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Chair

Mr. Kevin Sorenson

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•(1105)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Kevin Sorenson (Crowfoot, CPC)): Good morning, committee. I want to welcome everyone here this morning. A special welcome to our Finnish foreign affairs committee.

This is the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development, meeting number 7. We are very pleased to have with us this morning the representation of the Finnish Parliament, the Finnish foreign affairs committee. We welcome you to Canada, and we certainly welcome you to this committee.

I want to thank your ambassador for arranging this. I've had the pleasure of meeting him, and he has certainly been very upfront in encouraging us to get together as two committees who in many cases are working for the same issues around the world. We welcome you, and we welcome your chairperson, Ms. Liisa Jaakonsaari. If I mispronounce these Finnish names, I apologize.

I think I can call it a pleasure when we have two foreign affairs committees coming together. Canada and Finland have had much in common as northern countries, as bilingual, democratic states whose economies are modern and innovative. Canada and Finland share a great deal of similar values and a commitment to a rules-based international system. It provides the foundation for our like-minded approaches to global issues on the multilateral agenda.

Both our nations promote human rights on the international stage. Both our nations contribute substantially to international peace-keeping and crisis management. We are concerned with environmental protection, sustainable northern development, indigenous affairs, advanced social policy, and regulation of information technology. Canada and Finland enjoy a busy program of high-level visits providing opportunities for dialogue on numerous bilateral and multilateral issues. We work together constructively in a range of multilateral organizations such as the United Nations, OSCE, OECD, Arctic Council, and the WTO.

In June 2003, the Canadian embassy in Helsinki co-hosted a regional seminar on the *Responsibility to Protect* report of the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty. We worked with the Finnish government. Our two nations engage in many kinds of relationships, including academic and cultural relations, trade and investment, and science and technology, to name a few areas.

We welcome you. In this meeting we invite you to share the message you bring from your government, or from your country. We can then move into a series of questions from opposition and from

government. We'll try to keep the time and the questions fairly short and the answers concise. Again, we welcome you.

•(1110)

Ms. Liisa Jaakonsaari (Chairperson, Delegation of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Finnish Parliament): Thank you very much for your kind words.

Your family name sounds like a very Nordic name; that's why we feel so comfortable here.

Thank you very much for making this meeting possible.

I remember that it was a Canadian professor, Marshall McLuhan, who predicted that the world would be a village in the future so that we are interlinked. His prediction was really more than right, because now we all feel that all threats and all challenges are common. Especially in my committee, the foreign affairs committee, we have emphasized the role of transatlantic cooperation among the European Union, the United States, and of course Canada. It's actually the main reason we are here.

We have enjoyed your hospitality and of course this wonderful weather. I called Helsinki, and I heard that it's rather cold there. It's very beautiful weather here and it's nice to be here in general.

This nature of the world as a village is a reality. The main issues on our committee's agenda are, for example, energy and security. It's a huge challenge for Europe and for the whole world, of course, how to combine the nexus between development and security. In Finland we have been pondering how we could strengthen security in the northern part of Europe.

It's actually a very crucial time now, because Finland is running for the EU presidency rather soon, next month. We'll be able to raise some important questions on the European Union's agenda.

You perhaps have the impression that the European Union is disputing all of the constitutional treaty. That's actually not true. It's a very controversial issue.

But in the field of foreign security policy, the progress within the European Union has been extremely good. We have achieved a lot. One of the main ideas on Finland's presidency agenda is on how to strengthen the European Union's role as a world actor, because we need different tools to solve problems in the Middle East and in other parts of Europe.

Of course, this very timely question of terrorism was more than some months ago. We have really been following your analysis of the Toronto case of last weekend.

Thank you very much once again for receiving us.

May I give the floor to members of my committee? I'm sure it would be better for everyone to introduce themselves.

My name is Liisa Jaakonsaari, and I am a Social Democrat in a centre-left government party. According to the opinion polls, we are now the biggest party in Finland. We've now started this internal dispute.

Aulis.

• (1115)

Mr. Aulis Ranta-Muotio (Member, Delegation of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Finnish Parliament): My name is Aulis Ranta-Muotio of the Centre Party of Finland. In the last election it was the biggest party. I hope that after the next election we will win again. I am a member of the committee.

Ms. Maija Perho (Member, Delegation of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Finnish Parliament): My name is Maija Perho, and I represent the biggest opposition party. Of course, we hope to be the biggest ruling party after the election in March of next year.

I'm a member of the committee on foreign affairs and also of a committee on violence in Parliament. I am with the National Coalition Party.

Mr. Antero Kekkonen (Member, Delegation of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Finnish Parliament): My name is Antero Kekkonen, and I'm a Social Democrat.

Mr. Jari Vilén (Member, Delegation of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Finnish Parliament): My name is Jari Vilén. I'm also a member from the opposition, the National Coalition Party. I have the privilege of chairing the so-called Grand Committee of the Finnish Parliament, which is responsible for European Union affairs at large.

We were number three in the opinion polls this morning, which was publicized at 20% of the votes, but I think in the coming months we will see how developments happen. The tradition in Finland is always that with two out of the three larger parties, one is in government and the other is in the opposition. We were sixteen years in power. It's now our turn to be in opposition for four years. But I think after the elections we should see again about who will stay in opposition and who will stay in the government.

As our chairman said, especially concerning the foreign policy issues, there is a very strong consensus tradition in Finland. We do not have too many differences in this area, and I think you will find that out when we have a further discussion with our colleagues.

The Chair: Thank you, sir.

Mr. Johannes Koskinen (Member, Delegation of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Finnish Parliament): My name is Johannes Koskinen from the Social Democratic Party. As Jari said about the rotation between the parties, there's also rotation inside the parties. I was the Minister of Justice for six and a half years, but last September there was a rotation of cabinet members. Now I'm now a member of the foreign affairs committee, the grand committee, and Parliament's constitutional committee.

Mr. Jari Vilén: They're keeping him busy.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Liisa Jaakonsaari: Excuse me, Chair, I would like to introduce our ambassador and our counsel to the committee.

The Chair: Mr. Ambassador and counsel to the committee, welcome.

We'll go into five-minute rounds. We're going to try to keep the questions and the answers to five minutes, which will give more people an opportunity to ask questions.

From the opposition side, the former chair of the committee and the vice-chair, Mr. Patry.

Mr. Bernard Patry (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Madame la présidente, Mr. Ambassador, welcome to all the committee.

I have two questions, and I'll go directly to them. In a sense, both concern the EU. Knowing that Finland held the presidency of the EU in 1999 and will again be president starting this coming July, during your presidency in 1999 the EU's northern dimension was a major initiative put forward, which continues today. I would like to know any scoop that you can provide us on what major initiatives Finland would like to achieve during this second term of presidency. That's my first question.

This is the second question. If you're looking at the geographical situation in Finland, in fact it has a very special relationship with Russia. Russia is your fourth-largest trading partner. There will be two more members in the EU next year—probably Bulgaria, but not right away, since there are still problems in Bulgaria. With these two new accessions, you'll get seven members of the former Soviet Union. Do you see any change in the stability in the region concerning Russia?

Those are my two questions, please.

Ms. Liisa Jaakonsaari: Thank you very much.

They are really crucial questions. As far as Russia is concerned, Finland and Russia actually have nowadays a very good relationship. There are no major political problems. There are lots of practical problems due to the very busy trade between Finland and Russia. There's border crossing. There are a lot of practical questions. Of course, Finland is benefiting a lot from the booming economy of Russia. But we are worried about the internal development of Russia because during Mr. Putin's regime the democratic development has not been very positive. We know from the experience of world history that without democracy there will not be development in the long run. That's why we are worrying about the situation in Russia. The situation of the civil society is cause for concern, and the violations of human rights. On the other hand, due to the high price of oil the standard of living is rising in Russia. The people can get salaries and pensions, so in that sense it's a good situation.

As far as your question concerning the EU's enlargement is concerned, I think that it has created stability in Europe. All these new countries are members of NATO, and our assessment is that this has enhanced stability in the whole of Europe.

As far as the northern dimension is concerned, Jari Vilén, the chairman of the grand committee, would be able to answer that question.

• (1120)

Mr. Jari Vilén: I'll try to be brief to give my colleagues also a chance to comment, because then you might see the variation that we have with different party affiliations. But actually on the principles of European policy there's a very large unanimity in Finland.

You asked about the priorities that we have in the coming presidency. I would very briefly note three or four of them.

First, of course, is the relations to the north and northeast, the Finnish relation with Russia, and especially the EU relation with Russia. We will have a special European Union and Russia summit during the Finnish presidency. Probably the highlight for us Finns will be that in that summit there will be decisions on the continuation of the so-called northern dimension policy, which will be, as we believe, a cornerstone for the regional cooperation between the European Union and Russia. This is will be very important in the field of environmental protection, hopefully in the energy field, and also in the logistics, because Finland is the trade route to Russia and from Russia, back and forth, as our chairman said to you.

An element that I think will be even more crucial, taking into account the perspectives given by our president of the committee, is of course home and justice affairs. The European Union is trying to enhance its cooperation in the field of police cooperation in combating against organized crime and illegal immigration. This will be one of the high priorities during the Finnish presidency. We're trying to have more concrete decisions, decisions people deserve. Also, part of that is, of course, campaigning against terrorism.

Thirdly, we will have to discuss the treaty but we don't expect to have any outcome from that. As I said, we will maintain the commitment concerning enlargement. I believe that on the first of January 2007 there will be both Bulgaria and Romania as members of the European Union. Then comes the big question of what happens afterwards. I hope that Finland can maintain the momentum also for the new candidate countries that we have, for Turkey and for Croatia. When they will come, of course, is another question.

The priority is also, quite understandably, in these areas. Austria has a priority in the Balkans, and we have a priority in the north. So it's clearly a continuation of the policies of the European Union. Of course, the foreign policy will be one of the priorities too. There are many issues on the agenda that we have to tackle. I'll just mention the issues concerning the Balkans, how to stabilize the region and how to further support the decisions. One of the very concrete decisions that will come before the end of the year concerns Kosovo, the status of Kosovo, and I think we all believe that the outcome cannot be anything except independence. Independence means a very long-term commitment by the European Union, the presence of troops, international aid, and we have to prepare ourselves for that. Of course, preparation for the European Union military capacity will be one of the issues in the Finnish presidency.

At the beginning of the next year the European Union should have its own rapid deployment troops available, including the Finns in the first of those contingents. It's a very busy agenda and a very heavy agenda.

• (1125)

The Chair: Thank you.

We want to go to Madame Lalonde.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Francine Lalonde (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): In Canada, we have an Official Languages Act, and French is one of the country's two official languages. I represent the Quebec riding of La Pointe-de-l'Île, and I'd like to start by telling you—and I'm certain Bernard will agree with me— that Quebeckers had a genuine love affair with a famous Finn, Saku Koivu, especially when he recovered from his bout with cancer. Recently he has been having eye problems. We know more now about Finland since the arrival of Saku Koivu on the scene.

I also have two questions for you. First of all, how important is it to your committee to achieve the millennium objectives? Secondly, in the area of foreign affairs, maintaining and securing peace in the Middle East is a desirable goal, given the current situation and possible repercussions. Have you looked into this and what is your position on this matter?

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Vilén, or whoever....

Mr. Jari Vilén: I will give room for everybody, but I will start very briefly with the concern, especially, about the millennium target.

It is a commitment Finland has made. It's a commitment that is shared by all parties, both from the opposition and the government.

Of course one of the crucial elements of our millennium target is reaching the 0.7% in development aid, and this is currently—and I think it would be proper to give the floor to the government parties—in the government program. But I think in practice we have to say that we'll not be able to achieve the 0.7% by 2010. We currently have reached 0.43% in aid.

The European Union countries have themselves, last December, decided on another revised timetable for reaching the objective; it's by 2015. I believe that is a very realistic timetable, and it's something the Finnish government can also reach in the next government period, which starts in 2007 and stretches into 2015. I think it's something that is sustainable and can be done in such a manner that the money will be well spent and especially targeted for the right purposes. As I said, I think all our parliamentary parties except one are in favour of this timetable, and especially of fulfilling the commitments we have undertaken.

I'm sorry, what was the second part of your question?

Ms. Francine Lalonde: The Middle East.

Mr. Jari Vilén: The Middle East; that's right.

Johannes?

Mr. Johannes Koskinen: The European Union is active in trying to solve the frustrating situation there. The very acute problem is how to finance the Palestinian Authority, and the commission is trying to find a way that President Abbas or his administration would be the channel to allocate the funding from the EU and the member states. Norway has also started humanitarian funding through the same kind of channel, and we hope the United Nations will also be active in this effort.

It would be crucial to have the solution in a few weeks, to avoid a more catastrophic situation in the Palestinian areas.

• (1130)

The Chair: Thank you.

Anyone else?

Madam Chair.

Ms. Liisa Jaakonsaari: May I ask one question?

We are discussing now in Finland how to strengthen the role of Parliament in security and foreign policy issues. In Finland the government presents a white paper every four years. Once you're in your term of office of government, then you give a big picture in that white paper. My committee has a little bit criticized the style, because the world is changing so fast that we have to be able to draw also these big lines faster than we can do in this report. My question is this. How are you consulting with your government, and what is the method you are discussing, and how does the government inform your committee on the question of foreign security policy?

The Chair: First of all, I think our committees are set up very differently, as I understand them. As I understand the responsibilities of the Finnish foreign policy committee or foreign affairs committee, you are also the oversight committee of security. Is that correct?

We have a number of different departments. I know that the prior government conducted a study, in which I was vice-chair of national security. We were looking for a parliamentary committee that could be an oversight of the intelligence-gathering agencies that we have here in this country.

I want to study more the Finnish model because, as I understand it, your committee specifically is the oversight for even those intelligence-gathering agencies. Is that correct? That is correct. So we are set up very differently. In security we have our intelligence-gathering agency, CSIS, and our RCMP, which are all part of another department, the Department of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness. We have an oversight committee of CSIS, known as SIRC, that goes through to make sure that everything that is carried out in this agency of CSIS is done properly so that every human right is recognized and protected.

So they are very different. How we have reports to our committees.... Our committee is not structured as yours is. We have ministerial accountability. Ministers will come—in fact we're expecting one this afternoon, and we had one last week—to give us an update on how that department is, or how Canada is, in that certain area they're responsible for.

I'm not certain if that's answering your question. In the last week, for example, we had a minister who appeared. He talked about Hamas and about the Middle East. He talked about some of those

issues, but it's our responsibility to be aware of it but not to be necessarily the oversight of any of that.

Mr. Peter Van Loan (York—Simcoe, CPC): May I add a bit, Mr. Chair?

Under the Canadian Constitution traditionally, foreign policy was the exclusive or sole responsibility of the Governor in Council, which meant the Prime Minister and cabinet in practice. What has changed recently as a result of a campaign commitment of the new Conservative government is a step to further consultation with Parliament on matters that traditionally were left solely for the cabinet.

For example, we had a vote to consider changes to and continuation of the NORAD treaty—the defence of North America, the treaty with the United States. Traditionally the way that would have been done is cabinet would have considered it, and after the treaty was negotiated, it would have been ratified by cabinet. We have inserted an additional step in which there was a debate in Parliament and a vote on that and then the ultimate cabinet ratification.

Similarly, on a decision on extending our involvement of our military in Afghanistan, when those troops were sent originally, the normal historic constitutional practice of the decision being made by the Prime Minister and cabinet was followed. This time we went to Parliament and sought its approval for extending that commitment.

So there is a bit of an evolution happening here. Does it have legal force and consequence, or is it just the practice of this Parliament? I would say right now it's just the practice of this Parliament, but as time evolves, if it continues and is practised continually, it might adopt the status of maybe a convention that is an accepted practice.

I hope that doesn't take away from question time, but helps answer the question.

• (1135)

The Chair: No, it doesn't. We'll come back to your question time. As I sat and listened maybe I misinterpreted your question. I don't think our government is responsible for bringing a white paper every four years, or every so many years. In the last Parliament we had an IPS, an international policy statement, that gave a little bit of an indication as to the direction the government was...a state of the union statement basically on Canada's involvement around the world, their vision, their thoughts on certain policies.

I'm going to go back to Madam Lalonde for a minute or two, because she still had a couple of minutes before the question came back.

Madam Lalonde.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Francine Lalonde: Thank you.

I'd like to know how the Finnish government gives concrete expression to the commitment it has made. You stated that the government proposes a policy to you every four years. Can you be a little more specific?

[English]

Ms. Liisa Jaakonsaari: In general, the Finnish Parliament is very active in the field of foreign security policy. Earlier we had a constitution. According to the old constitution the president alone led the foreign policy, but now the cooperation between the government and the president is crucial. That's why the Parliament is more involved in giving opinions on foreign security policy.

In our committee, of course, our timely issue is how the European Union foreign security policy is proceeding. As I mentioned earlier, the progress that the EU has made has been enormous in that field. We are following the development very carefully. Actually, very recently we passed new crisis management legislation. Then, of course, these development questions.... And an actual question is how we reorganize our relationship with NATO. As you know, Finland is not a member of NATO, but we are cooperating very closely and actively within the framework of partnership with NATO.

The latest statement from my party leader was that we could join NATO if we could get crucial benefits from the membership. Because Canada is a member of NATO, perhaps it's self-evident for you to be a member of NATO and you see relations with NATO as very crucial. In Finland we are criticizing that NATO is so strongly a U.S.-led organization that other countries—especially a small country—have no influence on the decision-making of NATO. We know that it's strong. It's not right, but it would be very interesting to discuss with you how you see the future development on NATO and what kind of relationship Canada has with NATO.

• (1140)

The Chair: Mr. Van Loan, I know you were going to pose a very good question.

Mr. Peter Van Loan: That's exactly where I was going to be going.

And just by way of background, it might be helpful for you to know that notwithstanding the Dutch-sounding name, my own family is actually Estonian. And also as a matter of interest, I have with me an intern who is American, but her name is Kara Vänni. Her family background is Finnish. So there is some knowledge and interest among us about this part of the world.

You talked about the recent developments in Russia, and I do think this is linked to NATO. Whatever people may say in polite company, the reality is that is a matter of concern. The increasing assertiveness, shall we say, of Russia has to be a concern. While people can debate the wisdom of the strategy Finland adopted in the wake of World War II, in the new environment, freed from that, having seen NATO expansion, having seen how the Baltics and most of the former Warsaw Pact countries have gone, it is puzzling to a Canadian why Finland would not have said, "The conditions are different now; we can take this as an opportunity to engage in that web of collective security."

Certainly we don't see—I don't see, and this government doesn't see—NATO as an American-led organization, but rather one that is more an example of American largesse and generosity in providing a security umbrella to western democracies. Perhaps we in Canada understand that more acutely because we sit next door with a huge amount of real estate, and certainly not the real economic means to

meaningfully defend it against international threats. Through NORAD, we have been accustomed to that kind of security cooperation. We feel the joint command reflects our interests, and in NATO the obvious rationale or reason for NATO was to defend the same interest. From this side of the ocean, it seems to us an enormous benefit for Europeans to have that security while only paying a small share of the cost.

Why is Finland not taking this opportunity to consolidate that security blanket while it can, when trends suggest this may become more of an issue in the years ahead if you don't? I'd be interested in hearing from all the different parties, because I suspect there is a difference of perspectives.

Mr. Jari Vilén: I will start from the opposition side.

I think all the opinions in Finland concerning NATO are within a very small margin. All the parties are saying, as the Social Democratic leader said, that we are willing to join NATO if we can see added value for Finland and for our security.

But I think the basic element, and the reason why NATO still is a very difficult issue, is you cannot win the elections with foreign policy, but you can lose the elections with foreign policy. So none of the parties are willing to take a very positive stand in favour of NATO membership before the elections. For historical or some other reasons, there are always elements saying NATO is part of the confrontation between east and west, part of the confrontation of the global powers.

Many people still don't see in Finland as a new emerging power for crisis management on a global scale, and therefore it's difficult to have a favourable decision.

At the same time, we must take into account also that public opinion is very much against it. Roughly 29% of the population is in favour, over 50% against. But in the same opinion surveys, if you ask, "Will Finland join NATO in the future?", over 50% will say yes, which is a contradiction in public opinion.

Mr. Peter Van Loan: What if you asked, "If we were under threat or attack, would the NATO countries come to our aid?"

Mr. Jari Vilén: The first response would be that it's the European Union that is the first security guarantee for us. It's easier for people to take steps first in the European Union, which is developing roles in the foreign affairs and security policy. It doesn't have this hard power that NATO has. Today the challenges in the world are a very different kind. Actually, the European Union we see has much more power to respond to challenges of global terrorism, failing states, and organized crime than NATO, which is military might.

NATO's power would be if you had a conventional threat against Finland, which of course is a very remote possibility somewhere in the future. Therefore the parties are not willing to take a stand in favour, because of the lack of public opinion support and because they're not willing to jeopardize the outcome of the elections.

Sweden doesn't want to talk about the European Union. Finland doesn't want to talk at a political level about NATO. None of the party leaders are willing to do that. Of course, as I said, there's a margin of error. I think our party is the most pro-NATO party. We want to join NATO, with the condition that there's large public support and a large political consensus for joining NATO. We're not willing to stand all alone saying that Finland should join NATO.

I think it takes time. Unfortunately, it may take more years. Until then, there seems to be very large consensus that we're taking all the necessary steps to being as close to NATO as possible. One of those elements—which is actually on your government's agenda and which we're looking for your response on—is the in-house partnership with NATO being drafted by the U.K. and the U.S.A. It gives willing and capable partners—countries like Finland, together with Sweden, Australia, New Zealand, South Korea, and Japan, countries willing to participate in very challenging organizational operations like in Afghanistan—in-house cooperation where we would have access to information, intelligence sources, and participation in the decision-making structures.

I would like to ask your support in supporting this idea, because we see it as beneficial for Finnish security at the same time.

• (1145)

Ms. Liisa Jaakonsaari: May I add, there are still some really genuine questions open for us, for example, on what the future of NATO is. We have the impression, for example with the U.S.A. still having this unilateral approach and with all these kinds of coalitions of the willing, that NATO is not as relevant for the U.S.A. as it was earlier. Of course, we've seen the changes during Mr. Bush's second coalition. We want to be sure that NATO is still relevant in the future. It's a very important organization.

We will follow how the European Union's security and defence policy is developing and what kind of division of labour it will be between NATO and the European Union. We have to elaborate all these questions very carefully and then make the decision. At the moment I agree with the opinion of the majority of the Finns that nowadays our security questions.... We feel safe somehow by cooperating closely with NATO and contributing to different crisis operations with NATO and the European Union.

There is not a lack of security from our point of view, but for a future perspective it's good to get answers to these crucial questions.

Mr. Johannes Koskinen: I'll say a couple of words.

All the new members of NATO have become members through a referendum. That's the reason that in Finland we have to look carefully at what the people think about this. Almost all the eastern and central European countries had a referendum on NATO. Now, according to the Finnish constitution, it's not obligatory to have a referendum. But like EU membership, the possibility of NATO membership could be an issue for a referendum.

About this constitutional role of the Parliament and the foreign affairs committee, in Finland almost all the international treaties have to be accepted by the Parliament. That's the reason the government has to listen to the views of the Parliament. Only when the treaty has nothing to do with legislation or budgetary questions and issues is it

possible to ratify it by the government and the president only. But I think 95% of the international treaties are accepted by the Parliament

• (1150)

The Chair: Do we have another answer over here?

Mr. Aulis Ranta-Muotio: Some politicians, and many Finnish people, now think that NATO's article 5 is no longer relevant in this situation. That's one reason why we have only 20% of Finnish people for NATO.

Ms. Liisa Jaakonsaari: As you say, this NATO question is very important for us.

Madam Perho.

Ms. Maija Perho: I would like to add very briefly something about the climate in Finland now that it is allowed to discuss NATO. Some months or years ago, if someone said it was very important to openly discuss NATO, the positive and negative sides and the economy, and so on, parties that were against NATO said, "You won't go into NATO". It was a very simple discussion. I hope that we can now really analyze the situation and what NATO is.

If it's allowed, I would like to change the subject and ask you about the climate policy, the Kyoto agreement, and the actual situation now, because in our briefing papers we have information that the goal is quite far away. Maybe you have other ways to reach the goals. We are interested in hearing your views on this.

The Chair: I hesitate to turn that over to the former government to answer, but very quickly—and then I want Mr. Wilfert to pose a question—the new government recognizes that the goals put forward in the Kyoto agreement were unachievable in this country. Instead of going down 6% from 1995, which is what we would have had to drop, we actually had 35% growth above the targets for greenhouse gases and carbon dioxide emissions. So although we're signed on to Kyoto, we want to be realistic about whether we can achieve the goals.

When you set a goal, you had better ask if it is achievable and whether we can reach those goals. This government has suggested that we need to do things to help clean up the environment, our climate, and our pollution, but we need to have a plan that is going to achieve something. Certainly this government has taken a different approach from the former government. We want to put in place a plan that's going to work.

Mr. Peter Van Loan: We must be honest about keeping commitments if we make them. That is our view.

The Chair: Yes.

I will go to Mr. Wilfert. In all fairness, Mr. Wilfert had a question in regard to climate.

Maybe you can talk a little bit about it, Bryon, and also pose your question.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert (Richmond Hill, Lib.): Mr. Chairman, I wanted to talk about the Arctic Council and the program of action. I'm talking about sustainability issues in the Arctic. We all share a common border, in a sense, with the Arctic, and I wanted to ask you about that.

You've heard from government members—and it's not an opinion that I share, and I'll get into the Arctic Council—but I think it is important to keep in mind, by way of comment, that Canada had the most aggressive plan of the G-8 when it came to climate change policy, as articulated in April of 2005 under Project Green. We do have international commitments, and I believe we can fulfill them.

The way to do that, obviously, is to make sure they are properly funded, which they were. We had the most successful COP, COP-11, in Montreal in December, and we have to look at the framework. Obviously, Kyoto isn't perfect, and looking beyond 2012 is very important. The previous government clearly had a position supported, I believe, by all opposition—well, now we have the two opposition parties, although the degree of support may have varied, but I think the principles we were involved with were supported.

However, changing gears slightly, in terms of the program of action, the issue of the Arctic Council, and the issue of sharing of information on the arctic, we all know of the problems with habitat, whether it's wildlife or otherwise. Lapland is an example. We see a disturbing situation now in terms of the toxics that are appearing in animals—caribou, reindeer—in the North.

I wanted to know your view as to the areas in which we could be doing more sharing of information and taking a more aggressive approach in terms of the council; of course, we have things like the University of the Arctic.

The second area I want to deal with, Mr. Chairman, is the International Criminal Court, because there are many people who are unconvinced about the merits of the court. Canada and Finland, I know, are very supportive of it, but we have those who don't seem to agree on ending impunity on the international stage. We have had very severe issues out there in the past—Rwanda, Yugoslavia, etc.

Do you have any thoughts on how we could collaborate more effectively—particularly, in your case, as EU partners—in getting others to sign on to the whole issue of the Statute of Rome? Clearly, it is something that Canada, regardless of the political party, has supported. I believe we have a distinguished Finnish journalist, Erkki Kourula, who is on the ICC, and I would appreciate your thoughts on that.

At any time over a cold drink I'd be more than happy to discuss with you and my colleagues the climate change policy. I never believe in airing dirty laundry in front of guests, so I really won't go into that—and it can be dirty over there; I know that.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

•(1155)

Ms. Liisa Jaakonsaari: Before I give the opportunity to Mr. Koskinen to answer the question related to the International Criminal Court, I would like to ask him whether my analysis is correct—that there are no big changes in terms of climate policy due to your regime change. Nowadays, you have a more pragmatic approach—or am I right? Are you keeping the goals or targets of the Kyoto protocol? No.

The Chair: We are still working to reduce; we're encouraging anyone to work towards those targets, but the penalties and the other things that go along with it were problematic to this government. I

think they want to put in practical, achievable goals in climate legislation, and they'll work towards that end.

Mr. Johannes Koskinen: On the International Criminal Court, I quite agree that we have to strengthen the role and efficiency of it and also the special ad hoc criminal courts, so that they do not take five years or ten years to punish the most severe criminals. In the EU, this principle is quite widely accepted, but we need to find the right time to have new assignments to this Rome Statute so that the scope of the International Criminal Court can be widened.

I also have to admit that on these efforts of the Canadian government to create a new chapter of international law, this responsibility to protect is very important. It's a major step toward the principle of having responsibility for criminal actions, with as much cooperation as possible, to avoid major human catastrophes of manslaughter.

•(1200)

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Liisa Jaakonsaari: Thank you.

As far as Arctic cooperation is concerned, it's very important. I pay tribute to Canada, because Canada has been so active in Arctic cooperation. In my opinion, there is no lack of research and no lack of information. In terms of climate change, for example, high-quality research has recently been published. Really, we all know the problems. It is how we implement all these recommendations and how to place those crucial questions of the combined climate change and Arctic cooperation on the agenda.

My impression is that earlier the United States was more interested in Arctic issues, but they are not so interested any more, and that is a cause of concern.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: I just want to say that having been to Finland on two occasions, I have been very impressed, particularly in the area I was involved in, which was district energy systems. Regarding the whole concept of dealing with the environment—with garbage issues, which is really a major concern here—and the public education approach, really from the youngest to the oldest, I must say, we have a lot to learn. I certainly appreciate the leadership that Finland has taken in that regard.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Wilfert.

Mr. Goldring, please.

Mr. Peter Goldring (Edmonton East, CPC): Thank you very much, ladies and gentlemen, for appearing today.

Finland and Canada share a lot of commonalities. We border very large countries and keep our own individual culture while bordering such other large countries. On our borders, we share northern regions and northern industries. We also share other things, for example, in the telecommunications field, with Nokia, the very large telecommunications company, and of course we have our BlackBerry too.

We share another thing too, and that's in sports, in hockey. I believe Jarri Kurri is a well-known Finnish player who played for the Edmonton Oilers. As a matter of fact, he was three doors down from our home in Edmonton, when he was raising his twins. I believe he is back home in Finland now.

We touched a little bit on Kyoto. What we're trying to deal with on Kyoto is to have practical plans that do work and do reduce emissions. One example of that is seeing automobile carriers in my travels to the Caribbean and Japanese vehicles on the streets of various islands. What happens there is that Japan removes vehicles from their streets through emission controls, but what they do with those vehicles is to load them onto ships and sell them throughout the Caribbean. Some of the initiatives that are planned to lower emissions are really negated if you're taking those emissions and shipping them off to another area. I believe there is much to do, internationally, to bring some sensible planning and direction into it.

I'm certainly very comfortable and assured that our country is working on its own to provide the best that we can to work toward clean air and a clean environment.

My question would be more toward one element of your society, and that's the electric power generation. Is it primarily nuclear? Are there issues such as this that you collaborate on with Canadian interests? I believe there is a re-looking in some areas in Canada to renew and refurbish nuclear power in certain provinces, such as New Brunswick, and in Ontario too. Is there much collaboration there? What percentage of the electric power in Finland would be nuclear?

Ms. Liisa Jaakonsaari: I think it would be beneficial to get the government's point of view. The ambassador will answer that.

His Excellency Pasi Patokallio (Ambassador, Embassy of Finland (Ottawa)): In terms of nuclear power, we are actually the European country that's now building new nuclear capacity. There will be a new nuclear power plant on stream in Finland in 2009, which will be our fifth reactor. We are actually looking to nuclear power as part of the energy mix for the future.

As to collaboration in the nuclear field between Canada and Finland, there isn't that much in practical terms, in the terms you were mentioning, on refurbishing. I'm not aware of any particular joint venture we might have in that area.

• (1205)

Mr. Peter Goldring: Have you had other nuclear power facilities? What has your electrical generation primarily been? Has it been hydro and water, or nuclear, or a combination?

Mr. Jari Vilén: There's actually an ongoing discussion at the moment in Parliament concerning Finland's future energy and environmental policy. I think the discussion is still ongoing; it started this morning, and I think they'll be debating the whole day. A parliamentary report has also been prepared for this kind of policy.

Very briefly, the report outcome is that we will maintain a cocktail of opportunities. Nuclear power will remain one of the most important factors; one-third of the energy that we need comes from nuclear reactors. There's also speculation in Finland that while we're constructing the fifth one with the Finnish-French technology, there will be interest in building a sixth one, because the economy that Finland has is very energy-consuming. A stable price in the economy is therefore extremely crucial. The stable price will now be received through the nuclear energy package. There are then other sources that we have, which are, of course, traditional reactors concerning coal and petroleum.

We're looking for sustainable and renewable energy sources. I think this especially is under debate at the moment. Unfortunately, we don't have any more future plant powers to construct. The legislation is very strict for environmental protection purposes. Those that have been constructed can be maintained and upgraded, but there are no possibilities for new sources.

We're actually looking for other elements that we can have, and bioenergy is one of the elements that we're very actively looking at. It's very time-consuming and very challenging at the moment. It will take a long time before we can change Finnish agriculture, for example, in a manner in which we can have more biofood. The discussion is very hectic at the moment.

It's the same in the European Union. The EU has decided to have a special program at the beginning of the next year during the German presidency, which will be prepared during the Finnish presidency.

I think that one of the key elements, if not the key element, in the discussions with Russia and the EU is energy. Last winter when Russia decided to cut off oil and gas in some of the eastern European countries, it really raised concerns in the European Union. Energy dependence in the EU is increasing all the time. Some countries are 100% dependent on Russian energy, and in some countries it's 50% to 70%. It is a very crucial issue that we have on the agenda at the moment.

Mr. Antero Kekkonen: I only wanted to say that the new reactor we're building comes from France.

Mr. Peter Goldring: When you say it was hotly debated in Parliament, on what basis was the debate mainly concentrated? Was it safety concerns? Was it overall public non-acceptance of facilities in their communities or in their neighbourhoods? What's the main criterion or the basis that would denote a hesitancy by members to fully subscribe?

Mr. Jari Vilén: In Finland, by law, Parliament has to accept the construction of the new nuclear power plant. Parliament has decided on the construction of all the nuclear power plants.

Ms. Liisa Jaakonsaari: It's not all of them. It's the latest one.

Mr. Jari Vilén: It's the latest one.

They had to change the legislation. This was voted on and accepted in Parliament. The construction of the fifth one is a unique decision.

Of course, the Green Party especially is talking about safety and security. But the discussion is more about whether it is right to invest. Is nuclear energy seen as a new or an old energy source? The focus of some of the deputations is that Finland should be more focused on renewable energy and bioenergy as future energy sources. Those in my party say that nuclear energy has to be included in the package as one stable source of energy, as long as you're looking for other options.

It was a unanimous opinion by Parliament's economic affairs committee that no source of energy should be excluded from the package that Finland would use. It was basically the decision of the Parliament committee that all energy sources should be open for the Finnish people to take into account development and the challenges we have.

Mr. Peter Goldring: Thank you.

Ms. Maija Perho: One aspect in the discussion is also the fact that we import nuclear energy from Russia, and they produce it there in very old-fashioned, dangerous reactors. That's why we have been thinking that it's better to build our own.

• (1210)

The Chair: Thank you.

I want to basically conclude this committee. I want to thank you for being here. I really hope that you enjoy the rest of your stay here in our country.

I want to thank your ambassador again for being so diligent in seeing whether there was any way that the two committees could get together. Our committees are structured such that we only have certain days that we meet. I'm very glad that he was so diligent, because we made this work, and I think our committee certainly is the better for it.

We appreciated your being here. We've learned a great deal about Finland. Our countries are very close friends and allies and we hope to keep that up. If we can work together in other ways down the road, we look forward to that.

We will conclude this informal meeting.

Thanks for coming.

Madam Lalonde.

Ms. Francine Lalonde: It is not an informal meeting; it's a formal meeting.

The Chair: It's a formal meeting. All right.

We had an informal meeting this morning with Tunisia.

The meeting is adjourned.

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