



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

Standing Committee on National Defence

NDDN • NUMBER 064 • 1st SESSION • 42nd PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Tuesday, October 24, 2017

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Chair

Mr. Stephen Fuhr

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• (1015)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Stephen Fuhr (Kelowna—Lake Country, Lib.)): Good morning, everybody.

Welcome to the Standing Committee on National Defence.

On our continuing conversation about the crisis in Ukraine, I would like to welcome the Honourable Ivanna Klymush-Tsintsadze.

Thank you very much. It's nice to see you again. I haven't seen you since Invictus.

This is our last official meeting on this particular subject. We're going to go into drafting instructions and write up a report with hopefully some very relevant recommendations on how Canada can improve its relationship with Ukraine and help you get to where you need to be.

Thank you very much for appearing today. I'm going to give you the floor for your opening remarks, and then we'll go to formal questioning.

The floor is yours.

Hon. Ivanna Klymush-Tsintsadze (Vice Prime Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration, Government of Ukraine, As an Individual): Thank you very much, honourable Chair.

Distinguished members of the committee, I'm absolutely thrilled and grateful for this opportunity to address you today. I hope that this conversation will also be useful for the gathering of all the information you might want. Once again, I want to thank the members of the committee who visited Ukraine recently. I'm also very happy to greet those I have met here today.

Ukraine and Ukrainians do understand very well the price of democracy. We have learned the hard way over the last couple of years that democracy needs protection, that democracy sometimes requires fighting for, and that it requires nurturing.

I'm sure that everybody in Ottawa knows what exactly it means to maintain democracy and how hard the work is. This is exactly what we as Ukrainian citizens and we as politicians have also learned, and what we're trying to appreciate since independence was regained back in 1991.

Unfortunately, during all these years since Ukraine has regained its independence, quite characteristic of our development has been intrusion by the Russian Federation in different spheres—economic intrusion and political intrusion in the internal development of our country. For every step forward that we have taken, Russia has actually tried to push us two steps back. Its most aggressive behaviour, since 2014, has actually revealed the major goal that Russia has with regard to Ukraine, which is, de facto, to control our country.

Unfortunately, when Moscow started the full-scale war, the hybrid war against Ukraine, it did so to ensure that Ukraine would cede its sovereignty for some type of peace that could be preserved and managed only by the Russian Federation itself. I would like to underline that Ukraine, like all other countries, definitely wants peace on its territory but not at the expense of its territorial integrity, its sovereignty, and its democracy and future.

The three-year period of war during which we have been fighting on our own territory against the Russian Federation has resulted in more than 10,000 civilians and military personnel being killed, more than 25,000 wounded, and more than 1.5 million internally displaced people who are trying to find their lives in other regions and parts of Ukraine. Seven per cent of the Ukrainian territory that has been occupied, and 20% of the Ukrainian economy and industrial output has been halted, destroyed, or just plain stolen.

Since Russia started the war in eastern Ukraine, the fighting has ruined hundreds of residential buildings; cultural, health care, and educational facilities; power grids; water supply grids; and different roads and other infrastructure facilities. The Ukrainian Ministry of Defence estimates that the damage that has been brought upon the eastern part of Ukraine alone is at about \$50 billion.

Kremlin aggression is replete with a communications strategy that is trying to disguise the hard truth of the Russian actions. It is supported by tireless social media blogs by Russian propagandists. They are pushing their false narratives through different sources, starting with Twitter, Facebook, other social networks, newspapers, think tanks, and even different political parties in some of the European countries.

• (1020)

The aim of this storm of disinformation is to actually isolate us from partners and allies in the international community, and to present a false picture to the world by insisting that it's an internal civil war as opposed to real aggression of the Russian Federation on our territory. This is something that your close neighbour frequently calls—I think, very rightly—“fake news”.

Throughout 2017, Russia has really tightened its grip on the occupied territories in eastern Ukraine. It has started to recognize the fake documents that are issued by the so-called local authorities. It has established a rubble zone there. It has expropriated Ukrainian public and private enterprises. It has also been further promoting the non-Ukrainian vision of the future of Donbass, starting with the whole idea of so-called Novorossiya and Malorossiya, up to the integration of those areas with the Russian Federation.

Independent sources have shown time and again that Russia's military trains, equips, and manages the illegal armed formations that are fighting back the Ukrainian regular forces on the division line. Moreover, the Russian Federation has managed to integrate those illegal armed formations into its own military chain of command. Therefore, we know and can validate that not only Russian mercenaries, not only some of the Ukrainian citizens who have been living on those territories but also Russian regular troops, both on duty and on so-called vacation, are present and are fighting against Ukrainian armed forces in this region.

Russia has ensured that there is a reliable flow of weapons and military assets crossing the border to support its proxies in the occupied parts of the Donbass. We have already witnessed 69 so-called humanitarian convoys, each containing several dozen lorries. They were definitely not bringing in humanitarian supplies but armaments for their proxies to fight back the Ukrainian troops. Each time we have signed a Minsk arrangement, we have made quite a few attempts to establish ceasefires, and every time we try to establish another ceasefire, it is broken. It is violated by militants who are managed and supported by the Russian Federation.

I have a couple of recent examples. Since June 1, 2017, we tried to establish a ceasefire with regard to International Children's Day. It was violated on just the second day. Then we tried for the so-called "harvest truce" in the middle of summer. It didn't work either. It was violated. Also, we tried to negotiate a ceasefire, and we supposedly reached an agreement that there would be a ceasefire for the back-to-school period of time, starting from August 31, but it was also violated blatantly by the militants from territories not controlled by Kiev.

Humanitarian issues are also complicating the security situation in the region. Unfortunately, at this point we have 405 people on the list of missing persons in Donbass, and we do not see any attempt or readiness by the Russian Federation to actually start the negotiation process with regard to missions that would help us to find those missing persons in non-controlled territories. Moreover, Russia and its proxies continue to block the release process for hostages and illegally detained persons despite the fact that Moscow took these obligations upon itself within the Minsk process. Currently, the militants are holding 152 hostages.

● (1025)

Moreover, Russia keeps at least 15 Ukrainian political prisoners on its own territory, and about 29 on the temporarily occupied Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the territory of Sevastopol.

Two main principles—the immediate release and the use of an "all for all" formula—are totally ignored by the Russian Federation and its proxies. We are determined to ensure that peace in Ukraine and a restoration of territorial integrity are ensured through political and

diplomatic means. We spare no effort in fulfilling the Minsk agreements and we remain ready to implement a comprehensive and sustainable ceasefire.

We have already withdrawn heavy weapons and guaranteed access to the OSCE special monitoring mission on the ground to verify our compliance. Unfortunately, the OSCE special monitoring mission does not have access—as was agreed to in the Minsk agreement—to all of the occupied territory, and it does not have access to the 400 kilometres of the Ukrainian-Russian border that is not now controlled by the Ukrainian side.

Despite Ukraine's good faith efforts to implement the Minsk agreements, we have seen that the Russian Federation has deliberately and unilaterally been violating its commitments as a party to the Minsk process. Over the past year, the situation in illegally annexed Crimea has also been deteriorating in terms of the preservation or protection of human rights and in terms of security. Russia has turned the peninsula, which used to be a tourist attraction, into a military base. This has not only increased tensions for us here in Ukraine; it has also increased tensions and threats for the little states and neighbouring states in the Black Sea region.

The occupying regime basically sponsors intolerance to dissent. It imposes illegal rules by pressure, by persecution, by detention, and by abduction. In the most recent report—and I would like to underline this—of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, which was just released on September 25, it is noted that multiple and grave violations of human rights by Russia as an occupying state have been recorded. Among them are the large-scale nationalization of private, communal, and public properties; illegal detentions; enforced disappearances and abductions; extrajudicial executions; and other violations of fundamental human rights and freedoms, as well as the altering of the ethnic composition of Crimea by the forceable imposition of Russian citizenship.

One of the most fundamental human rights has been consistently restricted since the occupation of Crimea, and this is the right to freedom of peaceful assembly, as ensured by the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms. Since the illegal annexation of Crimea by Russia, 256 participants of peaceful gatherings have been brought to so-called administrative responsibility in Crimea. I will be ready to present just a few examples, maybe in our question and answer period, if I have the chance to do so.

One of the major things that I think need your attention is the fact that in 2016 the Russian Federation outlawed the the Mejlis of the Crimean Tatar people, which is the single highest executive representative body for the Crimean Tatars as an indigenous people living in Crimea. They have outlawed it because of the use of—and I'm quoting here—"propaganda of aggression and hatred towards Russia, inciting ethnic nationalism and extremism in society."

Moreover, all of the Ukrainian schools have been closed. The Russian Federation is conducting a very strict "de-Ukrainianization" policy in Crimea, these days.

•(1030)

Survival has actually demanded the urgent reconstruction of our military. Back in 2014 we found ourselves with an armed forces that had basically been deliberately destroyed, and that had been infiltrated by Russian agents. At the same time we were fighting back Russian aggression, we had to rebuild from scratch, from the ashes, our armed forces in order to fortify our ability to protect ourselves against the Russian Federation. Holding Russia at bay was necessary for our survival; however, in order to thrive, we do need to reform our country. We have to understand that the changes we are undergoing in the country require a lot of human effort, a lot of intellectual effort, and technical assistance effort, as well as the political will that we are currently demonstrating.

Our democracy and our respect for the rule of law are stronger these days than they have ever been in Ukraine. Our economy, after the prognosis that was given to it as a default prognosis back in 2014 and 2015, finally stabilized at the end of 2016 due to the harsh measures taken by the government, parliament, and the president, with the support of civil society in Ukraine.

Ukraine has set for itself two overarching foreign policy goals: integration into the European political, economic, and legal space, as well as integration into the transatlantic security community. With regard to the first goal, we have the association agreement with the EU, which just recently—September 1—came into full force, and we are viewing it as a map of the further changes and reforms that we will have to conduct in this country. We have the full support of the old government to implement this association agreement for the benefit of our people.

Moreover, I'd like to underline that this year the visa-free regime with the EU has come into force, and the decision to be visa-free was made on the basis of all the reforms that the Ukrainian parliament and government made, with the support of civil society and the president. We have all delivered on our side.

In June, our parliament also clearly stated that another foreign policy goal for the Ukrainian state was NATO membership as a strategic goal for ourselves. We understand that at this point it's our homework to ensure that the defence and security sector is reformed according to NATO standards, and we have the strategic documents that have been adopted according to which we are changing our armed forces, our defence, and our security system.

How can the international community help Ukraine? It would be a terrible mistake for the entire civilized world to think that Russia's focus is exclusively on Ukraine. We have to understand that this aggression does not apply only to Ukraine; it is not focused on or targeted exclusively at our country. For the past year the world has reeled over escalating reports of how Russia supposedly intruded in the 2016 U.S. elections.

I'm sure you've all been following the Russian attempt at a *coup d'état* in Montenegro. Also, traces of Russian intrusion have been seen in the referendum that was held in the Netherlands against the ratification of the association agreement with Ukraine. This broader Russian strategy is pretty clearly to destabilize the west by focusing on and amplifying the differences and the existing divisions, rather than supporting any one particular political party.

First and foremost, I think for all of us, it's a horizontal issue of national security for each and every state.

•(1035)

Russia will continue to use different tactics to undermine western democracies and to divide the nations, including by purchasing disruptive online political ads.

Russia today poses not only an existential threat to countries like Ukraine, Moldova, or Georgia but also a real threat to the EU, NATO, countries of North America and wider Europe, and, above all, all of the values on which western civilization has been basing prosperity over the last 70 years.

Since 2008, and especially since 2014, it has become increasingly clear that the Kremlin regime in Russia does not think in terms of the win-win world. It sees the west as a clear adversary. It's not because the west has done something wrong or did something wrong, but because this is how the world makes sense to Russia.

We are all aware that Ukraine's response to aggressive actions of the Russian Federation is actually allowing NATO countries to reflect on the situation. It is giving the time to consolidate. It is giving the possibility to realize the common threat and to create a clear road map regarding how to act further. Therefore, I think it's extremely important for NATO to have and to have had that time, and we are, from here, welcoming the NATO forward presence in Europe, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, and Poland, and also the tailored forward presence in the Black Sea region.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Canada specifically for the 200 trainers, armed forces troops who are training our armed forces. I know this is a bilaterally and mutually beneficial experience, because our soldiers and officers are also sharing their experience with your troops. We are also grateful to see that 450 Canadian troops are also stationed in Latvia. We appreciate that as well.

Canada's active role in NATO, sustained by the belief in sharing of the weighty burden of defence, embodies the character and values that today drive the Ukrainian reform agenda. Our faith in this value is the spiritual foundation of our fight against Putin's challenge to individual states, to international alliances, and to the very rules and principles that preserve international security.

The international community must recognize today that supporting Ukraine is an investment in its own security. A persistent and coherent strategy based on common democratic values should continue to be the cornerstone of the west's approach to the Ukrainian issue. It means a united and unified approach by every democratic state opposing Russian aggression. It means no "business as usual". It means that the international community must reconsider and reframe its relationship with Russia until the pre-war state in Ukraine is restored.

Sanctions are the most efficient diplomatic tools and instruments against an aggressor. The sanctions should be explicitly linked to their specific objectives—de-occupation of Crimea, de-occupation of the Donbass area, restoring of the territorial integrity of Ukraine, and reintegration of the territories of Ukraine in one state. The sanctions should actually be gradually increased if no progress is observed and not lifted until the objectives are met.

In this respect, I'm taking this opportunity to also thank all Canadian parliamentarians for supporting the Magnitsky act. If the west lifts its sanctions against Russia, a few countries might benefit immediately from some increase in bilateral trade turnover, but sanctions relief risks signalling to Russia that destabilizing of the foreign policy, violating of international law, and violating of international rules and procedures are actually acceptable.

• (1040)

Appeasement will only encourage Russia to pursue its journey to undermine democracy and international norms.

Distinguished members of the committee, our fight against Russia is not about our right to democracy or our desire to participate in the rules-based order that defines the international system. This fight is about every single country's right to democracy, to prosperity, and to human rights. It's about every single country's right to make an honest appeal to the international community for support—and to actually receive it. I do hope that we will further ensure and receive the support that we have had to date from Canada, along with your engagement and your clear and objective understanding of the situation on the ground.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you very much for your testimony, Vice Prime Minister.

Colleagues, before we go to our formal round of questions, I'll just give you the reminder that everyone is very interested in this. I don't want the questions to drag on at the expense of limiting other people's time, so when you see this piece of paper, it means I need the question or the answer to be summed up. That way I can move on and make sure that everyone gets an opportunity.

Ms. Alleslev, please begin. You have seven minutes.

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

I want to thank you very much, Vice Prime Minister, for your excellent characterization of the challenges and the courses of action.

You highlighted the political progress you're making, the judicial progress, and of course the military. I wonder if you could give us a

feel for how you define progress. What in your government are you using as the measures of success, and what are the quantitative as well as qualitative metrics by which you're assessing your progress?

Hon. Ivanna Klympush-Tsintsadze: First and foremost, unfortunately, even after 23 years of independence, we find ourselves in a situation in which we are still feeling the Soviet bureaucracy working in Ukraine. We saw that the procedures and rules we were functioning by were not transparent enough. We saw that, unfortunately, corruption was still part of the practice in a lot of areas. Therefore, first and foremost, for progress we're using macro-financial numbers. Unfortunately, they are not immediately translating into the well-being of people. We had a huge recession in 2014 and 2015. Only at the end of 2016 did we manage to have small growth—2.3%—in our GDP.

We're also using numbers based on the specific reforms we are introducing. For example, we have introduced an absolutely unique electronic procurement system, called ProZorro, in Ukraine. We can already see, from only one year of its implementation, that we have preserved about 10% of the money foreseen in the budget for public procurement. This means that we have closed the loop of corruption in so many cases. Right now we've introduced transparent rules of public procurement.

This is a very serious and quantitative measure. We are still working on improvement of this system, but finally it has become obligatory for everybody. We had a lot of resistance in different spheres. People did not want to use this, and they were finding different pretexts not to use it, but we were clear in our political will to continue on this.

That is about every single sphere. Even in this dire economic situation, and with the necessity to pay more than 5% of our GDP to defence and security every single year, I think we have managed to raise the minimum salary for Ukrainian citizens. I think it is a very clear quantitative and qualitative measure such that, even in the most difficult economic situation, we are ensuring that people are better socially protected.

Moreover, since the beginning of 2017 we've started raising salaries for teachers and for medics. We just passed pension reform. It was a huge endeavour undertaken by the Ukrainian government. Thank God, supported by the work we all did and by Parliament, we passed pension reform that, first, increases and makes more just the pensions our people receive; and second, includes a plan around how we will ensure that the pension fund, which right now has a 50% deficit, will not have this deficit in the years to come.

•(1045)

Ms. Leona Alleslev: Perfect. Could you speak to the judicial just a bit? What kind of metrics are you using to evaluate the independence and success of your judicial system?

Hon. Ivanna Klympush-Tsintsadze: The judicial system is not a stand-alone system. Over these three years, we have managed to establish a totally new system of anti-corruption institutions, starting with the National Anti-Corruption Bureau of Ukraine and the National Agency for the Prevention of Corruption, and through anti-corruption prosecution, and right now we are in discussions and working out the best way to ensure that we also introduce an anti-corruption court.

Over this year—

Ms. Leona Alleslev: Excellent. I don't have a lot of time, and I want to get to one other question.

As you know, as Canadian parliamentarians, we need to manage scarce resources, and we need to be able to communicate to our public what we are doing and why it matters. How would you characterize the things that Canada has done and is doing for you? Which are the most important, and what would you like to see us increase or do next, or something like that?

How would you characterize Canada's support for you in terms of the critical things you'd like us to do or would like us to do more of?

•(1050)

Hon. Ivanna Klympush-Tsintsadze: First and foremost, I'd like to mention the political support. It doesn't have to be downgraded, because this is huge support, as well as moral and emotional support for each Ukrainian citizen.

Canada has been instrumental in how we are rebuilding our armed forces. As I mentioned already, we are very happy that the training program has been continued and prolonged, and is still going on.

We also have the pleasure and the honour of having your very specific input into the Defence Reform Advisory Board, which is working on the reform of the security sector with our Minister of Defence. The very practical and very serious engagement of Canada in the new police reform that is being worked on and is gradually developing in Ukraine has been absolutely instrumental. Also, in terms of supporting the system of the judiciary and the preparation of this new investigative board, Canada has been important.

Another aspect of Canadian involvement, which is very important to me personally, is that, through UN Women, Canada is supporting our gender-equality policies. This is the first time the Ukrainian government has made the decision to actually have a coordination role in gender-equality policy at the level of a deputy prime minister. Usually, it would be just one ministry responsible for it as a social policy. We are working very closely with Canada through UN Women in terms of fulfilling our commitments to implement both UN Resolution 1325 and CEDAW.

I would like you to continue doing this.

Ms. Leona Alleslev: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Mr. Bezan, go ahead.

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

Thank you, Madam Vice Prime Minister Klympush-Tsintsadze. It's great seeing you again and having you at our committee.

I know you wanted to get a number of things on the record, after the meetings we had in Kiev last month.

I'll just follow up on Ms. Alleslev's comments about the Canadian contributions and what we are doing right. Can you tell us what else we should be considering? I know that the previous government from Canada also provided Ukraine with RADARSAT imagery. That was removed by former foreign minister Dion, and when President Poroshenko was here in Canada, just four or five weeks ago, he again requested that RADARSAT imagery be reinstated. Could you speak to that as something that Ukraine still needs?

As we go forward as a committee here and start making recommendations on what Canada can do to continue to assist Ukraine, what would you see Canada leading on, specifically in the defence file, to help Ukraine's military? Also, on the issue of UN peacekeeping, we have the Russian proposal and we have the Ukrainian proposal. Would you comment on that as well?

Hon. Ivanna Klympush-Tsintsadze: Thank you very much.

I'm glad to see you again as well.

Thank you very much for raising this very specific issue of satellite imagery, which we were previously receiving from Canada. I know that both through our embassy and through other channels we are continuing this dialogue with regard to the possibility of restoring this and getting those clear images with high resolution that would help us to ensure a more efficient defence of our country.

Moreover, even though we have rebuilt our armed forces from scratch and, notwithstanding the fact that we have right now the second-largest standing army in Europe, our personnel still need equipment, training, and modern command, control, and communication procedures, as well as advisory support with regard to changing our army in accordance with NATO standards, and, finally, lethal weapons. For us, it's a matter of being more capable of defending ourselves and ensuring that we are decreasing the number of casualties we experience because of constant shellings and violations of the ceasefire by non-controlled territories.

I have some numbers here. When the U.S. provided us with medium-range counter-battery radar, the share of mortar fire casualties dropped from 43% to 17%, which means we are clearly saving lives by having high-technology lethal weapons that are also helping to halt the aggression and raise the price of the attacks by the Russian Federation on Ukraine.

Ukraine filed its proposal for consideration for UN peacekeeping missions on the territory of Ukraine back in 2015. Moreover, the Ukrainian Parliament has given our president the right to appeal to the UN. Unfortunately at that point the then Secretary-General did not give the go-ahead to that Ukrainian initiative.

A couple of months ago we saw that Putin had decided to put forward a so-called “suggestion” that UN peacekeepers be present in Ukraine. There are several red flags as to why we would not be able to accept that particular proposal as it was filed and suggested. For example, we believe the UN peacekeeping mission has to be stationed on the whole territory that is occupied. It has to be controlling the non-controlled border between the Russian Federation and Ukraine, and not be stationed there for the protection of the special monitoring mission of the OSCE. Rather, if we are talking about reintegration of the territories, we need this mission to be stationed on the non-controlled territory.

I do not know why it was put forward in the way it was by the Russian Federation, but we are ready to explore all the possibilities for dialogue, and that's what we are doing. However, clearly there are some things we cannot accept. We also cannot accept any Russian national participating in this peacekeeping mission. I think this is absolutely a prerequisite for peacekeepers to be stationed here.

• (1055)

Mr. James Bezan: You mentioned the defensive weapons issue. One of the things we heard when we were in Kiev and Lviv was the discussion about possible defence industry collaboration. I wonder if you would be able to comment on that.

Hon. Ivanna Klympush-Tsintsadze: That's another issue and possibility. I do know that colleagues from the Ukrainian defence industry Ukroboronprom are planning a visit to Canada at the end of November with very practical and, I hope, very interesting suggestions for common industrial co-operation in the defence industry, and also in the airline industry, that again could be mutually beneficial and interesting for both sides, Ukraine and Canada.

We are already using some of the components produced in Canada in our airplanes. We are substituting those components that were previously imported by Ukraine from the Russian Federation. We have a very clear basis on which we can further build the co-operation in the industrial sphere.

We are also hoping to use the benefits of the free trade agreement that was recently signed and that came into force this summer between Canada and Ukraine. That could also be part of the promotion of each other's strong sides in both countries.

• (1100)

The Chair: Mr. Garrison.

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke, NDP): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you very much, Madam Vice Prime Minister, for being with us again. I've rarely heard so eloquent a description of the challenges faced by a country as the one we just heard this morning. I thank you for providing that to us.

I know that often we hear the situation of Ukraine being described as “repairing the plane while flying”. I guess I would add to the end of that “through very stormy weather”.

Since we visited, I understand there has been some success with reforms of parliament in the areas of health care and the issue of parliamentary immunity.

Could you describe those to us briefly?

Hon. Ivanna Klympush-Tsintsadze: Actually, there have been several great achievements in co-operation between the government and parliament with regard to pension reform, education reform, and medical reform. You can imagine these are three horizontal things impacting absolutely every citizen and every family in the country. It is the legal basis that will now require a lot of work, attention, and resources from both the government and the executive side.

As you heard just recently, last week parliamentarians considered two draft laws that are suggesting the removal of immunity for parliamentarians in Ukraine. This was demanded by quite a few political forces. This was also part of the promise made by many of the political forces that are in parliament today. According to the procedure that we have to follow, the initial step, when considering something that would require changes to the constitution, is a vote to send the draft laws for consideration to the constitutional court. That has been done with, basically, an overwhelming majority and an almost unanimous vote in parliament just last week.

That is also part of the process that is hopefully going to help Ukraine fight corruption more efficiently and ensure a more transparent and accountable way of governing in the country.

Mr. Randall Garrison: Thank you for that.

When we met with you in Ukraine, you talked about the importance of visa-free access to Canada for strengthening people-to-people relationships. We heard that again from the Ukrainian Canadian Congress yesterday at our hearings.

Are discussions going on with the Canadian government about establishing visa-free access to Canada for Ukrainians? We did ask the question in Parliament yesterday, but didn't get a very clear answer. Have those discussions been started from your end?

Hon. Ivanna Klympush-Tsintsadze: Yes, we have started these discussions from our end. We are ready to consider some special requirements, for example for Canada, in terms of granting visa-free access for any other country. If those requirements or those norms are not yet met by Ukraine, I think we are very ready to work on those, because there is a long-standing connection between Canada and Ukraine, and we have the possibility of increasing bilateral trade or increasing people-to-people contact through initiation of this easier travel to Canada from Ukraine.

As you know, Canadians do enjoy visa-free access to Ukraine and we are happy to welcome everybody who is taking the transatlantic flight. We will be happy to host more and more Canadians, not only for business but also for leisure trips of those travelling to Europe.

•(1105)

Mr. Randall Garrison: Thank you. I'd love to take you up again on that.

Yesterday the committee heard some unsettling testimony that there had been indications by the Canadian government that bilateral aid programs that support things like the anti-corruption training and military training would be funded only until 2018 and might not be renewed.

Have you made a very clear request to the Canadian government for continuation of those programs, and have you received any indications about the future funding for those military, anti-corruption, and police training programs?

Hon. Ivanna Klympush-Tsintsadze: We do not yet have a clear indication regarding how things will be evolving and developing. However, we will be continuing to make our clear argument and explain the road map regarding how and for what purpose we are going to use this support and training, both in the anti-corruption institutions and in the training of the military.

Unfortunately, we are still dependent on this. Moreover, one of my major messages to all of our foreign partners is about helping us to maintain those anti-corruption institutions that we have established and built, which still need high professionalism. There are definitely still forces in the country that are not very happy with their activities. We want to ensure that they are highly professional and that nobody can question whether they have done something right or wrong. This could be done only with further specific training that would be received from those who know how to do this.

We hope that this will continue.

Thank you.

Mr. Randall Garrison: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Mr. Darren Fisher.

Mr. Darren Fisher (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

It's lovely to see you again, Madam Vice-Prime Minister, albeit virtually.

I will use a similar line of questioning to the one I used yesterday with Paul Grod, and you spoke to this as well. Russia is using media to spread its propaganda through Ukraine. You used the term "storm of disinformation" and you mentioned that Russians are sort of selling this back home as an internal civil war, not only back home but also in the Donbass. *The Economist*, referring to the Donbass region, said, "...absurdly, despite the daily shelling, most of the locals blame Ukraine rather than Russia for their misery."

This information warfare is clearly working in the Donbass region, but when we were in Ukraine we certainly saw a pro-EU kind of feeling within the areas we were in. Let's say we move forward to a time when we're looking at a peaceful solution to this, and maybe a peacekeeping situation, how do you bring the Donbass region back into Ukraine? I assume that the EU support is mostly country-wide, with the exception of a couple of pockets. How do you bring them back into the fold in Ukraine?

Hon. Ivanna Klympush-Tsintsadze: You are right that people who live in the occupied territories are unfortunately subject to continuous information attacks by the Russian so-called media. I am glad we are not the only ones seeing the propagandist nature of the Russian media. It is functioning not only in the Russian Federation and the occupied Donbass region but also in some of the Russian media, like Russia Today and Sputnik. Finally, the world is getting a more sober understanding of the narrative we are dealing with.

I'm sure it would take time for people to be healed in those territories. Once they get exposure to different types of information, they will have to have a chance to absorb it, to analyze it, to get over their Stockholm Syndrome, and to feel dignified and sure that they do not have to be afraid of anything else. However, they will need some time, after the weapons are withdrawn, after the troops and mercenaries are withdrawn, to return to their usual lives and start thinking again.

Another part of this success is the CAF-controlled territory. In 2008, during the NATO summit in Bucharest, Putin said that Ukraine is a failed state. This is exactly what Russia is targeting. It wants to ensure that we do not succeed. They are not happy with any of our successes.

The more successful we are in economic reforms, in social reforms, and in growing democracy throughout the territory of Ukraine, the easier it will be for the people in Donbass to come back to normal. Once they see that behind the division line, life is flourishing and going ahead, this will be better than any political or campaign ad in the territory of Donbass. Working together and ensuring that we succeed is the best way of reintegrating.

•(1110)

Mr. Darren Fisher: Yesterday we heard about thousands of kilometres of porous border between Russia and Ukraine. What is the government doing to secure that border? We have arms traffic and illegal trade going on there. What can you do? How can you take steps to solve that issue?

Hon. Ivanna Klympush-Tsintsadze: As you are clearly pointing out, as I said earlier, we have found ourselves 23 years into independence with these loops in our development. Conscious decisions were made earlier to ensure that Ukraine could be penetrated by the Russian Federation and that it was dependent on the Russian Federation in terms of our economic well-being and our energy. Even now, more than 30% of our trade is tied to the Russian Federation.

All of this has to be changed, including border control. We have been training our border guards, and they have shown great successes in their activities, and we are also working closely with the EU to ensure that our borders are protected. Through the implementation of the visa liberalization action plan, which we had to fulfill to obtain visa-free travel with the EU, we have ensured that we can manage migration flows and that we are protecting our borders according to the rules and procedures acceptable to EU countries.

I think there was also probably a bit of not necessarily manipulation but non-objective information presented during your hearings, in which the Ukrainian-Russian border was called transparent. It's not transparent anymore.

The Chair: Thank you.

I think that pretty much brings us to the end of our discussion today.

I want to thank you very much for your time.

Hon. Ivanna Klympush-Tsintsadze: Thank you.

The Chair: In the next few days, the committee will go into the report-writing stage, and we'll deliberate on substantive recommendations to the Government of Canada. We also appreciate—as we've heard from many people—that this is very much an information war. It was our pleasure to help you, through this process and our visit to Ukraine, to get your voice on the world stage and to help combat the misinformation that has been happening.

If we can do something more for you in the future, please don't hesitate to contact us.

Thank you very much.

Hon. Ivanna Klympush-Tsintsadze: Thank you very much. I appreciate this opportunity and I thank you for all the work done by the Parliament of Canada and by the governments of Canada to support Ukraine.

I hope that this will stay the same in the future and that we Ukrainians will be contributing as donors and partners to the security of the whole world, including Canada.

Thank you.

• (1115)

The Chair: Thank you.

The meeting is adjourned.

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