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Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development

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• (1105)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Ali Ehsassi (Willowdale, Lib.)): Good afternoon, everyone.

Welcome to meeting number 46 of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, pursuant to the House order of June 23, 2022. Members are attending in person in the room and remotely using the Zoom application.

I'd like to make a few comments for the benefit of the members and our witness today.

Please wait until I recognize you by name before speaking. For those participating by video conference, click on the microphone icon to activate your mike and please remember to mute yourselves when you are not speaking. Interpretation for those on Zoom is at the bottom of your screen and you have the choice of either floor, English or French audio.

Today, we are resuming our study of the security at the borders of Azerbaijan and Armenia.

It is my great pleasure to welcome today, from the Embassy of the Republic of Armenia, Her Excellency Madam Harutyunyan, ambassador of the Republic of Armenia to Canada.

I should also mention that we also extended an invitation to the Azerbaijani embassy here, and to Baku as well, but unfortunately they were not available.

Madam Ambassador, you will have five minutes for your opening remarks.

Mr. Bergeron.

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron (Montarville, BQ): Mr. Chair, I don't mean to be difficult, but you told us he was not available.

Is that the reason you were given to explain why the chargé d'affaires for Azerbaijan is not here? If not, were other reasons given by the chargé d'affaires for Azerbaijan to explain why he's not appearing before the committee?

[English]

The Chair: I was informed, Mr. Bergeron, that a request had been sent to the Azerbaijani Ministry of Foreign Affairs, but no instructions had been received here in Ottawa.

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Did you receive the answer from the Azerbaijani embassy verbally, over the phone, or was a note sent to us?

[English]

The Chair: There was a conversation. I had a conversation on Friday as well as yesterday. I just wanted to receive an update as to whether any instructions had been received from Baku, but I was informed that nothing had been received as of yet.

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Consequently, the chargé d'affaires did not feel authorized to appear before the committee.

[English]

The Chair: No. He had sent them a request that someone be made available, but he had not received any instructions in return.

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Did the chargé d'affaires know that today, the study is not focusing specifically on the Lachin corridor, but on the general state of affairs between Armenia and Azerbaijan?

[English]

The Chair: What I can tell you is that I specifically informed him of that. I highlighted the reality that this is a study that we had decided upon prior to the motion you tabled, and that it would be focused on the situation at the Azerbaijani-Armenian borders.

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: I'd like to ask one last question, Mr. Chair.

Would be possible to know when we sent an invitation to the Azerbaijani embassy? Was it sent before Christmas or last week?

[English]

The Chair: I'm sorry. You were cutting out, Mr. Bergeron. I couldn't hear what your question was.

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Mr. Chair, I was simply asking you if the invitation was sent before Christmas or just recently.

[English]

The Chair: Whether the invitation had been sent before...? Yes, that's correct.

No, I think it was in mid-January.

I just checked with the clerk and she rightly points out that, as you are well aware, we were not aware as to what our schedule would be going forward for this session. Previously we were on Mondays, and we are now on Tuesdays.

The clerk rightfully decided not to send out that invitation until mid-January, when it was confirmed what our schedule would be going forward.

• (1110)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Hoback.

Mr. Randy Hoback (Prince Albert, CPC): I was wondering if we could ask—I'm not sure if it's appropriate—the ambassador, if they choose not to attend, to give us reasons.

The Chair: I'm not sure whether that would be appropriate. What I can—

Mr. Randy Hoback: Mr. Oliphant, maybe you can provide guidance on this. Is that appropriate, or not?

Hon. Robert Oliphant (Don Valley West, Lib.): I don't think we can compel any witness, especially a foreign representative.

Mr. Randy Hoback: We can, but we shouldn't. I was just seeking your advice for the committee here.

Hon. Robert Oliphant: I think it's their choice as to whether or not they want to appear. I'd be advising them to appear to tell their story.

Mr. Randy Hoback: Yes, I agree.

The Chair: Mr. Hoback, obviously that does not preclude you from inquiring yourself, if you so wish.

Yes, Ms. McPherson.

Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Could we ask if they'd be willing to submit a written explanation of their position?

The Chair: I don't think that's appropriate. We don't generally do that. It has happened on numerous occasions in the past that we have extended an invitation, and unfortunately—for a wide variety of reasons—witnesses have not appeared before us.

What we could do perhaps is to inquire whether they would like to make a written submission. Is that okay?

Ms. Heather McPherson: [*Inaudible—Editor*]

The Chair: Absolutely, Ms. McPherson.

Yes, Ms. Bendayan.

Ms. Rachel Bendayan (Outremont, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I don't know whether this is the moment to raise this. Perhaps I could request that we save one or two minutes at the end of this hour.

I understand there is a deadline of February 8 in order to submit travel requests on behalf of the committee. I wonder if we might

keep a moment following the witness's appearance today to discuss what this committee might like to request.

The Chair: Does that meet with everyone's agreement?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Absolutely, Ms. Bendayan.

Madam Ambassador, our apologies for that. You now have the floor. You have five minutes.

When there are 30 seconds remaining, I will hold this up to indicate that we'd be grateful if you could kindly wrap it up within 30 seconds. The same rule applies when it comes to questions that are put to you by members.

Thank you for being with us, Madam Ambassador. The floor is yours for five minutes.

Her Excellency Anahit Harutyunyan (Ambassador of the Republic of Armenia to Canada): Thank you, Mr. Chair, for the opportunity to appear before this hearing.

I wish I was here to brief you on the recent achievements in Armenia-Canada relations, to discuss the extensive report of Special Envoy Dion on how Canada can better support the Armenian democracy, or to talk about the importance of the decision by the Canadian government to open an embassy in Armenia. The latter has become a reality, among many other factors, through years of tireless advocacy by a number of members of this esteemed committee.

However, unfortunately, the security crisis and challenges following the 2020 war by Azerbaijan against Artsakh, the following aggression and occupation by Azerbaijan of the sovereign territory of Armenia, and specifically the ongoing blockade of the Lachin corridor force me to concentrate on these issues, which seriously undermine the efforts of Armenia to attain sustainable peace and stability in the south Caucasus.

Immediately after signing the trilateral statement on November 9, 2020, Azerbaijan violated its commitment to a complete ceasefire and cessation of all military operations by launching an attack on Nagorno-Karabakh, which resulted in the capture of two more Armenian villages.

In May and November 2021, as well as September 2022, Azerbaijan launched a military incursion against Armenia in which it seized 140 square kilometres of Armenian sovereign territories. Today, after almost two months of the illegal blockade of the Lachin corridor by self-proclaimed environmental activists, Azerbaijan has and continues to deepen the humanitarian crisis, with a far-reaching aim to ethnically cleanse the indigenous Armenian population of Nagorno-Karabakh.

One can wonder why there is such strong doubt about the so-called environmental activists' true intentions. It is a well-established fact that in matters of civil and political liberties, Azerbaijan holds one of the worst democratic rankings in the world, with a proven track record of suppression of protests and with dozens of political prisoners. The suggestion that there could be civilian activists in Azerbaijan who would be capable of launching a campaign of this size and scope without the direct guidance and supervision of the state authorities is implausible, to say the least.

Following the signing of the November 9, 2020 trilateral statement, Armenia spared no effort to achieve a normalization of relations with Azerbaijan. Unfortunately, Azerbaijan, instead of engaging in good-faith negotiations, continues its aggressive posturing and anti-Armenian rhetoric, refuses to repatriate Armenian prisoners of war, and is intentionally destroying the Armenian cultural heritage with the aim of desecrating our history.

Indeed, had Azerbaijan been genuinely interested in peace, or in a comprehensive assessment of the situation in Nagorno-Karabakh or at the borders with Armenia, it would not be denying the international community access to the region.

The aggressive actions of Azerbaijan clearly establish that in the absence of strong enforcement measures, including application of sanctions, the aggressor is and will continue to be encouraged to test the resilience and the determination of the international community. The only possible way of guaranteeing durable peace and stability in the south Caucasus is the continued involvement of the international community.

Under these circumstances, we highlight the importance of a strong international consensus on the immediate and unconditional cessation of the blockade of the Lachin corridor, and the withdrawal of Azerbaijani forces from the southeastern parts of Armenia.

In conclusion, please allow me to state that Armenia highly appreciates the statement made by Canada, calling for the full restoration of free movement through the Lachin corridor, as well as the statements made by a number of MPs of this honourable committee.

In this context, we rely on your continued support in order to exercise the significant leverage the international community is capable of to pressure Azerbaijan to stop the further deterioration of the dire situation currently unfolding in Artsakh in order to prevent a full-fledged humanitarian catastrophe.

There should be no illusion that the continuous aggression and the threat of the use of force, accompanied by war crimes and other violations of international humanitarian law, can ever become the basis for a lasting and sustainable peace.

Thank you very much.

• (1115)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Madam Ambassador.

We now open it up to questions by members.

For the first round, we will have five minutes each.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Is it five?

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Isn't it six?

The Chair: Because of all the questioning and stuff, I want to make sure we have two rounds.

Mr. Genuis, you have five minutes.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Thank you, Chair.

Your Excellency, thank you for being here. I share your significant concern about ongoing Azeri state aggression in general and the Lachin corridor blockade in particular. Reviewing the testimony from previous hearings, I think it became clear that there is an ongoing blockade that is causing the humanitarian crisis. Although certain forms of assistance get through from time to time, it is nowhere near the scope and scale required to maintain anything like normal life. It's also very clear from the evidence you've presented, but also that others have presented, that it is a choice by the Azeri state to cause this blockade to occur.

Could you please speak specifically to the role of Canada in this? Obviously, as a foreign affairs committee in Canada, our primary role is to advise the Government of Canada on steps it should be taking in response to this. What constructive actions would you like to see the Government of Canada take to address the wider situation, in particular the immediate crisis of the corridor blockade?

Ms. Anahit Harutyunyan: Of course, as I mentioned in my testimony, we highly appreciated, right after the blockade of the Lachin corridor, the statement made by the Canadian government calling for Azerbaijan to unblock the Lachin corridor. That was an important step. At the same time, we understand that maybe Canada doesn't have the same presence as its allies, the United States and France.

What Canada can do is to continue working closely with its allies to try to contribute to all of the missions and steps that our allies are taking. More specifically, as you know, the European Union decided to send a long-term civilian fact-finding mission to the borders with Armenia, which was a very important step. The Armenian government appreciated that move from the European Union. Canada can be supportive of that mission.

The other things we've seen in the case of authoritarian and corrupt regimes and that I think could be effective for Azerbaijan are the sanctions. Sanctions would be important to apply. If this committee could come up with these suggestions, this would also be very reasonable and important.

The other thing I can suggest to this committee, if you consider it appropriate, is that a resolution on behalf of the House of Commons would also be very much welcomed. It can pressure Azerbaijan.

As I mentioned during my testimony, the international pressure and the consensus of western democracies on what's going on in Nagorno-Karabakh and at the borders with Armenia are very important.

The other important thing that I can mention here is this: Don't be shy to call out Azerbaijan when it comes to human rights and the corruption they are heading. Talk about the prisoners of war, the political prisoners that Azerbaijan still has. Discourage your businesses from making investments in the corrupt Azerbaijani state. This is also another way of pressuring Azerbaijan.

The most important thing I think I might share with you as a foreign affairs committee is to continue to work with your NATO ally, Turkey. Turkey's negative involvement in our region doesn't allow us to find long and lasting peace. This is another thing you can hold consultations on. You can advise Global Affairs Canada to try to pressure Turkey to be engaged in the south Caucasus in a positive way.

Thank you.

• (1120)

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Thank you.

If I can respond to a few of those points, this committee does have the ability to adopt resolutions, which can then be referred to the House and concurred with by the House. I hope we will have an opportunity to do that with respect to the Lachin corridor and other issues.

I note, with respect to your comments about sanctions and material complicity, that this committee worked specifically on arms sales to Turkey and on those weapons ending up in the hands of the Azeri state. We were very critical of the government for its failures around that.

What kind of targeted measures can we undertake to ensure we're not in any way materially complicit with these threats to international peace and security or with the repression of the people of Azerbaijan by their government? What recommendations would you say that Canada can implement to ensure we're not complicit again in that kind of violence?

Ms. Anahit Harutyunyan: It's very important not to hear both sides' statements anymore when it comes to Azerbaijan and Armenia. The actions of Azerbaijan are talking by themselves. Whenever you're talking to the Azerbaijani side, make sure you name the aggressor and you know what's going on. These are the most important actions Canada can take.

We would appreciate a continuous dialogue. Of course, I work closely with Global Affairs on a daily basis. I am always in touch with all of you here. I think this is very important. Human rights, democratic values, are something we share with Canada, and we have to be supported when it comes to violations of these values.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

We now go to Ms. Bendayan.

Ms. Rachel Bendayan: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, and it's a pleasure to see you again, Madam Ambassador.

At the outset of your introductory remarks, you mentioned the importance of the embassy in Yerevan and the involvement of

many members, as well as the advocacy, of course, of the Armenian community here in Canada for that embassy.

Can you give us a sense of the impact that embassy will have and perhaps is already having in terms of the relationship between our two countries?

Ms. Anahit Harutyunyan: Thank you.

Of course, as I mentioned in my testimony, the report of Stéphane Dion became a very important basis on which the Canadian government made the decision to open an embassy in Armenia. We truly hope the embassy will be open very soon, hopefully in the summer.

I can tell you why, from the Armenian perspective, it is very important. At the same time, I'm here to stress the importance from a Canadian perspective as well. I would like to quote from the Stéphane Dion report and give some thoughts that he shared in his report as to why Canada decided to open an embassy in Armenia and not in Azerbaijan. As you understand, I was following last week's hearings and I heard some questions and witnesses pointing out the necessity of having embassies in the two countries.

Though Stéphane Dion's report concentrated mainly on supporting the Armenian democracy and finding ways for Canada to support that democracy, at the same time he understood quite well that our security is directly connected with our democracy. That's why he's calling the Armenian democracy fragile.

In his report, he makes one mention of the Armenian-Azerbaijan conflict:

The risks of war decrease with the advance of democracy. The more two countries in conflict move towards democracy, the more they maximize their chances of finding common ground and a peaceful settlement. To put it bluntly, when Azerbaijan makes decisive progress towards more democracy, Canada should consider ways to increase its presence there. By doing so, Canada would support the democratic transition in Azerbaijan as well as the prospects for peace with Armenia.

Again, this is a very important point that is raised in this report, because for us, as a democratic country, it would have been much easier to negotiate with a democratic Azerbaijan than with this corrupt regime in Azerbaijan.

Thank you.

• (1125)

Ms. Rachel Bendayan: Thank you, Madam Ambassador.

Certainly this report by our government's special envoy, the Honourable Stéphane Dion, is extremely important. There were 11 recommendations in that report. I'm sure you'll have an opportunity to touch on some of those in further questioning.

With the time I have remaining, I would just like to highlight that just yesterday, representations were made before the International Court of Justice, the ICJ, in a hearing that I understand began in 2020.

Is there anything you would like to share with this committee about the importance of that process and how you see progress moving forward?

Ms. Anahit Harutyunyan: Yes, you are correct that yesterday the International Court of Justice held public hearings concerning the application of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination in Armenia vis-à-vis Azerbaijan.

Of course, it was mainly the issue of the Lachin corridor that was presented by the Armenian side. As one of the representatives of the Armenian side rightly mentioned, the court is the last resort for the people of Nagorno-Karabakh to be freed from the threat of ethnic cleansing that they are living under on a daily basis. What we see in the Lachin corridor is proof of that.

Ms. Rachel Bendayan: Do you have further dates for hearings? Are you confident in the process that has been established at the ICJ?

Ms. Anahit Harutyunyan: I can say that we have made a very strong case. I was following, of course, the Azerbaijani side, too. I'm not talking here as an Armenian representative, but I thought that our side was very well prepared. The arguments were made very clearly to the court. I truly hope that the court will make a decision, the right one, that will express the interests of the people of Nagorno-Karabakh. We are talking about people and human rights.

Ms. Rachel Bendayan: Thank you, Madam Ambassador.

With the few seconds I have remaining, I will just say that you have been following the meetings of this committee on the topic quite closely, and you have probably heard members request that facts and information on the ground be brought to our committee. I would invite you to provide this committee with any information you may have as events continue to unfold and things continue to develop in the region.

Ms. Anahit Harutyunyan: Absolutely. As I mentioned, the humanitarian situation is very dire on the ground in Nagorno-Karabakh. I have some friends who I am in constant contact with. I hear from them, too. All the essential goods and products are missing. Kindergartens are closed. Schools are closed. They have blackouts of the electricity. On a regular basis, the gas is cut off.

You know, I can go on and on saying how dire the situation is, but I think for this committee a very important reference should be the statements made by foreign governments, namely the U.S., France and Canada. They call it a blockade.

The European Court of Human Rights calls this a blockade. So do the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, the European Parliament, The Free Press, Amnesty International, the Helsinki Commission, Human Rights Watch, the International Crisis Group and the Lemkin Institute for Genocide Prevention. What else do we need to know just to call it a blockade? I think if we trust our allies and partners, that's a very important reference.

Thank you.

• (1130)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We now go to Mr. Bergeron.

You have five minutes, sir.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you very much, Excellency, for being with us today.

I cannot overemphasize the importance of the question that Ms. Bendayan just asked and the answer you gave. Indeed, I was very surprised last week that some members of this committee appeared to consider all the testimony we received to be equally credible. As a result, we need neutral and indisputable information to overcome the Manichaean dynamic in which one person is right and the other is wrong, and vice versa, with arguments coming from people with vested interests. So, thank you very much for your answer to Ms. Bendayan's excellent question for you.

As you know, at the very end of August, the Prime Minister of Armenia and the President of Azerbaijan met in Brussels, under the mediation of Mr. Charles Michel, President of the European Council. A few days later, Azerbaijan led a large-scale offensive against Armenia which lasted only three days, but it effectively allowed Azerbaijan to occupy Armenian sovereign territory.

Subsequently, there was another meeting in October between the Prime Minister of Armenia and the President of Azerbaijan. The French President, Emmanuel Macron, as well as Mr. Michel, were present. There was even a meeting at the end of October between the Prime Minister and the President, with the President of Russia in attendance.

During these two meetings in October, was the Azeri offensive discussed? Were any explanations given as to why this offensive was carried out, even though peace talks had started in August?

[*English*]

Ms. Anahit Harutyunyan: Of course, the main reasoning Azerbaijan is citing when it comes to the violation of the territorial integrity of Armenia is that the border lines are not clear, and there is a clear need for limitations and border security.

At the same time, Azerbaijan is engaging in the different talks. What I can say is that the reasoning for being engaged in the talks and then violating the territorial integrity of Armenia is just, somehow, for face-saving. However, as we see, Azerbaijan is not interested in peace at all, because Armenia, since the very beginning, has been engaged in three tracks of negotiations with Azerbaijan.

Those tracks are.... The first one.... We formed commissions on both sides. The first track is the opening of all transport communications in the region. That's one commission. The second one is the delimitation and border security issues. The third one is the agreement on the normalization of relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan, or a peace treaty, whatever you want to call it. Armenia was engaged in these three tracks in good faith, but what we see from Azerbaijan is no interest in implementing any kind of agreement reached during those discussions.

The actions of Azerbaijan clearly talk about its true reasoning. It's not interested in peace. It's interested in peace on its own terms. As you understand, peace can't be imposed. Peace should be negotiated. Peace means dignity and well-being for all. Peace doesn't mean just an absence of war. We are really interested in having a long-term and just solution to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and for Armenian-Azerbaijan relations. That's why we request that the international community be present there. Don't allow us to be alone with the Azerbaijani side, because we really need international engagement to find lasting peace and stability in the south Caucasus.

• (1135)

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: One of the witnesses we heard last week, Ms. Olesya Vartanyan, made a somewhat shocking statement. She told us that the Azerbaijani offensive was simply intended to position itself strategically for a possible new armed conflict with Armenia. That way, Armenian territory would be split in two. They would therefore get through force that which they clearly seemed unable to obtain through negotiation, meaning a corridor leading to Nakhchivan.

What are your thoughts on Ms. Vartanyan's testimony?

[English]

Ms. Anahit Harutyunyan: The gains that Azerbaijan made in September 2022 are particularly striking because of the way in which they widened the conflict footprint.

Azerbaijan has taken control, as I mentioned, of 140 square kilometres of Armenia itself. From their commanding position—they control very geographically important mountains and heights—the Azerbaijani soldiers have the capability to strike even further into the country and potentially, as you rightly mentioned, cut the southern part of Armenia off from the rest of the country. Local officials and foreign experts say about 40% of homes and villages were destroyed. The main reason is, of course, to have a linkage with Nakhchivan.

Of course, I think we'll still have time to talk about Nakhchivan and the issue of the corridor that Azerbaijan is raising, but to your point, I wanted to say that you rightly mentioned that they now have positions that will allow them to cut part of Armenia off from the rest of the country in a matter of days.

The Chair: Thank you.

We go to Ms. McPherson.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Thank you very much, Ambassador. This has been very interesting and important for us to hear. Of course, I'm very sorry for what is happening in your country.

As a Canadian lawmaker and parliamentarian, I think we're all here looking for ways Canada can help and for how we can get to peace in the region, because the loss of life and the impacts on Armenians are very difficult.

You spoke a little about how Azerbaijan is not letting the international community come in as observers. What is the potential for peace talks to happen? What would need to happen? What role can

Canada play for us to move toward a more peaceful resolution of this conflict right now?

Is that possible in the current context with Azerbaijan?

Ms. Anahit Harutyunyan: As a person who comes from Armenia, of course I want to believe that peace is possible. Peace is what is needed for Armenia, but as I mentioned, peace means dignity. You can't have peace at all costs. Peace should be negotiated.

Azerbaijan is trying to just present its point of view on the normalization of relations with Armenia. They think Armenia should accept them; otherwise it means Armenia doesn't want peace, but we want to find a negotiated solution.

Safety and stability are the ultimate conditions in which reconciliation or any move forward can take place. Azerbaijan is not helping at all to create confidence-building measures. People don't believe in the genuine interest of Azerbaijan in establishing peace with Armenia.

When we say that international presence is important and that pressure on Azerbaijan is important, this is why it's so stressed and I will continue stressing those points. You have to pressure Azerbaijan with your allies and partners that are on the ground and working very closely with both Armenia and Azerbaijan to pressure Azerbaijan back to the negotiating table.

We should find the root causes of this long-standing conflict. If the root causes of Nagorno-Karabakh are not addressed, it's not going to be a long-lasting peace.

As I said, Canada doesn't have an embassy yet, but we truly hope you will be on the ground. We hope you'll help us, that you'll work with like-minded countries on the ground, and that you'll try to be more constructive and complement the efforts all the countries are making to try to bring peace to our region.

• (1140)

Ms. Heather McPherson: Thank you for that.

I have one last question for you. You speak about working with allies, partners and like-minded countries. You've spoken a bit about some of the multilateral institutions, but what are you hearing from other countries, specifically, on this?

Could you give us a bit of a sense of what some of the European countries are sharing with you at this time?

Ms. Anahit Harutyunyan: We were able to build a very big consensus of international communities, especially on the events that are unfolding in the Lachin corridor. There is this understanding that Azerbaijan is really not trying to take any type of step toward peace, so engagement is important.

The countries that are working with both Armenia and Azerbaijan are clearly mentioning Azerbaijan as an aggressor that is violating the rights of movement of the people of Nagorno-Karabakh. This is something that is very important.

The fact-finding mission of the European Union is more proof that the European Union is trying to be there and to be present. I don't think much is going to change vis-à-vis the Azerbaijan posture, but, at the same time, it can lower the risk of conflict there on the ground.

Canada's presence, of course, is very much welcomed. We hope that while you are there, as I said, you can work together and complement the efforts of your allies and partners.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. McPherson.

We now move to the second round. Members will have four minutes.

We first go to Mr. Epp.

Mr. Dave Epp (Chatham-Kent—Leamington, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Ambassador, for your excellent testimony.

I noted that twice in your testimony, early on, you mentioned the term looking for a “durable peace”. You concluded your remarks with “a lasting and sustainable peace”. You've touched on the four areas already in your testimony today.

May I ask, from your perspective, what peace looks like? You mentioned that Azerbaijan seems only to be imposing its own terms. You talked about a negotiation process.

Specifically, though, around four areas...I believe there are four. If there are more, please let me know.

You said the recognition of the border isn't clear. There isn't an international border that's accepted. What does peace look like around that issue?

Obviously, there's the Lachin corridor.

There's the blockade. I'm assuming that the removal and the free movement.... I'll let you put that into words.

Canada's foreign policy is built upon sovereignty, the recognition of other sovereignties or self-determination and peace, and the cessation of hostilities. What does that look like for Nagorno-Karabakh from an Armenian perspective in the context of sovereignty and recognition, as well as the corridor, or lack thereof, to Nakhchivan?

There are those four areas. We've touched on all four of them today, but from an Armenian perspective and a negotiating perspective, or from a desire for a durable peace, what does that look like?

Ms. Anahit Harutyunyan: Coming back again to the issue of peace, as I said, it is very important for our region. However, in order for us to be able to find that durable and stable peace, it should represent all of the interests in the region. It can't be dictated to Armenia what peace means, and we can't allow Azerbaijan to dictate its own terms. That's why we're holding the negotiations.

As I mentioned in my answer to the previous question, it's very important to address the root causes of the problem. You can't sign a peace agreement without mentioning the Nagorno-Karabakh issue. The issue is there. It doesn't matter how much Azerbaijan wants it to disappear from the international arena. Right now, what

we're discussing is the issue of Nagorno-Karabakh and the rights and securities of the people in Nagorno-Karabakh.

If Azerbaijan is truly interested in peace, it wouldn't have the state-sponsored Armenophobia that we hear at the state level from Azerbaijan. It wouldn't torture and kill prisoners of war, desecrate the bodies of soldiers and civilians, and destroy Armenian cultural heritage. If this is the way it wants to have peace with Armenia, we have a problem.

The international community has a decisive voice and place in the south Caucasus. This is a very important region.

Canada again can be very active when it comes to the resolution of the conflict with its statesmen, with its involvement with the parties and with its involvement with Turkey. Turkey is a very important player in our region, as I said. It's a very negative player, unfortunately, despite the fact that we have another track of discussions with Turkey, trying to see how we can normalize relations with them. Unfortunately, I have to say that what we see is talks for the sake of talks. Nothing is moving.

We see from Turkey's side that there is no interest in pressuring Azerbaijan into being more constructive in the negotiating process.

● (1145)

Mr. Dave Epp: Thank you.

What I'm hearing you say, and I'm perhaps interpreting, is that you're looking for that lasting peace to come through a direct negotiation as opposed to it being imposed. Correct me if I'm wrong on that.

The Chair: Mr. Epp, you're out of time. Do you want to wrap up quite quickly?

Mr. Dave Epp: I was going to go to the internal process of accepting a durable peace in Armenia. Can you, very quickly, say what that process would look like?

Ms. Anahit Harutyunyan: Excuse me, I couldn't hear your question.

Mr. Dave Epp: What would a lasting peace look like? Through your democracy, which Canada supports, what does peace look like as far as the acceptance from the Armenian legislature or the people is concerned? Is there a process internally that you would have to follow?

Ms. Anahit Harutyunyan: Of course, if we sign the agreement, there is a process for approval of that agreement. International agreements are approved by the court, the constitutional court.

Peace just means dignity and justice. If we can achieve it, through negotiations, to that point, this is the peace we are looking for.

The Chair: Thank you.

We now go to Madam Khalid.

Ms. Iqra Khalid (Mississauga—Erin Mills, Lib.): Thank you very much, Chair.

Thank you, Ambassador, for being here, and for the insights you're providing.

One point you made that I really appreciated was the connection between security and democracy. In the Dion report, which you've also referenced, Mr. Dion talks about fragile democracies and how Canada can better support them.

In terms of maintaining security and moving on to democracy in the context of the upcoming elections for Azerbaijan in 2025 and for Armenia in 2026, what role do you think Canada can play in building that democratic institution and providing that support as we're thinking long term in terms of safety and security in the region?

Ms. Anahit Harutyunyan: Of course, Canada has a very important role in supporting the Armenian democracy.

Stéphane Dion, in his report, of course mentioned certain areas where Canada can share its expertise and be really a very important player for Armenia. The areas he is talking about are, of course, fighting corruption, promoting human rights, supporting non-governmental organizations, and supporting the reforms in the Armenian parliament. As you know, we are a very young parliamentary democracy, and we are very happy that we have a very good, constructive working co-operation with the parliamentary centre, which is doing different projects for our parliament. Teaching us how to be a parliamentary democracy is very important for Armenia.

I can't say what Canada can do for Azerbaijan, because Azerbaijan, unfortunately, doesn't share any of these mentioned fields. For Azeris it's not a priority. As they are a country that doesn't respect the rights of its own people, they have no freedom of press, no freedom of assembly—that's why I was questioning the very essence of the environmental activists at the Lachin corridor—a more democratic Azerbaijan is better for Armenia.

• (1150)

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Thank you.

Just specifically with respect to Nagorno–Karabakh, you spoke a little bit about long-lasting peace and reconciliation. What role does Armenia have to play, and what role does Canada have to play with respect to building truth and reconciliation within that region specifically?

Ms. Anahit Harutyunyan: First of all, the parties involved in this conflict should have the political will to move forward toward that reconciliation. Unfortunately, that was my whole point during this presentation. We don't see any moves from Azerbaijan that it's ready to build confidence-building measures. This is the ultimate condition for peace and security and we don't see it from.... I don't know how we can move forward with those actions of Azerbaijan, but you can be sure that in Armenia, as a democratic society, we understand the importance of reconciliation.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Just very quickly, with my last 30 seconds I think I would be remiss not to talk about the gendered aspects of conflict.

What do you have to say about the role of women in ensuring peace and security in the region?

Ms. Anahit Harutyunyan: Since Armenia became a parliamentary democracy, women are now quite actively involved in Armenian politics. We've secured gender equality in our parliament, and

the same goes for Nagorno–Karabakh, so women have a decisive role to play.

Canada has an ambassador for women and peace. I think this area is a very good context for working with our Canadian partners. We can, of course, host a visit of the ambassador, and she can share her experience and help us to be more involved in the conflict resolution problem.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you.

We now go to Mr. Bergeron for two minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Your Excellency, I would like to follow up on the discussion we had about Ms. Vartanyan's testimony.

I think the elephant in the room is the corridor to Nakhchivan. Last week, some testimony suggested that peace negotiations did not seem to be going well on the Nakhchivan corridor, even though Armenia did commit to considering the possibility of creating such a corridor. Blocking the Lachin corridor was intended to pressure Armenia into concluding negotiations on the corridor to Nakhchivan. That led another witness to tell us that we were comparing apples and oranges, because Nakhchivan is not a landlocked territory. It's in direct contact with Turkey, while Nagorno–Karabakh is landlocked territory inside Azerbaijan.

What do you think of this kind of testimony?

[*English*]

Ms. Anahit Harutyunyan: This corridor rhetoric was brought forward by the Azerbaijani president. He acknowledged that in his annual conference, saying that of course there was no mention in the November 9, 2020 statement about Nakhchivan, the corridor connecting Nakhchivan.

This is something he is bringing forward for the discussions. He is going to pressure Armenia to give him that extraterritorial corridor that will connect western parts of Azerbaijan to Nakhchivan.

Armenia made it very clear right from the beginning, when this issue started to be discussed, that we ruled out any extraterritorial corridor on the territory of the Republic of Armenia. This is the principal position of Armenia. Nothing can change this position. I want to make sure you understand that our position is fully in line with the relevant provisions of the November 9 statement.

The decision on providing a link between the western regions of Azerbaijan and Nakhchivan can be resolved very swiftly. That's why we're on a track where we're discussing the unblocking of all the regional transport routes. We can do it very swiftly, as soon as Azerbaijan admits that all communications should operate under the jurisdiction and legislation of the Republic of Armenia.

I just have one more point, since I have this time to talk about the Nakhchivan corridor. I want to make sure to show you the differences between the Lachin corridor and the connection between Azerbaijan and Nakhchivan.

First of all, Nakhchivan and Nagorno-Karabakh have different needs that exist in very different realities. They don't face the same threats. Nakhchivan, first of all, cannot be blocked by Armenia. Nakhchivan has neighbours, Iran and Turkey. It doesn't face the existential threat coming from Armenia on a daily basis. The Nagorno-Karabakh people do face threats, because Nagorno-Karabakh is surrounded only by Azerbaijan. It's a matter of seconds to blockade it wherever Azerbaijan wants.

Another very important point is that Nakhchivan has a status with being Azerbaijan. It is an autonomous republic through the Treaty of Kars of 1921. Now what Azerbaijan is doing is refusing to accept the status that Nagorno-Karabakh had during the Soviet Union era.... It was the Nagorno-Karabakh autonomous region.

These are the differences that I wanted to talk about between Nagorno-Karabakh's case and of course Nakhchivan.

Thank you.

• (1155)

The Chair: Thank you.

We now go to Ms. McPherson for two minutes, please.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you again for your testimony, Your Excellency.

We're trying to find ways to protect civilians in the short term as we try to develop a longer-term peace in the region.

What role could EU civilian monitoring play? What roles could NGOs, human rights organizations and other civil society groups play in terms of having a ceasefire, having a peace...right now that would protect civilians as we try to build on a greater, more concrete peace going forward?

Ms. Anahit Harutyunyan: It's a very important question that you are raising, but it can't be one-sided. We should have Azerbaijan co-operating in everything, but we don't see that. Of course we can pursue the peace; of course we can eliminate the hatred that exists and try to build that desire to have peace and confidence-building towards Azerbaijani people, but we can't do it just on our own. We need a partner; we need a country that is really willing to have peace with its neighbours—that's the problem.

The EU has a lot to do on the ground, and hopefully it will do the same thing in Azerbaijan. Civil society has a lot of work to do. I'm grateful that Canada, through Stéphane Dion's report, is going to support our civil society. This is a very important part of democratic society.

Of course, there's a lot of work to be done, but again, when it comes to the lasting peace and a solution to the problem on the ground with Azerbaijan, I don't see any perspective with the Azerbaijani government.

Ms. Heather McPherson: Thank you.

Mr. Chair, that's fine, thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. McPherson. On that note, everyone's had an opportunity to ask questions.

Allow me to thank you, Madam Ambassador, for having been here and for having shared your insights and your perspectives. We're very grateful that you agreed to appear before us.

Let me also say that we would all like to see an immediate cessation of hostilities and for an enduring and just peace to prevail.

Thank you.

Ms. Anahit Harutyunyan: Thank you very much.

The Chair: We'll suspend for two minutes before the subcommittee—

Ms. Rachel Bendayan: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair. You had agreed previously to my request that we spend one minute. I have something to discuss.

The Chair: You're absolutely right, yes.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Rachel Bendayan: Madam Clerk, can you confirm that the deadline for making travel requests is indeed February 8?

Then, if we want to travel as a committee, do we need anything other than instruction from the members?

• (1200)

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Ariane Gagné-Frégeau): A description including the country, length of the trip and number of people is enough.

Ms. Rachel Bendayan: Very well.

Mr. Chair, I therefore move that we table a new request to travel to Ukraine. Many parliamentarians in this country, especially those from Europe, have made this trip. The Minister of National Defence was just in Ukraine two weeks ago, and I hope that the situation will allow committee members to make the trip.

[*English*]

The Chair: Yes, Mr. Bergeron.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Mr. Chair, I can't tell you how reassured I feel by what Ms. Bendayan just said.

I remind everyone that I wanted to travel to Ukraine for months. I think it's inconceivable that Canada, which claims to be one of its closest allies, if not Ukraine's closest ally, be one of the only ones, if not the only one, who has not sent a parliamentary delegation until now. For me, that was an anomaly we needed to correct as quickly as possible.

I find it unacceptable that travelling in Ukraine seems to be considered a privilege of the executive. There is no privilege for the executive here, Mr. Chair. On that level, I can only enthusiastically support the request Ms. Bendayan just made. I dare to hope that this time, we will succeed in finding a way to go to Ukraine to meet our colleagues and, through our very presence, demonstrate our unwavering support for Ukraine during the dark time it's still experiencing.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Bergeron.

We now go to Mr. Genuis.

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): On a point of order, Mr. Chair, can we move this discussion in camera, just because one of the reasons we're having this discussion is because a trip previously agreed to is not able to go to Ukraine.

I think it would be useful just to bring this portion of the meeting into an in camera discussion.

The Chair: That's fair enough.

First of all, as I understand it, that's a non-debatable motion. We can talk about it after this meeting is over, but we have a subcommittee meeting slated at 12 o'clock.

Would there be unanimous consent for adoption of that motion?

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Is this to adjourn this?

Some hon. members: No, it's to go in camera.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: On the point of order, if we go in camera, we have to do a switchover, and that's going to eat into the subcommittee that we've been—

Ms. Rachel Bendayan: It's a non-debatable motion. The motion is on the floor.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: There's no motion on the floor, because Michael intervened on a point of order, and I'm speaking on the same point of order.

Mr. Randeep Sarai (Surrey Centre, Lib.): The point of order is non-debatable and needs to be voted on.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: You can't move a motion on a point of order, colleagues.

If there's unanimous consent to adjourn, then we can discuss the travel issue at the subcommittee, along with the other issues.

I'm just saying that, logistically, if we suspend and go in camera for the main committee, then we're going to run out of time to have a discussion at the subcommittee.

Ms. Rachel Bendayan: Or we can have the discussion now, as was agreed at the beginning of this meeting.

Hon. Michael Chong: I'm fine to go in camera for this discussion, but if there isn't consent to do that, I'm fine with that, too.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Chair, on a point of clarification, what's the deadline for submitting any travel requests?

Voices: It's February 8.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: This would be kind of tight, time being of the essence to have this conversation.

Ms. Rachel Bendayan: I think there is unanimous consent to go in camera, Mr. Chair.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Mr. Chair, there's no interpretation.

[*English*]

The Chair: Is there no translation?

Could members remember to speak into the mike, please?

Does everyone want to go in camera?

An hon. member: Yes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: There is no interpretation, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Chair, I think we could just—

The Chair: Wait a second.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Mr. Chair, I think I have the floor.

The Chair: Could we just figure out first whether there's translation or not?

Is everything okay, Mr. Bergeron?

• (1205)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: Yes, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

The Chair: I understand that you have a point of order.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: I had the floor next.

You were about to call on me, and then—

The Chair: Yes, that's correct.

Please proceed.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: In the interest of having this discussion at the subcommittee as well as other issues we need to discuss, I move that we adjourn the current meeting.

Ms. Rachel Bendayan: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

Did we vote on the request to move in camera?

The Chair: We have to vote on the adjournment.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Rachel Bendayan: Madam Clerk, did we vote on continuing the meeting in camera?

The Clerk: No, because it was presented within the framework of a point of order. A motion cannot be submitted that way.

[*English*]

The Chair: The point of order was to introduce a motion, and then she introduced a motion, didn't she?

Hon. Robert Oliphant: Mr. Chair, I don't believe she made a point of order. I think she thought it was an agenda item, because you had agreed to two minutes at the end of the meeting. She didn't say that it was a point of order, but I think Mr. Chong did, because, to get the floor....

The Chair: That's correct. That's what I understood as well.

We can vote on going in camera for further discussion on her motion.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Can I understand what happened, Mr. Chair? My understanding was that I had the floor, and then I moved a motion, and then other members had points of order, but there was nobody else who had the floor.

The Chair: My understanding is that the point of order made by Ms. Bendayan was earlier, before the ambassador spoke, and she did not specifically say that it was a point of order. She was just bringing her motion when she spoke.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Even if there's a motion on the floor, a person can move a dilatory motion to adjourn the meeting.

The Chair: Yes, that's correct.

There was one motion that was Mr. Chong's motion.

He was moving to go in camera.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: I thought she was up on a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: No, she did not say that.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: You had said I was next, but whatever, it's fine.

The Chair: Can we do a roll call to go in camera?

(Motion agreed to: yeas 11; nays 0)

Hon. Michael Chong: Mr. Chair, when we go in camera, I just want to make a very quick point.

The Chair: We're going to suspend for a maximum of 10 minutes.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

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