



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

Standing Committee on National Defence

NDDN • NUMBER 081 • 1st SESSION • 42nd PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Tuesday, February 13, 2018

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Chair

Mr. Stephen Fuhr

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• (0845)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Stephen Fuhr (Kelowna—Lake Country, Lib.)): Good morning, everybody. Welcome to the defence committee.

I'd like to welcome our guest, Member of Parliament and Chair of the Latvian Defence Committee, Ainars Latkovskis. I'm going to refer to you as Mr. Chair, as well, just to make it easier.

To the Latvian ambassador and the Latvian defence attaché, thank you both for coming. I think it's been about 13 hours since we last saw you, so I hope you're doing well this morning.

I'll give you the floor to open up. We'd love to hear how things are going in Latvia with the Canadian contingent there at the forward presence. We'd also like to hear where you think we can make it better, because we're also very interested in improving our relationship with you as we move forward.

With that, Mr. Chair, I would like to give you the floor.

Hon. Ainars Latkovskis (Chair, Defence, Interior and Anti-corruption Commission, Saeima, Riga, Latvia, As an Individual): Good morning, everybody, and thank you, Chair.

Not so many hours have passed since yesterday's dinner. I'll try to emphasize some of the points we talked about yesterday, because I think it's very important that notes are taken and recordings are recorded. In our committee, every session is recorded, and it's available to the general public on request. Anybody can request a recording and receive that. We're used to working in such an environment, and we appreciate this very much.

First of all, before coming to Canada, my staff prepared a report on our relationship with Canada in general, but mostly about security issues. It was very interesting to read. It's kind of going back in history. My first degree is in history, and looking at how our relations developed over time, believe me, up to the year 2016, there were only two paragraphs. One of was them about how Canada became the first nation to ratify accession of Latvia to NATO. Thank you so much, once more, for this.

The second one was about Canada's offering our young officers extensive studies of English and French, which actually were very useful. I know many officers who have been here for that training. It's interesting enough that people came here to learn French more than they went to France to learn French. We use these officers now in our mission to Mali, so it's really useful.

Modern history starts in 2016 on June 30 when your government took a decision to be a leading or framework nation for NATO's enhanced forward presence mission in Latvia. That's when you start reading events that take place almost on a daily basis or on a weekly basis, different meetings, planning, people going back and forth, and agreements reached and signed.

Imagine this. There was decision your government took on June 30, and your troops and all the equipment necessary were there in Latvia on June 18, 2017. It took less than a year to move 450 men and women and necessary equipment to Latvia. Only two months passed, and Canada was a leading framework nation there, and, together with other partners, is fully certified as a battalion in Latvia.

I think it's a great success; a great success on the part of NATO and all the countries who reached these decisions in Wales and Warsaw. It also was possible because of your country and the people involved, starting with politicians and the Minister of Defence, and ending with ordinary soldiers who came to Latvia. I think you prepared very well, and now we're already in the second phase, second rotation, and in my view, things are going really well.

Latvia has the biggest NATO mission among three Baltic States and Poland. Interestingly enough, there are more troops in Latvia than in Poland, and Poland itself, who is receiving this help or assistance, has around 200 men and tanks in Latvia. This also shows that it's not only about receiving, it's also about giving. Latvia is the same; we're involved in six missions abroad. Our people, at this time, are serving in Afghanistan, Mali, Iraq, and other missions, so we try to do our best and not just receive help, but also, where we have expertise and knowledge, give it back where it's necessary for our partners, our allies, and NATO in general.

• (0850)

On our part, it was also very challenging, because, as a host nation, we had to put a lot of effort and money to accommodate troops from six different nations. That involved a lot of construction at our biggest military base near Riga Adazi, which is the biggest military training ground in the Baltics.

During the last year, we actually expanded this training ground, so it's even bigger. We spent a lot of money constructing new barracks, so your officers and soldiers are now under roofs since the fall of last year. We are going to construct four more barracks there: two will be fully funded by our budget money and two will be co-financed with Americans.

I'm not going to go deep into these logistical projects, but we have done as much as possible to make your army stay in Latvia not only welcome but useful for your army, because they are staying in the biggest military polygon. They're not just sleeping in the barracks, waking up, doing something, and being just there. No, they are training. They are training together with all the six nations, with Latvians very much involved.

Maybe one thing for the future, and I know there have been talks, but it would be very useful if you were to ask me to suggest something. We started this some years ago with the Americans, and it turned out to be very good. The Americans wanted to test some of their drones in Latvia. For that reason, we had to change some laws, and actually we did. We built airways around Latvia where these drones could fly around. Talking to the American officers there, I found out that this was something they didn't even have in Texas, the kind of territorial possibilities to actually get training, and fly drones close to the border, of course, with Russia.

This is something that maybe could be useful for you. I was surprised. I don't know what kind of situation you have. The Americans have plenty of land, but it turns out that the airspace where they can use these drones is limited, actually, to specific places like military installations, or something. We, in a very quick manner, changed our laws and regulations, and now it's possible. There are special free airways all around Latvia where you can use drones. I think it would be very interesting for your military people.

Another thing that Latvia set up in 2014, with the assistance of NATO, was the NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence. With the geopolitical situations today in the world, and Russian disinformation, and different developments in this field, this has become very useful.

Canada has been involved in this centre of excellence since the beginning, has invested money, and has always had its representatives working in Riga. Right now, there are two Canadians working there. Imagine that this NATO centre of excellence is not working specifically for Latvia. We sometimes laugh that they are not doing enough for Latvia, because they have developed different algorithms to see where the news is coming from on social networks, where our boats are involved, and where Russia is involved.

● (0855)

They have algorithms, of course, in English and sometimes in Russian, but Latvia is a small nation and a language not spoken widely is not used in this centre of excellence. Anyway, we can learn from what they have found in their studies, and the people working there are really good. It's somewhere also to invest and to get results from.

Maybe I'll stop there. I'm not so good at making long speeches. I'm ready to answer all your questions.

The Chair: Great. Thank you very much for your opening remarks.

I'm going to give the floor to Mr. Robillard. You have the first seven-minute question.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yves Robillard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Latkovskis, welcome to the Standing Committee on National Defence.

Since Latvia joined NATO in 2004, what aspects or key actions of this alliance have been most beneficial to your country?

[*English*]

Hon. Ainars Latkovskis: I have to say that, since we became members of the strongest military alliance in the world, it has been very interesting. I will say this is participation in missions abroad. That's where military personnel could get real training—Afghanistan, Iraq, and different other places in the world, Kosovo as well, and Albania, but those were many years ago. However, another thing, of course, is decisions made in the NATO summits in Wales and Warsaw. I think those were very important for us, and now we see the results, six NATO nations being stationed in Latvia.

From the general public's perspective, this is the sense of security, the sense of belonging to the west, to the democratic part of the world. This is hard to explain probably even for ordinary people on the street, but that's how many Latvians—and not only Latvians—who live in Latvia feel. When there was a war in Georgia, not many politicians took notice in the west. But when Russia annexed Crimea and war broke out in the eastern part of Ukraine, many Latvians asked, “What's going to happen if Russia does the same in Latvia?” The older generation had the sense, “Look at Ukraine, especially eastern Ukraine; it has a border with Russia, and so do we”. I had town hall meetings where people were just standing up and saying “Mr. Latkovskis, you were saying we are all fine, but look at the facts. We have a common border. They have a sizable population of Russian speakers. So do we in the eastern part. Those are two things in common.”

Where these people were wrong was that they were comparing apples and oranges. In Latvia, since we regained independence, we chose the course to be again part of the democratic west. We didn't choose some middle path or something wherein, because of the Russian interests in Ukraine, many politicians who were in charge of that country in the 1990s and 2000s chose some middle path, some grey area of security. It's impossible to be secure in a grey area, so Latvia is a NATO member.

Now I'll tell you how I usually explain it to journalists in Latvia and to the general public. You have a security system, which was set up in 1949, and your country was one of the founding fathers of this organization. If something happens, let's say some country attacks a NATO ally, and the NATO countries don't take a decision and don't defend, the whole security system simply collapses. What do you do? Do you choose? If Russia attacks Latvia: "Oh, not so important". If it attacks Norway: "Maybe a little important". If it attacks France: "Oh, this is important". You don't do these things. You don't calculate. Simply, if you don't come and don't defend and don't do something, the whole security system collapses. You only have trust in this because you believe it works. That's how it works.

After that, this explanation was taken on by many other politicians from almost all parties, and it worked for the general public as well. They understood.

What was probably the single most important act was on the part of two countries, actually. When Russia started its actions in Ukraine, two countries immediately made a decision and sent their fighters to the Baltics for air policing missions. Those two countries were the United States of America and Canada.

● (0900)

Everybody knows and remembers the United States of America; rarely, people know and journalists remember that Canada also sent its CF-18s to the Baltics for air policing missions. This is something you should know and that I think you should be proud of. It was important at that time. It was not so much important for Russia, to show that there is a deterrent; it was very important for Latvian people, because what they saw was that in a time of crisis we have friends. Thank you so much.

The Chair: Thanks.

That's pretty much your time.

I'm going to pass the floor over to Mr. Bezan.

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ambassador, Mr. Chair, and Colonels, it's good to have you at committee.

I want to direct my questions to Mr. Latkovskis.

First of all, I want to thank Latvia for passing the Magnitsky law. We talked about it briefly last night, the 63 votes and then I think the 37 abstentions. It speaks loudly that Latvia, Canada, the United States, and other European nations are all standing together to hold those corrupt foreign officials and gross human rights violators to account. I know that Russia has been kicking and screaming louder than any other country, but it has global application; it's not just targeted towards the plutocrats in the Kremlin. I want to thank you for that.

I also want to thank Latvia for being such a great host nation to our troops. All the members I have talked to at the Canadian Armed Forces who have been stationed at the enhanced forward position in Latvia have really enjoyed the experience of being there and of working with the very professional armed forces of Latvia as well as of all the other states that are participating in the eFP for NATO.

That has been a great learning experience for interoperability and for lessons learned in sharing that experience across countries.

As you know—we talked about it in the past when we were in Riga—we've talked about fake news coming out of Russia and those who are trying to appease Russia within the European context. We even have it here in Canada. We've had some journalists.... One comes to mind. He writes for *The Chronicle Herald* in Halifax and recently said that having our troops in Latvia is a waste of money and troops. He says it's "to counter a non-existent threat from the Russian bogeyman."

Even though we have some naysayers here in Canada, how do you, as a former journalist yourself, explain to those in the media and those who want to appease Russia how important it is that we have a presence in the Baltics?

● (0905)

Hon. Ainars Latkovskis: First of all, I don't know this journalist personally, but journalists like that in our country are very often called "useful idiots". That's the best you can say about them, and there are more serious cases where Russia simply buys people like that. They write whatever they're paid to write. But I'm not talking about this specific article or this specific author. I don't know the person.

In Latvia, we know these things very well. Although we know them very well and have for a very long time, it doesn't necessarily mean that now and then this fake news, or this information, doesn't get to our population. The main targets for this kind of news or information are not politicians, so that article was probably not written for you. It was written for your voters, so they would write a letter or an email to you and say, "What the hell? Why are you spending money somewhere there? We don't care about that."

You asked the question about Latvia joining NATO in 2004. We joined NATO, and we went on missions to Afghanistan, and I was at the time already in politics and people were asking, "Why Afghanistan? It's so far away." Even though things are messed up there and torn up like Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Russia, and thousands of kilometres...why do we care, for ordinary people?

We care, first of all, because we are now part of this military alliance. If our friends and partners are involved and have made that decision all together, not alone, we are together with them; and we know, if the day comes, they'll come and help us. That's how we look at the world now. That's why we are involved in six missions, although, when you look at our military, you see it's only 14,000.... We have 6,000 professionals and 8,000 national guards, who are voluntary. It's not like our resources are endless, but we try to do our best. Once things are already set, this actually helps us to get training, get expertise, get to know other army officers and soldiers from other armies, get to know how to work with them, and all of that. Another thing is, of course, that we are now part of this great military alliance, and we're responsible for keeping the world a safe place. That's our responsibility even though we're a small nation. You sign it. You just don't hope that you will be helped. You sign the agreement; you know you are also going to help with this cause. I think that's how democracy works. You want to be part of that world, and you hope that every country becomes democratic at one point or another, and you're helping to keep security around the world, wherever it is. We do that.

Mr. James Bezan: I know you have talked in the past about making sure that there is a separation of duties, even if it's on an unofficial basis, between the EU and NATO. There's no doubt, with the invasion of Crimea by Russia, that NATO's usefulness within NATO countries, especially in western Europe, has become more of a focus, and it has for a couple of decades.

My colleagues on committee here know that I've been a bit obsessed with PESCO, coming from Europe. Your previous comments, going back to 2015, talked about the role of the European Union and the role of NATO, keeping the separation of duties away from what is the military side of things, and what is more on the political action side. PESCO changes that a bit, from the outside looking in. I wonder if you could provide some analysis—

• (0910)

The Chair: Sorry, I'm going to have to hold it there because that's the time for this particular member's question. We might be able to circle back, but I'm going to have to yield the floor to MP Garrison.

Hon. Ainars Latkovskis: You timed that well. I have to learn something. We have particular people in my committee who just go and talk. I'm not comparing people....

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke, NDP): Thank you to our witnesses for being here.

I want to add to Mr. Bezan's opening remarks. Thanks for the hospitality that was shown to this committee when we visited Latvia. Certainly I found both the visit to the Canadian troops, but also the visits with Latvians, with you, and with others, very useful in understanding Canada's role in Latvia.

I felt the trip was important because it demonstrated all-party support from this Parliament for Canada's enhanced forward presence role. Not just in the traditional role of NATO in responding to threats from the east, but also in that enhanced role of preserving stability, democracy. I feel that's where we're making that great contribution.

What has been the Russian response to the enhanced forward presence? What do you see as the main impacts of Russian policy toward Latvia or the Baltics in general?

Hon. Ainars Latkovskis: In terms of, let's say, Russian military preparedness, the biggest military training in the history of Russia was held last year. It was called Zapad 2017, which translates as the "West 2017". The exercises stretched from the Black Sea to the border of Norway, including Ukraine as well. It was interesting to watch, because you could make some calculations about what kind of force could be used if there were a conflict. It was interesting to see that the territories covered thousands of kilometres, and the way they conducted the exercise was to cut off the Baltics or NATO, and not only the Baltics, but possible assistance from Norway. This is something we have to take into account.

That's where I can answer your question, and yours as well, because PESCO—an EU military kind of thing.... The one thing we support a lot is the creation of a so-called "military Shengen", because most of the NATO countries are in Europe, and moving troops and equipment takes a lot of time.

Then there are sovereignty issues. This is so funny, because not many laws have changed since the Cold War ended. During the Cold War, no politicians were asking such questions as how Americans from northern Italy would go to, let's say, Germany's eastern border to help, if Russia attacked. Nobody asked these questions because they would simply go. Now there are many of these questions. How will they cross the border? Will their guns be loaded?

There are problems when you look at the issue in this way, and this is something the EU has said. Really, the EU is not about the military. Latvia joined the EU. Of course, for us, it also gives a sense of security, because you're part of a big economic union or cultural union or whatever. These things simply are very important. Not only politicians are pointing them out, but also the military themselves, who look at logistics and at different kinds of training that have been taking place in Latvia during the last three years and also at the stationing not specifically of your troops, but stationing when the Spanish and Italians came. They are part of this mission in which you are a framework nation. They have to look at logistics: at how they are moving equipment and troops, how much effort it takes, and what kinds of procedures are requested by various countries. It takes some time, and this is stupid.

The EU has to do something about this. That's why it's important. At the beginning we were very skeptical, because we trust in NATO—believe me—very much, but there are issues that the EU can deal with.

It's also a question of research and development in this field. You know, countries that are small compared with yours.... Every bigger country—not the size of Latvia—has its own military production for using choppers and everything. This eats a lot of their resources. Something should be done about these different standards, although there are common NATO standards.

● (0915)

I have heard so much from different politicians. I was once at a big conference in France. It was in the city close to the Channel. At that time they had elections, and the new chair of the defence committee was elected. He was talking to us. He said he didn't want to listen to all the bullshit about standardization and everything. He said he came from this city and everything needed for France would be produced there. Fine, I mean, this is not getting far.

These are the issues the EU has to look at. I don't know how much it can succeed, especially when producing for the military also means people employed, salaries paid, social benefits, whatever. You know this is important. You have to somehow look at some unification in some areas.

Mr. Randall Garrison: I'm going to try the same tactic as Mr. Bezan. I'm going to spit out a very quick question that you can answer in response to the next question.

But what I would have asked—

The Chair: Ask it in 10 seconds or less, please.

Mr. Randall Garrison: What I would have asked you about is Latvia's involvement in some of the other aspects of NATO, including NATO efforts to reduce nuclear tensions in the east and in Europe. But I know I'm out of time.

The Chair: All right.

I'm going to give the floor over to MP Alleslev.

Ms. Leona Alleslev (Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill, Lib.): Thank you very much.

I would have loved to have had the opportunity to go to Latvia with the defence committee. We have financial constraints, and so the entire committee couldn't go. It didn't mean that we wouldn't have loved to have gone. We heard all kinds of great information from it. Even though we weren't there, some of us, we were able to benefit from the fantastic trip. Thanks very much.

The reason why we're having this study is to leverage a little bit of what my colleague James was talking about. We are at a point, I think, not only in Canada but in other countries, where the questions are really whether we need NATO, whether we should leave NATO to the Europeans, why NATO matters to Canada, and why Canada matters to NATO. That's the reason we're having this study and bringing people in to testify.

Is Russia really a threat? I think it's a legitimate question. I think people think it's not necessarily about invasion, because of course we do have the enhanced forward presence to be able to mitigate or dissuade from invasion.

You do have an election coming up. We do have an increased prevalence of cyber-threats, misinformation, and all that kind of stuff. Our democracy, of course, is based on our ability to have that information and those democratic conversations with our citizens.

How concerned are you about that kind of interference? How much support are you getting? You mentioned it a bit from the NATO cyber centre of excellence. Do you see that as a threat and to what extent?

● (0920)

Hon. Ainars Latkovskis: There are examples from different countries where elections took place. For some people it was unimaginable, some years ago, that Russia could even interfere in American elections. Now it's fact and it's known. There have been cases in Europe where elections are on a smaller scale but anyway it happened. Everywhere Russia leaves its mark.

It's not as if we are scared. We know Russia very well because we live nearby, and Russians live amongst us. Russians watch their news and watch their TV. They work amongst us. The biggest rate of interracial marriages with Europe is in Latvia. We know them very well. We see how it changes, what's on the news and what's beyond the news. Although we know them very well, it doesn't necessarily mean that we could be prepared for everything. We have done a lot to invest in our capabilities to detect cyber-attacks, to stem them.

Latvia, two years ago, was the presiding country in the European Union. We took it very seriously. We saw what happened to Lithuania concerning cyber-attacks, and before that to Estonia. Our committee was involved very much. We had regular meetings with our cyber-defence units, and we got prepared for this.

Now and then Russia tests us. Recently we had problems with a medical IT system. You would go to the doctor and be prescribed drugs and then you would go to the drugstore and it's all there. We have a shutdown for some hours during a busy time of day when the older generation goes to hospitals.

Ms. Leona Alleslev: I'm thinking a bit more of influence operations, because it did perhaps influence the American election. The American election didn't have a pro-Russian party looking to increase their footprint, and yet other countries certainly in eastern Europe have more...which has had a fundamental shift, perhaps, in the nature of that country when the more pro-Russian element has been successful.

Hon. Ainars Latkovskis: Now I understand, yes.

In Parliament we have and have always had a pro-Russian party. Years pass and the population changes and older people get older and younger people get voting rights. That party also tries to change. It's very hard because as in every democratic country, the older population has an obligation and goes to elections. Younger people are not so involved, let's say.

With a change of attitudes, the party also tries to change. They have joined a common European network of social democratic parties, and they're going to try to be on two votes at the same time. It's very hard because those who vote for that party, as I said, mostly come from the older generation that grew up and went to war during the Soviet times and watched the news from Moscow. They have some play in their hands.

It's not good for Latvia, of course, but just as I already said, it's very well known to Latvians. It's no surprise. Everybody knows the party, what kind of voters they have, and what kind of issues they deal with. It has all been known since the nineties when they started in 1993. They are there all the time. It's not new. You wouldn't expect developments like there are in the United States where you find out later. Now when something like this appears on a social network, it's very soon pointed out by ordinary people. You don't have to involve special units or the centre of excellence.

By the way, the EU also has a special unit and money devoted to fighting fake news. It's called EU Mythbusters. It works very well. You can find it on Twitter and Facebook. They look at fake news over a longer period—weekly or monthly—and then they show the fake news and show what really happened. They show the fake picture, which has been Photoshopped, and then show the real picture. This is also popular. It works well.

• (0925)

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll go to five-minute questions now.

Mr. Spengemann, you have the floor.

Mr. Sven Spengemann (Mississauga—Lakeshore, Lib.): Thank you very much for being with us.

I wanted to stay with the theme of the political component of the alliance. This committee will devote the next couple of sessions to foreign policy and defence, and I wanted to pick up on a question that my colleague Mr. Bezan posed to you, but be a little broader about it and explore with you the complementarity of the political sets of values that have built the European Union and NATO.

I think you were first elected to Parliament, if I have the facts right, just two years before Latvia joined the EU. Could you sketch for the committee the importance of the EU policy coherence vis-à-vis Russia and the world, and then add to that your assessment of the importance of the political side of NATO as a political and not just a military alliance? Canada is not a member of the EU, but it is a member of NATO, and for us I think the political question, including the deterrent effect of the unity of vision for democracy, justice, and individual liberty as a deterrent against Russia and other potential enemies.... It would be very important to hear your views on that.

Hon. Ainars Latkovskis: A whole afternoon could be devoted to this.

The Chair: You have about four minutes.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Sven Spengemann: We'll take the condensed version, yes, exactly.

Hon. Ainars Latkovskis: Let me give you some examples. The EU has been important. Like I said, it gives us a sense of belonging to the west, besides practical things like free trade, free travel—which is really free. You don't have, in the Schengen zone, checks, there's nothing. You don't even have to show your ID. You walk like you walk from one town to another in Latvia.

If you could divide up the first part of your question, exactly what kind of.... In 2002 I was elected, and in 2004, for two years we were sitting twice a week all day in plenary sessions, just changing our laws so they would be harmonized with the EU's laws. Those basically didn't touch any military stuff. The laws on our army, on security, we changed because we were on our way to becoming NATO members. They also needed a lot of changes and standardization.

In what way...?

Mr. Sven Spengemann: Maybe another way to cut the question is that if you look at the policy coherence within NATO vis-à-vis Russia—let's stay with Russia for the moment—and then the policy coherence within the broader EU as to Russia—

Hon. Ainars Latkovskis: About the EU, maybe put it this way—and this is like what the nice lady said—there are certain countries in which there are parties or a president in power about whom you would say they're pro-Russian or said something pro-Russian. It was all over the news, so people are concerned. Now and then they meet Putin, or some prime minister from Russia or vice-prime minister. Then they say, yes, we should do away with all the embargoes, and stuff like that. But when the time comes to make a decision in Brussels, when they sit around the table like this, EU countries are unified against Russian aggression, or fake news, or whatever.

This is more, probably, sometimes the reverence some politicians are paying to Putin when he comes. Or they are interested in some projects there, like Germany, with a pipeline, again, through the Baltics to Germany, which is not a really good thing as it makes the EU more dependent on Russian gas. I mean in the future, liquefied gas. You're also producing that in Canada, yes? Or not. The Americans do.

• (0930)

Mr. Sven Spengemann: Yes.

Hon. Ainars Latkovskis: They have changed their laws to allow them to export that. Then Germans have all these agreements and want to have more pipelines from Russia. They will be more dependent. There are contradictions, but at the end of the day, when they come together they are unified.

Who suffers most? Who suffers from these sanctions? The Baltics. But we complain less because we know in regard to security and economics that you sometimes cannot advance in your well-being if security-wise you are not in a good position. How will you then get investments? It's all connected. You cannot just say, we just want to trade with Russia, to hell with what's there. No.

Mr. Sven Spengemann: That's helpful. Thank you for that.

The Chair: MP Yurdiga, you have the floor.

Mr. David Yurdiga (Fort McMurray—Cold Lake, CPC): I'd like to thank you guys for joining us this morning. Also, it was great to have a conversation last night during dinner.

We talked a lot about fake news. We talked about cyber-attacks, cyber-defence, to a small degree, but we really never talk about internal corruption. What has been done to address that issue? Moving forward, is NATO part of that group to address this corruption that's happening? That's throughout Europe, but primarily we're talking about Russian influence.

Hon. Ainars Latkovskis: In what way do you mean “corruption”, political corruption?

Very often, there is no proof. Very often, Russia's agenda is like in America, where it coincides with some political party or some candidate's agenda. It doesn't have to be money. It's very often interests that are common. Russia feels it right away, and they abuse this or use this for their own benefit.

I also believe that very often, as it was during the Cold War, there are people who can be bought. There definitely must be politicians who can be bought. Well, excuse me, many people have issues, especially ambitious people such as us.

There are many ways, and Russia uses all of them, as did the Soviet Union. The President of Russia, Putin, was taught in KGB school. People in high positions around him are his former colleagues. The way Russia behaves now and what they are using, the tactics and the strategy, is very similar to what was used.

I recently read an article about how somebody finally got his hands on a KGB manual on how to work with foreigners. I think it's still used today. There are hookers, there is money, there is booze, and all I can advise politicians is to be very careful.

I have been to Moscow myself, before the Ukraine invasion. You get a call during the night in your hotel room and you're offered different things, and it's on you. They will use everything possible if it will coincide with their aims, to achieve something somewhere—I don't know, Canada's position on something, or whatever. I'm not talking just about you, but that's what they use.

Not much has changed. Maybe they have learned more. They are better at cyber things. They understood very quickly that the Internet is a really good thing for their aims, and they are using that.

This is difficult. If it's not going public, I can tell you a bit more. I'm a member of the National Security Council, led by the president. Every month we listen to our security services, and very often they pick up things and pass them to the security services of your country or other NATO countries. It's just interesting. It's interesting to see the way Russian security services work. It's almost as in Soviet times. They have their working hours from 9 to 5. It doesn't matter. You can very often notice that they are Russians because they finish work at 5 o'clock there. In Europe, it would be 3 or 4 o'clock during the day, or in your part of the world it would be different. It's sometimes so easy to detect them because the shift ends with, “I worked my butt off.”

● (0935)

Mr. David Yurdiga: Thank you for that. It's a hard one to talk about.

You mentioned that Russia is very aggressive. They use all means possible to achieve a goal. Have they used the economy at all? Ever since NATO has had troops on the ground and is doing

the training, are they doing anything in regard to the economy? That's a concern.

Hon. Ainars Latkovskis: Yes. We have sanctions, and the United States has imposed sanctions.

The Russians also imposed sanctions. As I said before, I think the sanctions hit us more than many other EU countries because they are more for foodstuffs. Because we have a common border, during the Soviet times the Baltic States were the ones who mostly supplied Moscow, St. Petersburg, and Leningrad, otherwise they would have been starving. They thought they would hit us and some other east European countries hard and we would be the ones in the meetings in Brussels complaining about EU sanctions, saying “We should do away with sanctions, everybody; let's just be friends.” They use this.

It hits them more or less. What they are eating now is not cheese. It's called a production of cheese. It's not real cheese. You make a cheese substitute.

Mr. Randall Garrison: Processed cheese.

Hon. Ainars Latkovskis: Processed something, but it's not cheese.

They have few of their own, and everything else from the EU and other countries are sanctioned on the list: milk, meat, fish, different stuff. Some of our companies had to work very hard to look for markets in other different countries, but they have found nobody went under the water, they're working, and it actually benefits our economy at the end, because they have to look somewhere else. It's easy to sell to Russia, it's a big country. Try to find some ways from small countries somewhere else.

The Chair: Thank you.

I'm going to give the floor over to MP Fisher.

Mr. Darren Fisher (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Thanks, gentlemen, for being here.

We touched on this when we were in Latvia and we touched on it last night. I'm interested in... I guess it's a unique relationship based on location, but Latvia has a lot of Russians in Latvia. There are a lot of Latvians who speak Russian. There are pro-Russian political groups and parties.

I'm interested in the misinformation campaign. When you think about the way they're spreading fake news, are they reaching out in Latvian, are they reaching out in Russian, are they reaching out to the NATO troops, are they reaching out to the general population, and is any of it having any impact? Are there any success stories on their end? Are there any success stories on your end, or is there a collective eye-roll because the Latvians so understand what's coming at them? I'm just interested in the dynamics of how that plays out based on the fact that a large portion of the population either is Russian or speaks Russian.

Hon. Ainars Latkovskis: I would advise you, if you are more interested in that subject, to look at the website of the NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence in Riga. They did extensive research where they employed these algorithms. They looked for news or posts on social networks like Twitter and Facebook concerning NATO's forward presence mission. What they came up with was surprising. Of all the posts or tweets about NATO's presence in Latvia, Estonia, Lithuania, or Poland in Russian, 80% of them came from Russia, with bots or somebody writing these things. You have probably read articles about these big houses in St. Petersburg where people are employed to write stuff. It was 80% in English, and 80% in Russian. There was no Latvian because they have problems with the knowledge, and then the centre of excellence is not writing algorithms or generating them in Latvian. It's difficult. We have difficult grammar, so it's difficult for them, but in Russian and English, up to 80%.

They tried their best, but they didn't succeed. Maybe in some parts of the Russian-speaking population in Latvia, it had some effect, but not in a very substantial way. In English, I don't know. Maybe the author who writes those articles follows some of these bots and reads fake news there, but they didn't succeed. They tried, and there was one case.

Right away, after Germans were stationed in Lithuania—a framework nation, like you in Latvia—they put out fake news that Germans raped a young girl. It took Lithuania half a day. There were officials out in the news, and it was on every official news site, putting the facts and saying it's wrong, and where it comes from. It didn't catch on. But Russia tried. They do this. They test and they look. Okay, if it doesn't work they don't employ it, but if something else works they will use that. They're good at it.

We have developed, in many of our countries, cyber-defence. They have developed cyber-attacks. They excel at this. They're probably the best. I don't know if the Americans do that, employ this, but they do, and they are really good. Defending is harder.

• (0940)

Mr. Darren Fisher: Do you have a question?

Ms. Leona Alleslev: Yes. I'm just wondering if you could share with us what your defence committee is studying at the moment.

Hon. Ainars Latkovskis: They can send only me here. I'm not studying very much abroad.

What I like to do—and I try to engage the whole committee—is to go and visit our troops outside. We go to training grounds. We see training. We talk to the people. When new equipment is bought, we go out and talk to those who use this equipment. We sometimes even try that equipment. This is really good. We changed to new automatic weapons in Latvia. I come from the times when we were trained with AK-47s.

Ms. Leona Alleslev: Me too.

Hon. Ainars Latkovskis: I know how it shoots, how it works, everything.

You're trained to do certain things and then you see how this weapon works. This helps. Instead of just sitting behind the table, there's a general or army commander, and you ask them, "How are the new weapons?" "Oh, they're fine."

Ms. Leona Alleslev: Thank you.

Hon. Ainars Latkovskis: I tried to do this, otherwise.... We are going in April to Adaži base for half a day and hopefully we'll spend time with your troops as well. I have visited Polish troops there, but this time we have intend to talk more to the framework nations.

The Chair: Thank you.

MP Paul-Hus, you have the floor.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Latkovskis, welcome to the Standing Committee on National Defence.

Last January, I attended a presentation in Washington by the RAND organization, which presented us with various possible scenarios for Russian intervention in your country and in neighbouring countries. They talked about military movements and military capabilities. To date, NATO countries have deployed battalions.

At the end of the day, in your opinion, is the biggest threat a military invasion or a cyber attack?

[*English*]

Hon. Ainars Latkovskis: In reality, if we look at today's world, I think more threat could come from cyber-attacks. Russia actually used this against Estonia at one point, when they didn't like the fact that Estonia was moving a Second World War monument. They were not taking it away. They were simply moving it to the cemetery outside of Tallinn. Then they were severely attacked.

Then the world saw for the first time what kinds of capabilities official Russia has. When you hear about all these "Fancy Bears" or something, this is just a name. Actually, these are special units somewhere in Russia and Moscow or somewhere else.

There's more threat than this, but it is like this because we can deter. The decisions by Warsaw or Wales or you being there, it's deterrence and deterrence worked before, and it works now. Deterrence really works. I'm not afraid of invasion, military invasion. In reality, cyber-attack could come right away.

• (0945)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: What you are telling me is that the military presence is sort of provoking Russia, and therefore Russia will carry out more cyber attacks against your country.

Do you think that having NATO troops on the ground is escalating the conflict?

[*English*]

Hon. Ainars Latkovskis: No.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: No? Okay.

Do you think that Canada could be effective if it conducted operations from here? The Internet has no borders, so we might be able to help you from here. Do we need to deploy so many troops?

[English]

Hon. Ainars Latkovskis: To be more precise, I'm not saying that because NATO is there that we are more prone to attack from Russia. I am saying that cyber-attacks are more possible in today's world, and Russia easily uses this because nothing keeps them from doing that. We just talked.... We have elections in Latvia this fall. A cyber-attack could be very small, or it could be as big as it was in the Estonian case when many government websites and systems were taken down for some days, and in some cases, even a week.

I doubt that they will do this because NATO troops are stationed in Latvia and they have no use for that. Now and then, they test us simply to see our weaknesses. I'm not talking about Latvia but the Baltic States, or Eastern Europe, or Europe in general, and North America. There's no reason, specifically, to attack Latvia.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus: Right now, in Canada, we are studying Bill C-59, which deals with cyber attack and counter-attack capabilities.

Do you think NATO countries should have cyber attack capabilities? Could Latvia request this capability? For example, could Latvia say that it would like Canada to conduct a cyber attack against such and such an element in Russia?

[English]

Hon. Ainars Latkovskis: No, we wouldn't like to tell anybody to attack Russia in any way. That's not our aim.

Our aim is to be a safe, democratic, and prosperous country. To achieve that goal, you don't have to occupy another country or take part of their territory, no, not at all. We have suffered from this, and that's why we believe in the modern, democratic western world. The thing is, because we are a democracy we don't do some things that are done by authoritarian regimes.

I think North Korea also has this capability for cyber-attacks, although there are almost no mobile phones or anything like that, and everything is forbidden, but they have this capability. How do they have it?

I wouldn't request, and I don't think Latvia would ever request that somebody attack somebody else on our part. No. We have no intention of attacking anybody—never, ever. Not even pre-emptively. We're not Israel.

The Chair: Thank you.

MP Gerretsen.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I'm wondering if you can tell us what the general perception is of Latvia's citizens with regard to Canada's role in Operation Reassurance.

Hon. Ainars Latkovskis: It's very positive, I have to say.

Even before Canada became a framework nation, there's one thing that you really know about. We all share a passion for ice hockey. We, as a small nation, have really good results. We've stayed in the highest league all the years now, as a small nation. Many other bigger nations like Italy are kicked out. They come in and go back, but we are staying there. There are many Latvians who have their kids playing ice hockey—not only boys, but girls as well.

This is where you sometimes feel like soulmates. Ice hockey is a big thing in Latvia. At least in our minds, you're crazy about ice hockey. I don't know how it is in reality, but I saw an ice hockey rink in front of your Parliament.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Hon. Ainars Latkovskis: We don't have one here.

• (0950)

Mr. James Bezan: We're playing tonight if you want to go.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: The Conservatives were really happy when we built that.

Hon. Ainars Latkovskis: You had 150.... We have our 100 years of independence celebration. Of course, the opposition is complaining, and even people in positions like me are sometimes complaining about spending so much money, but not so much on sports as on cultural activities.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: I'm just trying to get it out there. I'm giving you the opportunity to....

We see a lot. Through our work, when we went abroad, from the discussions that we've had around this table, there seems to be a great amount of satisfaction with Canada's participation at least on the parliamentary, government, official level. I just want to know if that is just as equally regarded by the average citizen who's walking around in Latvia.

Hon. Ainars Latkovskis: It is. Really, I'm also not living in the clouds. I have the opportunity to talk to people on the street.

I don't play ice hockey; I play soccer. I play three times a week, and there are guys from different professions. There are construction workers, teachers, people who own big companies. When they talk to me, it's always about politics, also about security.

In reality, I'm not bragging. It's appreciated. It's very much appreciated.

Some were surprised at the beginning, why Canada? For many years, Canada was out. Even a few were out of Europe.

Now since you're there, no incidents have been recorded involving your troops. They are very active when we have some sports events or so on. We organize and you get involved in being there, showing your equipment, talking to the people, as I said. Many Latvians speak different languages so they have the possibility to talk to you.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: I have to cut you off because I'm limited on time, but I appreciate that you got to the issue there.

Out of the four battle groups in this operation, Canada is leading the one in Latvia. Can you give us a sense—we all know, but I'd like to hear from you—of the comparable size of the different operations, and in particular, the number of nations that are in Latvia under Canada's leadership?

Hon. Ainars Latkovskis: We know well the situation in Latvia. Right now, there are 1,200 military personnel involved in Latvia, seven nations that will—

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Seven nations?

Hon. Ainars Latkovskis: Yes. There will be nine. The Czechs and Slovaks are coming.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Out of curiosity, how did those nations—and I'll just stick to the ones in Latvia—decide that they wanted to go to Latvia?

Hon. Ainars Latkovskis: Maybe politicians in those countries have better answers, but at least in my discussions with our military personnel responsible for this mission—what they have told me and what I have seen myself—for many of these countries one of the decisive moments is when Canada took a leading role.

You can imagine that in Europe, very often there is military training happening. Many European countries and units travel to each other and take part in training, because the distances are not great, of course. Canada is not a country that very often gets involved in training. Americans are more present in Europe—they are always there and they encourage us—but this was something that pushed other countries in that direction, to take the decision to play a part in Latvia.

• (0955)

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Other countries got involved because Canada was involved.

Hon. Ainars Latkovskis: Yes, many of them. I know for sure that Russia was devastated when Spain and Italy decided to join this group in Latvia. They didn't expect it.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: What value do you put on that?

Hon. Ainars Latkovskis: Very much value, because when you talk to the general public, they ask, “Why are you in Afghanistan? It's so far away.” Or they say, “Spain and Italy are in the south. Why should they come and help us?” But they come, and that's for you to judge. They come, and that's why people have more trust in NATO than before. Before, we said that in the case of military conflict or war, although article 5 says our friends will come and help, who is really going to help? Back then, you just hoped. Now they are there, and the numbers are growing.

The training grounds we are offering, the logistics, and everything else is why the Czechs and Slovaks are coming, for example, additionally.

It's a big mission. I don't know exactly how many are in Poland, Lithuania, and Estonia. In Estonia they have the Brits and the French, and in Lithuania the Germans and some other nation—the Danes?

A voice: Yes, I would say the Danes, in smaller numbers.

The Chair: I'm going to have to end that question there and I'm going to give the floor to Mr. Garrison. You can run a little longer if you'd like.

Mr. Randall Garrison: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

One of the things we have seen recently in Europe is some manoeuvring of tactical nuclear weapons and movements. The United States moved tactical nuclear weapons from Turkey to Romania, which may have more to do with Turkish relations than it does anything else, but we also saw the movement of Russian nuclear-capable Iskander-M missiles into Kaliningrad.

The question I tried to sneak in at the end of my last round is really, what has been the Latvian response within NATO, in terms of trying to reduce the nuclear escalation or nuclear tensions?

Hon. Ainars Latkovskis: We are keeping calm, and this way there are no announcements from politicians; there is no rattling of arms. With the assistance of NATO countries and their security services, we follow the situation very closely. We know what's going on, we are informed, and I think it is the right approach.

Mr. Randall Garrison: NATO used to have, though, more active efforts under way to look toward anti-nuclear proliferation and anti-nuclear tension-building. Has Latvia made any requests inside NATO to reactivate those kinds of measures?

Hon. Ainars Latkovskis: I don't think so. I'm not aware of any.

Mr. Randall Garrison: Do you see a useful role for NATO in trying to become re-involved in those kinds of things? Certainly, the danger of tactical nuclear weapons is the idea that they're somehow usable without a catastrophe for the entire world.

Hon. Ainars Latkovskis: A year ago, a BBC documentary looked hypothetically at the possible usage of these because of the conflict in Latvia. This was a documentary that was watched by many Latvians. Of course, it asked some questions, but I'm not a great specialist on non-proliferation issues. Hopefully, heads of NATO countries who will be meeting again this year—

Where is it going to happen?

His Excellency Karlis Eihenbaums (Ambassador of the Republic of Latvia to Canada): It's in July.

Hon. Ainars Latkovskis: In July, but where?

Mr. Karlis Eihenbaums: It's in Brussels.

Hon. Ainars Latkovskis: —will address these issues as well, but I really don't know. I share your concern, but I have no information concerning these issues.

Mr. Randall Garrison: Thank you.

The Chair: That ends our formal round of questioning. Given the clock and our committee business at a quarter after and the need for a few minutes to suspend and say goodbye to our witnesses, I'll give two more five-minute questions.

I'll start with the government side, then I'll give the last question to Mr. Bezan or whoever on the Conservative side wants it.

I'll give the five-minute question to Mr. Spengemann. If you would like to share your time, you're welcome to do so.

Mr. Spengemann, the floor is yours.

Mr. Sven Spengemann: Mr. Chair, thanks very much.

I want us to return for a minute to the big-picture political question.

NATO is an alliance that's founded on the principles of democracy, individual liberty, and the rule of law. Anecdotally, within the international community there is an emerging sentiment that things are chaotic, unsettled, and that there are fewer and fewer countries that will stand up for the values of the rules-based international order.

To what extent do you think that's true in the perception of the Latvian people? Is it true in your own perception, and is there more that needs to be done to defend the core values of democracy and liberty?

• (1000)

Hon. Ainars Latkovskis: What made things worse, as you know, was the so-called Budapest agreement, when Americans, Brits, and Russia agreed that Ukraine should get rid of its nuclear weapons after the Soviet Union broke down. That agreement said something about the Ukraine being kept as one territory, so it didn't work. It's really bad for that clause, I believe, but I think it's worth fighting for.

The decisions the European Union took after Russia annexed Crimea are the right ones. Otherwise, it would be like history repeating itself all over again. It would be as it was before the Second World War. The leaders of the EU could not afford something like this; it would be devastating.

Going back to some of the questions about why you should become involved or why we should become involved, I would say from my heart that if something happens in the Arctic, in the territories that you are rightfully saying are yours, believe me, we'll be there. Our people are training right now. They jump into cold water through the ice and they are learning how to survive—not specifically for a future case like this, but that's what we do for training. We involve your troops as well in that kind of training, but I guess you do the same here in Canada as well.

But who would do that?

Mr. Sven Spengemann: We jump into cold water most of the time.

Mr. Chair, I'll delegate the rest of my time to my colleagues.

The Chair: Mr. Robillard.

[Translation]

Mr. Yves Robillard: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

A March 2017 *National Post* article quoted Paul Rutherford, former commander of the Joint Forces Cyber Component, stating:

[English]

We definitely have to get it right. We have to go to Latvia with a strong defensive posture.

We will educate our troops about vulnerabilities, because Russia is quite adept in the cyber and information warfare domains.

[Translation]

Almost a year after that statement, what do you think the current state of this war of disinformation is?

[English]

Hon. Ainars Latkovskis: I already tried to explain. There was the case of Lithuania, where they did as much as possible at that point, trying to put out fake news about the rape of a young girl. That news didn't fly. They did a lot of posts on Facebook and tweets on Twitter in Russian and English, which were targeted at NATO. In general, the content was more about how NATO is a bad thing and there is no need for NATO to be...and Russia is a nice country. But it didn't go anywhere. It didn't influence societies.

I think you have to take a look at it. They are not trying to target your troops there. They are trying to influence the local population and put them against the troops, but they haven't succeeded.

I told you yesterday, but probably I'll tell you once more. Your ice hockey team, on the way to the Olympic games, had the last friendly game, a training game, and it took place in Latvia. The Latvian national team is coached by a Canadian. I play soccer. I don't know his name—

A voice: Hartley.

Hon Ainars Latkovskis: Hartley. Before that game, the opening ceremony was...our soldiers and your soldiers. The biggest arena in Latvia was full of people. They were rejoicing. They were all happy. There were Canadian and Latvian flags. It was the most-watched game last year.

They are not succeeding; that's the thing. I have to tell you they are not succeeding because, as I said, we know them very well. It doesn't necessarily mean that maybe they'll succeed somewhere. But they try, like with Lithuania. They would probably have tried in Latvia, but then the Germans were first to be stationed there, sooner than the Canadians. They tried there. They looked... "Oh, it doesn't work. Okay, no waste of time." They have stuff enough to do around the world. They're busy.

• (1005)

The Chair: The last question is to MP Bezan.

Mr. James Bezan: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I have two questions. I'll ask the first one.

Latvia, Estonia, Lithuania, Poland, and Romania have all benefited from their membership in NATO over the last 15 years. There are other countries that have aspirations to join NATO: Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova in particular. How does Latvia view that potential membership?

Hon. Ainars Latkovskis: Yes, we are supporting them, especially Georgia. I think they have been ready for some time. I know there are some problems with some NATO member countries that always postpone these dates and put forward new targets to be achieved by Georgia. They do everything possible. But they had elections, and the first elections were very harsh against the opposition, but not as harsh as what usually happens in that part of the world. So they had the second elections and they were, I would say, democratic. They deserve it, and they are ready. In that part of the region, we have to have an ally, a strong ally. I'm not very good with my English. We need a friend there—not only us, Latvia, but I think NATO.

Moldova is a bit more of a difficult situation, but hopefully one day. Yes, why not? And the same with Ukraine. I would wish them to do well and become a modern western country.

Mr. James Bezan: I'd say with the defence reforms that are taking place there, that in time, and hopefully sooner than later, they'll meet all the targets laid out by NATO for membership. I know Mr. Yurdiga and I are both of Ukrainian heritage, and so we are quite passionate about Ukraine.

Hon. Ainars Latkovskis: You have 200 people there for training missions.

Mr. James Bezan: Yes, we have over 200 people in training and other operations.

Hon. Ainars Latkovskis: You're doing a really good job. However, instead of just feeding them with promises and then saying they have to achieve this and that, of course they have to do that, but at the same time you have to give them, besides training, also something to fight with, some equipment. They have to have—

Mr. James Bezan: As Conservatives, we support providing lethal military equipment to Ukraine. It's actually party policy here.

Hon. Ainars Latkovskis: That's my personal view. I'm not speaking on the part of the Latvian government.

Mr. James Bezan: I'll just move on to the next question before we run out of time here.

Everything that Canada has been doing and what we've been talking about largely has been around cybersecurity, as well as ground-based army operations through eFP Latvia.

What about the other threats coming from Russia? You are a Baltic nation. What's taking place in and under the sea, and what types of aerial threats is Latvia dealing with right now?

Hon. Ainars Latkovskis: What we have in the Baltics is called an air policing mission. It has its limits. In name, it's there. We have to show Russia that we know what they are doing. It's not the time of conflict and it's not as though our response times have to be like during the war, but every time they switch off a responder or fly close to our borders, or sometimes actually break international law

and take some shortcut specifically for special purposes to see if we can check them, to see if we are there.

I think the next steps are sea and air. We would be, of course, interested in changing it from an air policing mission to a normal mission. It depends, of course, on the decision of all the NATO countries, but Canada has done its part in being there for air policing missions, and many other countries as well. Every half year they have a rotation, so for many countries, some have been there more than twice or three times.

I brought my committee there also to see how they do these things. At that time, the Italians were there. It was impressive. They had new Eurofighters. I was very impressed.

• (1010)

The Chair: I want to thank you all for coming this morning. It was mentioned earlier by MP Garrison that Canada's participation not only has, obviously, the Government of Canada's support, as they're the ones who tasked them to go there, but it also has all-party support in the House of Commons, which is very important. It's important to us and I know it's important to you.

You also talked at the very beginning of this hearing about mutually beneficial relationships. I think you used the term “give and take”, but we're proud to stand with you in Latvia with NATO.

I want to highlight the fact and thank you for supporting Canadian aerospace. I know you're one of the biggest customers for C Series and you're the launch customer for the CS300 version. That matters to us. It shows that there's a lot more to our relationship than just defence and security, which is very important, but this relationship between Canada and Latvia can grow into a bigger relationship, with trade and other things that are very important to both nations moving forward.

It's very important to us.

Hon. Ainars Latkovskis: Yes, and if you remember, Latvia was the first nation to ratify in our parliament the free trade agreement with the European Union. We're the first. We think that's the way to do it. It's not the other way, which we hear very often from the part of North America that is south of Canada. That is the way that Latvia and Canada do it.

The Chair: Thank you for coming. I'm going to suspend for a few minutes so we can maybe get a photo. We didn't get one last night.

Hon. Ainars Latkovskis: Yes, that would be nice.

Thank you.

The Chair: We'll say our goodbyes, and then I'll resume with an in camera session on committee business.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]

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