadian worker and Prime Minister Trudeau has used the same words.

The government is open to freer trade and open borders. In that respect, we have some affinity with China. President Xi Jinping's speech in Davos was along similar lines.

In principle, we support free trade agreements and open borders, but not all Canadians are there. I think the government would only wish to pursue a free trade agreement if we believed that it was good for the average Canadian worker and that, therefore, we would be able to persuade Canadians that this was a good thing. The government has not yet come to a final determination on that. Exploratory talks are still going on. Consultations with industry are still happening.

You can go along two tracks. Free trade exploratory talks are going on and that's good, but at the same time, independent of that, we are pursuing initiatives in tourism, agri-food, forest products, clean tech, and other areas. Not everything waits until the free trade situation is settled. We are simultaneously proceeding in areas that are really important for Canada, and more importantly, really important for Canadian jobs. I think that the more we can produce arrangements with China—like in tourism but also in other areas—that clearly create Canadian jobs, the more open Canadians will be towards closer ties with China.

Mr. Jati Sidhu: I know you touched on a lot of different sectors we can explore. Since you touched on forestry—and I'm from British Columbia—can you speak about one particular sector that you are going to be focusing on or is it a diverse focus on every commodity that's under an FTA?

Hon. John McCallum: We've been in the business of selling wood to China for a long time. When I was Minister of Natural Resources briefly back in 2005, I remember going on a trip to China to sell Canadian wood. That was 12 years ago. We've been talking about that for a long time and we have made a lot of progress in those years.

There is a model Canadian city made of wood in Tianjin, and we want the Chinese to see that and adopt that in other cities. The history of China is that they don't traditionally build things with wood, so it's an educational process. It's a process of getting them to change their bylaws and various rules to make it easier for them to use more wood.

The good news is that the Chinese are really seized on energy efficiency and environmental targets. Wood is good for that, so we are combining our wood efforts with our environmental efforts. We think there will be further positive progress made in terms of selling more Canadian forest products to China.

However, we also have to ensure that our own forest industry is serious about their engagement with China. Then it's not just on and off depending on the state of the U.S. market, but a serious effort to build relationships and ties with China, as well as the larger market in the U.S. We're working with the Canadian industry and with the Chinese authorities to try to create a situation that generates significant additional demand for Canadian forest products, not just from British Columbia but also from other parts of the country.

•(1030)

Mr. Jati Sidhu: We have 50% of the wood product coming from British Columbia, so—

Hon. John McCallum: Yes. I have nothing against British Columbia. All I'm saying is that some of the wood might also come from other places, such as Quebec and other provinces.

Mr. Jati Sidhu: Quebec is number two, yes.

Okay, to question number two, Ambassador, there's a growing protectionist rhetoric across the globe, from our neighbour to the south to Europe. I would be interested to hear your thoughts on the importance of Canada's continuing to persistently seek out progressive trade deals with China and emerging markets around the world.

Hon. John McCallum: I think that's what we're doing. We're having these exploratory talks with China. We've just completed a European free trade agreement. We're having talks with India, and no doubt with other countries around the world, and we want it to be a progressive deal.

Three things we have already mentioned to the Chinese that we would like to see included in a possible free trade deal are a chapter on gender issues, a chapter on environment, and a chapter on labour. Those are important issues that the Chinese haven't necessarily fully dealt with or registered in previous free trade arrangements, but those are things that Canada is pushing for.

Mr. Jati Sidhu: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Ambassador.

The Chair: We'll go to Mr. Fragiskatos, please.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Congratulations, Ambassador McCallum, on your appointment, and thank you very much for being here today.

Hon. John McCallum: It's a pleasure.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: The issue of human rights has come up today. You were asked about it, and to your credit you even raised it at the outset in your remarks. Could you talk in general terms about

the importance of engaging countries that Canada might have concerns about with respect to human rights, rather than isolating oneself?

Engagement allows for a dialogue; you can put human rights concerns onto the table. At least that's how I see it. Could you speak to that point?

Hon. John McCallum: Human rights are a central, essential concern of the Canadian government. We talk about that inside the embassy every day. We spend a lot of time on consular issues. It is fundamental to what we do.

On your question of engaging, as I think I said in my comments, you don't not talk to somebody just because you think they might disagree with you. If you did that, you'd never talk to the opposition because they might disagree with you. I think the better strategy is to engage. Sometimes it's when the disagreement is potentially the biggest that there are maximum gains from that engagement. I believe that Prime Ministers Chrétien, Martin, and Trudeau—the ones I have served—have engaged their counterparts on human rights issues and things of that nature, and we are continuing to do that at a lower level.

It is something we are seized of. It is something fundamental to our mission, and it is something we do talk to our Chinese counterparts about, often privately, but sometimes publicly as well. We also talk to like-minded countries all the time.

Canada, I am told, is among the top three in China to raise these issues, but there are certainly many other countries that are as seized of these things as we are, and ambassadors and others in our embassies often talk to each other on the best way to proceed on these things, because by and large, we are like-minded on these issues. If you look at the western countries, we mostly think along similar lines and we often work together to pursue this agenda.

•(1035)

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Thank you.

Ambassador, you spoke in your comments about China's turning to green technology. I wonder if you could explore briefly the interest in China in that area, and the impetus. What exactly is motivating China to turn to that?

I understand that obviously there is a great deal of money to be made in the investments they've made in solar technology and wind technology—huge investments. However, they're also experiencing real concerns around climate and air quality, in particular in some of their major cities. Could you speak to that?

Hon. John McCallum: I live in Beijing now. Beijing is well known around the world for its bad air. The people who live there notice that. Now, to be fair to Beijing, I've been there five weeks and the air has been great. The skies have been blue and the weather has been wonderful. I'm sure that won't always be the case.

Certainly, China has signed onto the Paris agreement. As a country, China has committed to do its bit for global warming. As I said, it's the biggest emitter of CO2 and by far the biggest spender on clean energy. On both counts, China's in there. This is something that I remember Prime Minister Harper always saying, "How can we engage on global warming without China?" I agree with Mr. Harper on that. This is an area in which we must engage with China.

I've also said that just about every minister I've spoken to who has engaged with China is keen. Right at the top of the list for keenness—I'm not saying they're alone, but they're among the leaders for enthusiasm—would be our environment minister and our natural resources minister. The natural resources minister, Jim Carr, is going to China in June. He's going to have meetings on wood and other things. Minister McKenna will be there in December, I think, having had a very proactive visit last year. We are heavily engaged on the environmental-clean tech side of it. Both ministers, one in June and one in December, will be actively engaging China. I think this is one area in which China and Canada are like-minded.

I also think it provides opportunities, including economic opportunities for some of our companies in the clean-tech field and for research between China and our Canadian universities in carbon capture and storage, and also for action in that area. I think that is one of the big areas where more co-operation could bear fruit.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: You've touched on the question I wanted to follow up with, which was opportunities for Canadian firms, so I'll conclude with this. We have a very active and vibrant Chinese diaspora, and obviously with your experience in Markham—

Hon. John McCallum: I know a bit about that.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: You know it probably better than most.

As we are engaged in exploratory talks now on free trade with China, and as that discussion continues and hopefully materializes into something much more, I wonder if you could speak to the potential for the Chinese diaspora to engage in this process and to help this process along.

Hon. John McCallum: I think they're central to it. As you said, I know a bit about it. I've said ad nauseam that 40% of my electorates in Markham were Chinese, so I know that community well, and I think they are a very important bridge to China. When groups from Canada visit China, they contain many Chinese people who are doing business in China, but often they're also going back to their hometowns, so it has both a personal side and a business side. It's not just Chinese people who do business with China, but I think they are an important part of the equation, and I think they are very active in this area.

I also think that whatever branch of the Chinese community these Canadian Chinese come from, they are almost all enthusiastic about stronger ties between Canada and China. By and large, that is a consensus in the Chinese Canadian community, so I think they agree with what we're doing in terms of stronger ties, and I think they are a big part of the solution to actually producing those stronger ties.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Thank you, Ambassador McCallum.

Hon. John McCallum: It was my pleasure.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fragiskatos.

Mr. Kmiec, please.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Thank you for being here today.

I have a lot of questions based on the conversation around the table. I'm going to cover Hong Kong, the free trade agreement, religious rights in China, and the THAAD missile defence system deployed in South Korea today by the American government. Then, if I have time, I'd like to ask you a couple of questions about the regional comprehensive economic partnership.

The Chair: We'll do all that in five minutes.

Hon. John McCallum: If you talk too long about what you're going to talk about, you won't have any time left to talk.

• (1040)

Mr. Tom Kmiec: If I can get to the last one, I'll be happy.

In Hong Kong on April 27, nine democracy activists were arrested ahead of the July visit by President Xi Jinping. We've seen what's been going on with the clampdown on the city and the disrespect for the original agreement that was reached when the colony was transferred back to China.

I'd like to get your thoughts and your views on what's going on in Hong Kong. I've heard from a lot of expats in Beijing and Shanghai who travel to Hong Kong quite often. They're saying that the city has been downgraded to a tier-two city. Essentially, the advertising that used to be in English in the city is now being converted and is all in Chinese script. As well, the city is just not as important to the Chinese government anymore because it's become a tier-two city. Also, the vibrant democracy movement is being clamped down on by the government in Beijing. I'd like to get your views—Canada's view—on this.

Hon. John McCallum: As I said in my opening comments, we certainly have a keen interest in the integrity of Hong Kong's autonomous institutions under the one country, two systems formula. I know there are some stresses and strains on that. We do what we can to support that. We have 300,000 Canadian citizens living in Hong Kong. We have a very active consulate general. We are very active in Hong Kong and we certainly support that system.

At the same time, you say Hong Kong might be a tier-two city. I mentioned earlier a tier-two and one-half city that was 10 million people. There's at least one tier-two city that has a population almost as big as Canada's, 30 million. A two-tier city in China doesn't mean you're doing too badly. I think there might be two tier-one cities according to some classifications: only Shanghai and Beijing.

What I'm trying to say is that Hong Kong does face competition as to which will be the economic driver of China. Hong Kong plays a major role and I'm sure Hong Kong will continue to play a major role, but so does Shanghai. When you have a country of 1.3 billion people, there's room for more than one city to have a major role in the financing and other activities of that country. Certainly for offshore activities and other areas Hong Kong is thriving. Hong Kong does have its challenges. Canada does support the system that the Chinese agreed to, but there are strains on that, I know.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: I want to talk about the potential for a free trade agreement with China. I know the Canadian government is interested. You mentioned a labour chapter as part of a potential agreement. You mentioned that you have Australia envy. I share that. I think Australia has done a great deal of innovative public policy changes that Canada tries to emulate oftentimes. Recently they also scrapped their 457 visa, which allowed foreign workers to gain access, work in Australia and then become permanent residents on a path to citizenship. They scrapped that.

Part of their free trade agreement had provisions that allowed foreign workers to be sent to Australia to work. That caused a lot of tension with Australian workers because people felt they weren't getting the job opportunities they expected. What does Canada expect to see in a labour chapter?

Hon. John McCallum: I have some experience in issues with temporary foreign workers and immigration from my previous job.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: That's why I ask.

Hon. John McCallum: No doubt that will be an issue in the free trade negotiations. I have not yet had discussions on that subject.

I remember from my old days about the temporary foreign worker issue that exploded with public reaction some years ago. I remember one of the issues was that you had a mine in British Columbia where Mandarin was a required language. If you didn't speak Mandarin, you need not apply for a job. I remember that was a very explosive issue in Canada. I have that in my head, so when we get to these discussions with representatives of the Chinese government I will be mindful of Canadian concerns, having lived through them myself. We weren't the government then but I was part of it. I remember it.

That is a sensitive issue. It's an issue that, no doubt to some degree, will come up in potential free trade discussions, if we go that route. One has to be aware of sensitivities in that area but it hasn't yet come to pass.

The Chair: Colleagues, it's the end of our two hours, plus we have 25 minutes to get to a vote. I think the ambassador understands that, having been here a few years.

First of all, on behalf of the committee, Ambassador, thank you very much for taking us up on our offer. It was very informative. We'd like to do it on a regular basis, so keep it in mind that when you are in Canada we'd very much like to hear updates on where we're going. Probably all of us in the room agree that China is a very important partner and the relationship that's being developed is of great interest to all of us in many different areas.

As a committee we are also very interested in China with regard to the strategy the government will have dealing with Chinese politicians. As you know, Canada has spent a great amount of time sending its political team to the U.S. Around this table we think that would be a good strategy for China, so we are looking at that very thing as a committee, of going to pay you a visit some time in the not-too-distant future.

On behalf of the committee, we very much appreciate your time. Obviously we wish you the best of luck because it's extremely important to Canada.

● (1045)

Hon. John McCallum: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I would certainly welcome a visit from all of you. I hope you can come to Beijing. As I said, it's my plan to return to Canada every six to eight weeks, so I would be happy to provide reports from time to time if that is your desire.

The Chair: Thank you, Ambassador.

Colleagues, that will be the end of today's meeting. It was very impressive. You have 25 minutes, roughly, to get to the vote. Thank you.

The meeting is adjourned.

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