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## **Standing Committee on National Defence**

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**EVIDENCE**

**Tuesday, December 4, 2018**

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**Chair**

**Mr. Stephen Fuhr**



## Standing Committee on National Defence

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• (1105)

[English]

**The Chair (Mr. Stephen Fuhr (Kelowna—Lake Country, Lib.)):** Good late morning to committee members and guests. Thank you all for coming today.

We're here to talk about regional and geopolitical and military issues in the context of Russian aggression. Today we have the ambassador of Georgia, Ambassador Kavtaradze; the ambassador of the Republic of Moldova, Ambassador Beleavschii; and our friend, the ambassador of Ukraine, Ambassador Shevchenko.

Thank you all for coming.

We're here to give you time to talk about the recent events happening in your part of the world with regard to Russian aggression. Obviously there are the issues themselves and then all the fallout that occurs after the fact with regard to misinformation and disinformation. We would like to hear first-hand from you folks on what's really happening over there and how it's affecting you, both geopolitically and militarily.

I know you've been told to restrict your comments to 10 minutes. I'll be generous with the time if you could please not exceed 15 minutes. We really want to hear from you.

I'm going to yield the floor first to the ambassador of Georgia.

Sir, you have the floor for your opening remarks.

**Mr. Konstantine Kavtaradze (Ambassador of the Republic of Georgia to Canada):** Thank you very much.

Mr. Chair and distinguished members of the committee, thank you for this opportunity to appear before you today to brief you on the security challenges our three countries—Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine—face.

I know about the time constraints, so I'll go directly to my statement.

I've been in the diplomatic service for the last 30 years, and for these last 30 years I witnessed seven or eight wars and conflicts in our region—in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, in Transnistria, in Nagorno Karabakh, the 2008 Russian-Georgian war, the annexation of Crimea and military actions in eastern Ukraine—and all these conflicts, dear committee members, either were instigated by Russia, or Russia was and continues to be part of these conflicts.

These conflicts are the most serious challenge and impediment for countries like Georgia, which seek closer ties and integration with NATO and the European Union. Conflicts are instruments in the hands of Russia, and by using this instrument, it tries to maintain so-called spheres of influence in the neighbourhood.

These conflicts are not isolated cases. They point to a pattern of Russian behaviour, and it's important to see the pattern in order to not only just cope with the existing challenges but to address threats that Russia may pose in the future.

Unfortunately, Russian leadership still thinks in terms of spheres of influence. Actually, the Kremlin always considered the end of the Cold War and the dissolution of the Soviet Union as a humiliating defeat for Russia. No one has made this Russian mindset clearer than President Putin when he said that the collapse of the Soviet Union was “the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the century”. We are witnessing intensified efforts by Russia to undo this greatest catastrophe. Its aggressive actions can, however, also be viewed as an act of desperation in light of declining influence in post-Soviet areas. The reason for this decline is the unattractiveness of the undemocratic political model Russia has to offer.

In order to understand Russia's attitude toward Georgia, and generally to its neighbourhood, it's important to have the historical perspective. Georgia is 3,000 years old, a European kingdom with its own original language and traditions, Europe's longest-serving single royal family, and a European mindset and political culture. After almost 100 years under the Russian Empire, and a short period of independence after World War I, in 1921 it was forcefully incorporated into the Soviet Union. This background is a reason why, after regaining independence in 1991, it was very natural for Georgia to declare European and Euro-Atlantic integration as its major foreign policy priorities.

Russia's response was swift. It started to arm and entice the separatists in two Georgia regions, and as a result of the military conflict in 1992-93, Georgia lost control over these two regions, and it received hundreds of thousands of IDPs, ethnically cleansed with the help of the Russian military.

In the 1990s, Georgia gradually started to become an alternative transit route for Caspian oil and gas to Europe. This further infuriated Russia, which sought total control over energy sources and routes of delivery in the neighbourhood.

In 2000, Georgia started the set of comprehensive reforms designed to fight corruption, rebuild infrastructure, consolidate state institutions and strengthen Georgia's ties with NATO and the EU. Our desire was simple and very challenging: to build an independent and democratic nation with a market economy, which Russian leaders considered a dangerous alternative to their own model. Any political or economic progress in the neighbourhood was seen as a danger by the Kremlin.

In 2006, the Kremlin closed down all the road, air and maritime connections with Georgia, stopped oil and gas supply, and introduced an embargo on Georgian wine and agricultural products. The aim was to kill the Georgian economy and put pressure on the government to change its pro-western policies. In response, in two years' time Georgia managed to completely diversify its export markets and energy sector, diminishing dependence on Russian oil and gas from 80% to 12%. When nothing else worked, in a desperate attempt, Russia resorted to direct military aggression.

The war with Russia in August 2008 was the hardest test, not only for Georgia but for the established international order. Before attacking Georgia, Russia carried out the illegal process of passportization in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, in order to later claim that it defended its own citizens there.

Russia mounted an all-out military invasion, using tactical ballistic rockets and strategic bombers, in addition to ground forces. Georgia fought back and we managed to survive.

In full defiance of a six-point ceasefire agreement facilitated by the French EU presidency, Russia recognized the independence of two occupied regions. Unfortunately, at that time, Russia did not pay any price for this aggression.

The two main goals of the invasion were to deter Georgia from the Euro-Atlantic path, and to stop the flow of Caspian oil and gas through Georgia. From today's perspective, we can say that despite military aggression and occupation, Russia could not achieve its goals. Georgia continues its democratic transformation and is strengthening institutions. One week ago, for the first time, we had a second tour of presidential elections, and for the first time, a woman was elected president of Georgia.

According to the World Bank, Georgia is one of the world's top reformers and leaders in the "ease of doing business" rankings. It is one of the least corrupt countries in Europe, and is part of major international and regional infrastructure, transport and energy projects. Last year, Georgia, which is a country of 4.5 million people, received seven million tourists. In 2020, we expect nine million.

Georgia continues its NATO and EU integration, which has huge public support. This is a big asset for Georgia. About 70% of Georgians support NATO integration, and around 80% support EU integration.

Georgia has all the instruments for membership in NATO. We have a well-established NATO-Georgia Commission, and we are implementing a substantial Georgia-NATO package. We are involved in the Black Sea-security strategic discussions. We have joined military drills, and for years, Georgia was the third biggest contributor to NATO's operation in Afghanistan, with ISAF. It

continues to be the third biggest contributor to the Resolute mission today. We've had heavy casualties, for a small country. Thirty-two people have been killed and more than 300 have been wounded in combat.

Despite formidable security challenges, the government continues with difficult reforms. At the same time, we are trying to ease tensions with Russia. We established multilateral and bilateral formats for negotiations, and even though we have not had diplomatic relations with Russia since 2008, the Georgian government has also introduced a bilateral format for consultations.

There are some positive trends emerging as a result of this. Trade is improving, direct flights have been established and—I mentioned the seven million tourists—Russians are one of the biggest groups among the tourists.

However, despite these attempts to improve relations with Russia, the fundamentals of the Kremlin's policy toward Georgia have not changed. Russia continues its occupation of 20% of Georgia's territory, does not allow around 500,000 IDPs to return to their homes and spares no effort in derailing Georgia from westward movement. The Russian military is erecting dividing walls and barbwire on the occupation line, and constantly moving the line of occupation deeper into Georgian territory.

Recently, the Georgian Parliament adopted a resolution about the gross violation of human rights in occupied territories by Russian forces, and the Otkhazia-Tatunashvili list, which imposes sanctions, including restrictions related to visa, property and financial transactions on those officials accused and convicted of murder, abduction, torture and inhumane treatment of citizens of the occupied territories.

We submitted that list to Global Affairs Canada. We would be grateful to the Canadian government and to Parliament for their support in implementing this resolution, and sending yet another signal that every crime and gross violation of human rights would have its consequences.

• (1110)

We welcome Canada's more active involvement in eastern Europe. This involvement is not just about deterrence, defence and security. First of all, it is about shared values: the values of democracy, rule of law, open societies and free trade. Russia tries to destabilize Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine because by adhering to these values those countries constitute a direct challenge to the Russian ideological narrative. Their success in building open and prosperous societies would undermine Russian influence in other states of the region by proving that there is a viable alternative.

Experience shows that the only way to stop Russia from undermining international security is by showing determination and solidarity within the alliance and with the countries that fall victim to its actions. Moscow did not pay the price for invading Georgia in 2008 and supporting separatism in Moldova and, as a result, today we have an annexation of Crimea and an invasion in eastern Ukraine.

In conclusion, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine are interconnected and bound by shared history, mutual respect and common challenges. We are immediate neighbours of the EU and NATO, and what happens in our countries directly affects the security environment, not just in Europe but here in North America, in Canada, too.

That is why it is so important to provide help to Ukraine today when it faces such big challenges. By helping Ukraine, you're assisting Georgia and Moldova, too, and by supporting Georgia and Moldova, you are making Ukraine's case stronger. The best responses to destructive policies are further democratic reforms and deepening our integration with western institutions. We believe that the doors of NATO and EU should remain open for countries like Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. I hope that one day, sooner than later, our countries' European and Euro-Atlantic perspective will become a reality.

Thank you, Mr. Chair and distinguished members. I am ready to answer your questions later.

•(1115)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ambassador.

Ambassador Beleavshi, the floor is yours.

**Ms. Ala Beleavshi (Ambassador of the Republic of Moldova to Canada):** Thank you so much.

Chair Fuhr, vice-chairs, distinguished members of the committee and my fellow ambassadors, I am truly honoured to take part in this briefing session on regional security, especially in this format along with my colleagues and good friends from Georgia and Ukraine. I am particularly glad that all the three heads of diplomatic missions have been invited to address the esteemed members of the defence committee and share some of our thoughts and reflections on the regional security that directly affects our countries.

I view this briefing in the current composition, first of all, as yet another testament to Canada's growing concern over regional security in eastern Europe, and as a confirmation that Canada recognizes the commonality of the legacy of the past of all the three countries, of the challenges and threats posed to their independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity and their common aspirations. Not least, I would like to see this as a sign that Canada is seriously considering a common approach towards supporting our three countries in addressing these threats.

Mr. Chair, my country, the Republic of Moldova, is deeply concerned about a serious deterioration of the international security environment, which we all feel so closely and which reminds us of the sad times of the Cold War. We all face a great deal of serious, older and newer challenges and threats to our common security that undermine peace, stability and the rules-based world order, and hinder countries' development.

The Republic of Moldova, by its geographical position, is an integral part of the security architecture of the Black Sea region, an area of interest for a number of regional and international actors. Security in this part of Europe is influenced by the existence of the frozen or protracted conflicts in Georgia and Moldova, as well as by an ongoing war in Ukraine.

Transnistria makes up 11% of Moldova's territory, where about 40% of the country's industry is concentrated. Abkhazia and South Ossetia make up 20% of Georgia's sovereign territory. Eight heavily industrialized southeastern regions of Luhansk and Donetsk, along with Crimea, together make up over 20% of Ukraine's GDP and population.

I brought these figures to show how much is at stake for the countries that chose to pursue their path to democracy and Euro-Atlantic integration free of external coercion and pressure.

Of course, the level and scale of intensity of the territorial conflicts in each of our countries could differ in various periods of time, but the pattern applied is common. Separatist movements are being encouraged from outside of our countries. The breakaway regions are being strongly supported economically, financially and militarily. The fact that an active phase of the Transnistrian conflict ended by reaching a ceasefire agreement in July 1992 does not mean that it cannot degenerate into armed hostilities when needed. The conflict has remained unresolved for 28 years. Today, contrary to the Constitution of the Republic of Moldova, over 1,700 Russian troops are stationed in the eastern region of my country and over 20 thousand tons of arms and ammunition remaining from the former Soviet 14th army are stockpiled in the region, posing a serious threat to regional security.

As you are well aware, we have addressed these issues consistently and repeatedly in the framework of the highest international fora, including the UN and OSCE, as this problem does not include exclusively the Republic of Moldova. It affects the entire region, the Black Sea countries and the European continent.

•(1120)

Instead of disarming the separatist forces and withdrawing the Russian troops stationed illegally on our territory, in accordance with Russia's international commitments, the region is being continuously militarized with an increase in the capacity to produce and modernize weapons, assault-armoured military equipment and Grad artillery systems. This was clearly demonstrated last September at the Transnistrian military parade.

In this context, I would like to draw your attention to the continuous supply of these forces with modern technology and conventional weapons beyond any control of the international community. Russia continues to offer, on a large scale, Russian passports and to recruit local population for its troops stationed in the region.

I take this opportunity to voice our concerns about the recent intensification of the joint military exercises conducted by the Russian troops, along with the paramilitary forces of the Transnistrian separatist regime. During 2017 alone, over 320 training military activities were carried out in the region.

This year the number grew considerably. Activities of this kind are being recorded almost daily, with crossings of the Dniester River during the exercise advancing towards the capital city of Moldova; military exercises with the use of artillery systems; and elements of tactical training engaging diversion groups, reconnaissance personnel, snipers, etc. The last major exercise included the mobilization of the entire force.

We perceive these actions as a direct threat to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of my country. At the same time, these exercises are likely to create new tensions in the region in the context of the crisis in Ukraine.

We are also worried about the ongoing activities of the Transnistrian regime aimed at increasing the number of military education institutions specializing in such areas as infantry, tank and artillery education activities for land forces, and craftsmen of propaganda.

Additionally, during 2017 two cadet schools with a capacity of 500 students, aged 11 plus, were opened in the region, both founded with the direct support of the Russian defence ministry and the former Russian deputy prime minister Dmitry Rogozin, declared by my government to be *persona non grata* on our territory. Nowadays graduates of these institutions are active military personnel of the Transnistrian paramilitary structures and officers of the Russian troops stationed on our territory.

That being said, we are firmly committed to continuing our efforts aimed at finding a comprehensive and sustainable political solution to the conflict within the existing five-plus-two negotiating format, which includes the Russian Federation, Ukraine and the OSCE as mediators, plus the EU and the U.S. as observers. These major international actors have all the potential to achieve this goal, that of granting a special status to the Transnistrian region based on the principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity of Moldova within its internationally recognized borders, as is stipulated in the relevant international documents.

I am glad to note a positive dynamic in the process of negotiations that views particularly confidence-building measures in the context of small-step policy. Parties to the conflict have worked hard lately, being focused on resolving the daily problems faced by the population in the conflict zone—in particular, issues related to ensuring the rights to education, property, free movement, etc.

We will continue to advocate both within the UN, OSCE and now the international fora, but also in the framework of a bilateral political dialogue with the Russian Federation in favour of a complete and unconditional withdrawal of the Russian troops and ammunition from our territory. We will continue to stand up for the transformation of the current peacekeeping operation on the Dniester River into a multinational civilian mission under international mandate.

• (1125)

Ladies and gentlemen, to interfere in the course of development of a state, no war is needed today. It is enough to have the ability to influence its politics by using various means of persuasion, misinformation and manipulation, and cyber-attacks; by corrupting officials and using all sorts of sophisticated schemes of money laundering; by imposing economic embargos and by meddling in the election processes. This is how I describe the current challenges posed to my country. They are also relevant to Georgia and Ukraine to a large extent and we are not ready to counter these hybrid threats.

Moldova, Georgia and Ukraine have all signed association agreements with the EU, which provide a clear road map for closer political association and full economic integration with the European

Union. They have chosen a western model as their development and security option, which would, in effect, fully anchor them in the western space of democratic values.

Looking specifically at Ukraine and Moldova, the two neighbouring countries, they can't be treated separately from each other. Only together will they succeed in becoming genuinely European or they will fail by being turned into a grey area. This is due to their geopolitical and geographic proximity, as you may see on the map provided. Better governance, economic opportunities, justice reform and the fight against corruption should be the cornerstones of western strategy for these states.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel put the crisis in Ukraine in a wider context of Russian interference in eastern Europe, accusing Russia of creating instability, not only in eastern Ukraine but also in Georgia, Moldova, Azerbaijan and Armenia. She said, "There is a belt of countries that cannot develop as they want. In the face of this, we cannot close our eyes as Germans." I am confident Canada fully shares this view.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ambassador.

You have the floor, Ambassador Shevchenko.

**Mr. Andriy Shevchenko (Ambassador of Ukraine to Canada):** Mr. Chairman and members of Parliament, it's an honour to be here to address you and, through you, to thank the Canadian people for their unwavering support towards Ukraine.

[*Translation*]

It provides great support for my nation, and I thank you for it.

• (1130)

[*English*]

I would like to start with the footage that many of you have probably seen. This video was filmed on November 25 in the international Kerch Strait by a Russian naval officer who wanted to capture the moment when his ship would follow orders and ram the Ukrainian tugboat.

There is something in this video that strikes me every time I watch it. It's the voice of the Russian captain, who is so excited at this chance to hunt, chase and hit the Ukrainian vessel. He screams, "Press her! Hit her! Squeeze her!" Make no mistake; they knew what they were doing and they enjoyed this opportunity to do whatever they wanted without any threat of receiving an appropriate response.

Radio exchanges between the Russian officers show that there was a clear order to shoot, ram and capture the Ukrainian vessels. The picture at top right shows the damage to the control room of the Ukrainian vessel. They knew exactly where the people were, and that is exactly where they targeted.

Apparently, not everything went well for the Russians either. The picture at bottom right shows the Russian patrol boat, which was damaged in a collision with another Russian vessel.

It was a well-planned attack that was controlled directly by President Putin, as would later be recognized by his press secretary, Peskov. For the first time since the Russian aggression into Ukraine in 2015, we saw a case where the Russian military directly attacked the Ukrainian military. This time they did not hide behind green men, as they did in Crimea, or behind mercenaries, as they did in the eastern part of Ukraine.

This incident was a result of the Russian decision to block passage through the international Kerch Strait. As you know, the bridge was illegally built by Russia. A number of individuals and companies related to that were sanctioned by the U.S. and our other partners, and I hope Canada will follow suit.

If you look at the picture, you will see there's nothing really new in it, because this is exactly what the Russians did when they invaded Crimea and tried to blow up Ukrainian vessels in Donuzlav Lake in the spring of 2014. At that time, Russia stole Crimea from Ukraine and the world did not interfere. This time they want to steal the Sea of Azov.

As of today, Russia has dramatically escalated the situation in the region. It started in the spring. The circled zones that you see show the areas where the Russians started intercepting and inspecting commercial vessels. Now they are practically blocking the Kerch Strait from free passage. They have two goals in doing that.

First, they want to cut off the Ukrainian ports of Mariupol and Berdyansk, which you can see in the upper part of the picture and which are key to the exports of steel and grain from the east of Ukraine.

Second, this is a perfect set for extending their military advance along the northern coast of the Azov sea, all the way to Crimea. The blue box at top right shows you the area that is already heavily used for Russian naval exercises. It's right next to the Ukrainian city of Mariupol. Russia has deployed major forces into the region, which allows it to effectively control the water and the air in the region, as well as most of the coastline of the Sea of Azov.

The bigger picture of the region tells us that by militarizing Crimea, Russia has greatly increased its presence throughout the Black Sea. As you can see, Russia has also stepped up its aviation reconnaissance activities across the Black Sea. As you know, Canada has deployments in Romania as part of the air patrol operations, so this picture tells you that it was the right decision by Canada to send your servicemen and servicewomen to exactly where they can make a difference. They are playing a very important role there in helping us to defend the eastern flank of NATO.

It's important to realize that the biggest threat from Russia is if it expands its influence into the Mediterranean and into the Balkans. Crimea, this red diamond in the middle, is very key to that strategy. If you look at the numbers, you can see that Russia has been turning Crimea into a huge military base. Our intelligence tells us we will see much more of that in the next several years.

It also tells us that Russia has already consolidated impressive nuclear capabilities in Crimea. This includes naval and air, and there are signs that Russia is restoring nuclear storage in Crimea. This can be a horrifying game-changer in the whole of eastern Europe and the Middle East.

In that sense the Russian presence in Moldova and Georgia is not just to put pressure on those independent nations leaning toward the west. They also need it for the military buildup across the region.

What do we ask you to do about this?

First, there are a couple of very practical things. We need your support to get our men back. We're talking about 24 sailors. The youngest is 19. They have been brought to Moscow and they have criminal charges against them. We know enough about the Russian judiciary to be very concerned about the trials. We believe they are prisoners of war. They went from a Ukrainian port to another Ukrainian port through an international strait. Many of them are alive only by a miracle and they deserve the right to be brought back home.

Second, we demand release of the three vessels currently held in Kerch.

Third, we need to restore free passage through the Kerch Strait. It's an international strait and international law should be applied.

At this moment I would like to specifically thank Canada for supporting these demands. This is exactly what was said in the statements of Minister Freeland and also in the statements by the Leader of the Opposition Andrew Scheer. Moreover, this was repeated in the joint statement of the G7 ministers. We praise Canadian leadership on this issue throughout the G7 community.

We also believe this is the time to upgrade NATO presence in the Black Sea region and to introduce more punishing sanctions on Russia.

We need to take a new level of co-operation between NATO and its allies in the region. Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia feel and know that we can do much more together. We need this to deter Russia from further escalation. We also need more NATO presence in the region to ensure that the Black Sea will remain open to civil and commercial activities. This should complement our defence co-operation that already exists. Operation Unifier is a great example of practical co-operation between Ukraine and Canada.

I know that many of you have visited your troops in western Ukraine; so did I. It was an incredible feeling to see that genuine exchange of experience and the camaraderie that our men and women in uniform have built between them. By now, 10,500 Ukrainian soldiers have been through Canadian training, and only God knows how many lives have been saved thanks to this training. As we come to the date of renewal of Operation Unifier I encourage us to take the operation to a new level of scale and depth.

Following the Canadian decision to include Ukraine in the AFCCL we observed Canadian companies taking the benefit of the new market opportunities in Ukraine. As it has been made public that we are about to close the deal on sniper rifles, I think we should explore more areas of co-operation. Direct sales from Canadian companies to the Ukrainian government is obviously great, but I think we can go further. We would like Canada to see this as a necessary and worthy joint investment. This will help us to defend Europe and this will help Canadian companies to get its fair share of the market. We want Canada to follow the U.S. example and consider investment in the supply of weapons and equipment in Ukraine.

Finally, we want Canada to directly support our aspirations for NATO membership. As you know, the Ukrainian Parliament has just successfully adopted, in first reading, an amendment to the Constitution setting the goal of NATO membership for Ukraine. We are serious about profound defence reform. We know we are a de facto eastern friend of NATO, and we want membership.

Canada was the first western nation to recognize Ukrainian independence. There was also a time when you helped us to get into the WTO. I think this is the time when you would lead us on our way to NATO. We want you to show this type of thoughtful and visionary leadership again.

Thank you.

• (1135)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ambassador.

We're going to seven-minute questions.

Again, could everyone check in with me once in a while, and if you see this, wind down in 30 seconds so I can move on? This way everyone will get an opportunity. I would appreciate that.

The first question goes to MP Robillard.

The floor is yours.

[*Translation*]

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

My thanks to the ambassadors for their excellent remarks.

My first question goes to the three ambassadors. The Republic of Moldova, Georgia and Ukraine signed the charter of the Inter-Parliamentary Assembly at the beginning of October this year in order to address the problem of territorial integrity. However, since few details of that meeting have been released, I would be interested in finding out more.

Can you tell us which initiatives your countries anticipate and how the three sides see the implementation of those initiatives in concrete terms?

• (1140)

[*English*]

**Ms. Ala Beleavshi:** Perhaps my colleagues will continue. Thank you so much for this question. I'm happy that you've been following the recent developments.

Indeed, that was an initiative of the three parliaments, to create an interparliamentary assembly that would be focused on defining the measures that could be taken by all the three countries in order to withstand the security threats, which all of us have mentioned today. They are common to our countries.

This parliamentary assembly was convened in October of this year. It was agreed to have close co-operation between the parliaments. That will help us voice all together our concerns, to speak up before the international organizations about the threats that are posed to the security of our countries, but also to speak with one voice when we are promoting our objectives of integration into the European Union and Euro-Atlantic structures.

We also hope very much that this experience, which has been set up by the parliaments, will be taken over by the governments and there will be a closer co-operation on various dimensions.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Yves Robillard:** My question goes to the ambassador of Ukraine.

I would like to know more about the current situation in the Sea of Azov. Specifically, I would like to know whether Ukraine is taking steps to negotiate the return of the Ukrainian sailors captured by Russia. As of now, Russia seems to be sinking to new depths in planning to prosecute members of the Ukrainian military in Moscow.

I would like to know your point of view on the situation and, mostly, to get an update on it.

[*English*]

**Mr. Andriy Shevchenko:** There is no good news with regard to the sailors. At this moment, they're in Moscow. They have been taken to the infamous Lefortovo prison. All the signs indicate that the Russian leadership wants to make this a demonstrative criminal case. We believe our sailors are prisoners of war, which means there should be a very different legal approach. We are also concerned we will not get proper access to them in terms of our diplomatic support. Once again, we know enough about the way the judiciary in Russia operates to be extremely concerned about those sailors.

Regarding the situation in the Sea of Azov, at this time, there are no signs that the Kerch Strait will be brought back through the international laws and regulations the way it used to be. It's extremely important that we ensure free passage through the strait.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Yves Robillard:** Thank you.

My next question goes to the ambassador of the Republic of Moldova.

Last June, here at this committee, you said that signing the border control agreement between Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova was going to decrease arms trafficking, reduce barriers to trade and make for better control of the region called Transnistria.

Since then, have those objectives been achieved, or are they in the process of being achieved?



[English]

**Ms. Ala Beleavshi:** Perhaps you would look at the map again, although this does not give you a very precise view of the Transnistrian segment of the common border with Ukraine, which is around 450 kilometres in length. Since this territory is not controlled by the constitutional authorities of the Republic of Moldova, Transnistria has been considered as a region with widespread smuggling of drugs, weapons and trafficking in people.

With the introduction of the EU border control mission and with the closer co-operation between the border security authorities of Moldova and Ukraine, the smuggling or transiting of the border has come under control. The situation is getting better, although the control is still not there. We are aiming at it anyway. With the co-operation with Ukraine, I hope that we will ultimately succeed.

• (1145)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

MP Gallant.

**Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

First of all, I would ask that the ambassador from Georgia provide the committee with a list of every instance of Russian aggression, for example, moving the border at South Ossetia, any incursions or cyber-attacks, etc. We would like dates, times and specific locations. That is our first request.

To Ambassador Shevchenko, how has the recent Russian military and economic aggression in the Kerch Strait changed the dynamic of Ukraine's war against Russia?

**Mr. Andriy Shevchenko:** First, as we have discussed, it really changes the situation in the Sea of Azov. Russia has enough deployments on the land, in the air and on the sea to completely control the whole Sea of Azov. This also allows them to quickly advance along the coastline of the Sea of Azov. We have been talking about this for quite a long time, that it was part of their plan to make sure they have a land bridge from Russia to Crimea. Right now, it's scary to say, they are really in a perfect position to advance. That is one of the reasons we are extremely concerned about this.

**Mrs. Cheryl Gallant:** In addition to adding more presence in the Black Sea, how can Canada and NATO be of assistance in opening marine traffic in the Kerch Strait?

**Mr. Andriy Shevchenko:** We need efforts both on the diplomatic front and militarily. We need more military presence to deter Russia from further escalation, and we need consolidated diplomatic pressure on Russia. We need to restore international law in the Kerch Strait.

This is not just in the interest of Ukraine, but in the interest of all countries that have activities there.

**Mrs. Cheryl Gallant:** Okay.

As you may be aware, the committee heard testimony from the Atlantic Council last month regarding Russian aggression against its neighbours. John Herbst, their Eurasia director, stated that if Russia were to lose in the Donbas, its appetite for adventurism in the Baltics and elsewhere would disappear.

Would you agree with that assessment?

**Mr. Andriy Shevchenko:** I would strongly agree that we should see the situation as very interconnected. When we talk about this interconnectivity, we are talking about a huge region, from Syria to the Arctic Ocean. In that sense, a Canadian presence in Latvia, Romania and, of course, Ukraine is a major and very right investment in the security of the continent and NATO security of the world.

**Mrs. Cheryl Gallant:** The committee was also told by the Atlantic Council that there are two aspects working in our favour in the fight against the Russians: The Russian people are not in favour of Russian troops fighting and dying in the war, and Russia's economy is weak.

As for the first reason, we know that pressure on Russia can be achieved through increased military action against Russia in Donbas. Has Canada's support in terms of military aid been sufficient, and what more can we do to help Ukraine keep up the pressure on the Russian troops in the Donbas?

**Mr. Andriy Shevchenko:** First, here is an observation on Russian society: I think we should not underestimate the atmosphere within Russian society, created by many years of propaganda. The same footage we just saw was used in Russia to actually boost support for the government, and was used as anti-western propaganda in the way it was presented to the Russian public. I belong to those who believe that President Putin is not just the source of the problems we discuss. He is, in many senses, a reflection of the state of Russian society, which means we will have to deal with all this for years, and unfortunately, for decades to come.

Going back to what Canada can do, I think you already do a lot. I would encourage you to continue that. I think it's important to help us build a strong military, and that's exactly what Canada does. It's extremely important to help Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia succeed in our reforms and make them sustainable. In the mid-term and the long term, the success of Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia should be a major priority for the free world and for NATO. This will make the continent much more stable.

There is another thing Canada can do. Canada can and should use the great respect that this country has around the world to consolidate international support for our countries, and specifically for Ukraine. In that sense, again I would like to praise Canadian leadership in the G7 community and NATO, and in other international organizations.

• (1150)

**Mrs. Cheryl Gallant:** Mr. Herbst also mentioned specifically that the arrival of Javelin missiles has helped Ukrainian forces take out Russian tanks. Is there any other specific military equipment Ukraine needs that Canada can supply?

**Mr. Andriy Shevchenko:** Yes, and as many of you are aware, there are very specific contracts that are being discussed right now, even as we speak. These include weapons and equipment. Also, I think there are many things that are in store for the future.

I can give you one example. I hear from our military that there is a new huge concern and problem with Russians using their laser equipment to blind our soldiers. It's something that we desperately need—to understand how we can actually protect our soldiers from this kind of new modern equipment. I think this is exactly the knowledge and experience that the Canadian Army also needs to have. We would like to see these kinds of projects as something that we could jointly invest in.

**Mrs. Cheryl Gallant:** The other advantage the Atlantic Council mentioned that we can press is that of Russia's weak economy. The Magnitsky act is the main tool that we have in Canada to assist, an act that many other western allies have. Has Canada been using the Magnitsky act to its fullest potential?

**Mr. Andriy Shevchenko:** Not yet. We are extremely thankful to the Canadian Parliament for adopting the Magnitsky act, and we think that it is high time to put more pressure on Russia using the Magnitsky act. There are some absolutely demonstrated bizarre cases of violations of human rights, and I think there are plenty of reasons to make use of this law.

With regard to other punishing sanctions, I believe the Atlantic Council also recommended looking into sanctions against major Russian banks. Also, I would like to see how can we limit Russian commercial illegal activities in the Black Sea region.

**Mrs. Cheryl Gallant:** Cyber-attacks have been—

**The Chair:** I'm going to have to leave it there. Unfortunately, we're out of time. However, we should have time to circle back after.

I'm going to give the floor to MP Garrison.

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

Thank you to the ambassadors for being present with us today.

Certainly, my party shares your concern about the recent increase in tensions in the region.

I know that Ambassador Shevchenko mentioned the government and the official opposition statements. The NDP also issued a statement supporting the three demands that you talked about at the beginning, in terms of getting prisoners back, releasing the vessels and then restoring free passage of the strait. We do certainly support you in that.

One of my concerns, always, is that incidents like this have to be responded to—and responded to strongly—but they can't let us get knocked off our longer-term success in building relationships with all three of your countries in terms of the integration.

Some of the things that the NDP previously called for between Canada and Ukraine were visa-free entry—also for Ukrainians to Canada—and the restoration of the youth mobility agreement. I am wondering whether there has been any progress on either of those. I think those are very important in building our longer-term relationship and in helping to strengthen Ukraine's democratic values and economy.

• (1155)

**Mr. Andriy Shevchenko:** First of all, I would like to thank the NDP for its continuous support towards Ukraine.

With regard to the youth mobility agreement, I can report that, yes, we do have progress on that. We have received Canadian proposals on this major and very important agreement, and right now we are in the process of consideration. I believe that we are in a good position to advance on youth mobility. It's something that both countries will greatly benefit from.

Unfortunately, I don't see much progress on the visa-free regime. I can also say that in 2018 we again see an increase in the number of refusals for visas for Ukrainian citizens. As of this moment, this number is as high as 26%.

I think there is no good reason to justify such a high number of visa refusals for Ukrainian citizens. I think the goal for both countries is very clear. We need to make sure that there is a free opportunity for people to travel between the countries.

**Mr. Randall Garrison:** When Ukraine already has visa-free access to the EU and when we already have a free trade agreement between Canada and the Ukraine, it's hard for me to understand why we would not proceed to visa-free access. I certainly haven't heard explanations from the government that would justify the high rate of visa refusals. You certainly still have our support on that.

The second thing that you mentioned was that Operation Unifier is coming up for renewal. I was one of the members of the committee who was privileged to go to Ukraine and see the project in action. Whether we have the details worked out and whether we're going to expand that agreement, would an early statement about supporting the renewal of that mission at this time from Canada be of use, given the crisis in the region?

**Mr. Andriy Shevchenko:** Absolutely. The very fact of the renewal of Operation Unifier will be a strong message of support towards Ukraine. I can also share with you that I think, this time, we are in very good communication with the Canadian government and with Canadian Armed Forces on how we can make better use of Operation Unifier.

This last year, we have seen the extension of the geography of the operation. Also, I hear that a lot of things have changed in terms of the scale and the depth of co-operation between Ukraine and Canada. I hope we'll see more of that after March 2019.

**Mr. Randall Garrison:** Certainly I know my party is very much in favour of such an early declaration that there will be a renewal of that agreement. I don't think it's necessary for us to work out all the details at this point, but I believe it would also send that strong signal.

I have probably very little time, but I'm going to turn to the other two ambassadors today.

I'd like you to comment. I'm not questioning, at all, your concerns about Russian actions at Kerch, but I think for Canadians it's somewhat sometimes hard to understand that interconnectedness. I'd like to give both of you a chance to talk a bit more about what that action, in denying international passage, might mean for both of your countries.

Maybe we'll start with Moldova and then Georgia.

**Ms. Ala Belevschi:** Thank you so much.

The fact that Moldova has Russian troops stationed to the western border of Ukraine means that it is potentially another front, which could be opened at any time by Russia.

The Transnistria region is situated actually 100 kilometres from Odessa. Clearly Russia is focusing on Odessa as well, because this is a very important port. The proximity of Transnistria to these parts, which is the Black Sea port, indeed poses serious threats to the security of Ukraine and the security of the entire region. That is why I believe that any developments in Ukraine today directly affect the security of Moldova and the security of the region.

**Mr. Konstantine Kavtaradze:** Thank you very much.

If you'll allow me, I'll just very briefly elaborate on two previous questions because they are interrelated with the question that you gave us.

First of all, I'd like to notify the distinguished members of the committee of, in a sense, a trilateral co-operation between Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia in establishing long-term consultative structures alongside the trilateral parliamentary assembly you mentioned here. It would be tomorrow or the day after tomorrow, I'm not sure, but within the OSCE meeting, there will be a meeting, I suppose, between Canada and the organization called GUAM. The abbreviation is for Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Moldova. This is an organization that was established back in the 1990s in order to have additional tools for consultations and for co-operation, and we continue with it. The fact that GUAM establishes direct contact with Canada is a very good message of Canadian support to Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia.

The second issue is concerning the Russians' actions in Georgia, including the hybrid war and borderization. The issues are there, and we would be happy to provide the information that we provided to the government already.

The Magnitsky act was mentioned, and the Otkhozoria-Tatunashvili list is kind of the Magnitsky act of Georgia.

•(1200)

**The Chair:** Could you wind up in 30 seconds, please, Ambassador?

**Mr. Konstantine Kavtaradze:** Actually, the issue is that we really need Canada's involvement, not just in the sense of imposing sanctions but also in sharing the experience of how the Magnitsky act is implemented by Canada in connection to many countries, including Russia.

The three of us were talking about the interconnection of our fates, histories and challenges. First, Russia attacked, using the Black Sea fleet to attack Georgia in 2008. Actually, Russia used these same ships—the naval ships that they are using in Kerch—against Georgia in 2008.

Secondly, we were talking about a wider region. Maybe Moldova is not a little state of the Black Sea, but it is a Black Sea region state. We were happy to learn that in the Brussels summit NATO introduced Black Sea security discussions. It's very important, because Georgia is a very integral part of these discussions. This shows, in the participation of our three countries in the discussions on the Black Sea, that what happens in Ukraine today is very much a

factor in what will happen in Georgia and Moldova tomorrow, just as what happened in 2008 in Georgia very much affected what is happening in Ukraine today.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

I'm going to give the floor to you, MP Gerretsen.

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

My questions will primarily be for the Ambassador of Ukraine.

First, Your Excellency, I want to ask you about the video you showed the committee, which demonstrated the Russian aggression. Can you comment as to where the video is sourced from? Obviously it was from a Russian ship. Was it shared publicly? Did Russia share that as propaganda? Did you obtain it by some other way? Is it publicly available? I'm just curious about how the video got out there.

**Mr. Andriy Shevchenko:** It was widely spread by international and Russian media.

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen:** Yes, so it was used as a propaganda tool within Russia.

**Mr. Andriy Shevchenko:** That's what I believe.

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen:** This committee made a recommendation following the study that we did on Ukraine. Recommendation 7 stated:

That the Government of Canada provide lethal weapons to Ukraine to protect its sovereignty from Russian aggression, provided that Ukraine demonstrate it is actively working to eliminate corruption at all levels of government.

One of the things that our committee discovered when we travelled to Ukraine a little over a year ago was that there were still some elements of corruption within the government structure that needed to be dealt with to move towards a fully functioning government that uses the democratic principles as values to be established.

I'm wondering if you can comment on the work that Ukraine has been able to do to that end.

•(1205)

**Mr. Andriy Shevchenko:** It's an impressive amount of work, and I'm happy to say that you—Canada—helped us to do this. As many of you know, there is a major Canadian investment in the defensive work in Ukraine. You help us through your advice and through your people on the ground who help us to change our military.

When we talk about the reform of the Ukrainian armed forces, there are several clear targets for that, clear goals. The first is very practical: to be able to defend our land. The second is to make sure that we can work together with our allies from NATO and, in the future, inside of NATO. The third is to fight corruption—which Ukraine used to be notorious for—and I believe we are quite successful in that.

Also, you mentioned the recommendations of the committee. I again would like to thank the committee members for the very thoughtful and visionary recommendations that you provided in terms of Ukraine and in terms of Canadian actions in the region.

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen:** The reason why I read out recommendation 7, Your Excellency, was that given the fact that the committee made this recommendation with that caveat attached to it, it would definitely be easier to push that recommendation if we were able to demonstrate action with respect to ridding government of some of those government structures that used to be extremely notorious for being corrupt.

I do agree with you. Even what we heard when we were there was that a lot of that is being dealt with. I was looking for more specific examples as to how that corruption is being dealt with and perhaps what has happened in the last year and a half since we were there.

**Mr. Andriy Shevchenko:** In general, there are three major sources of corruption, and they are universal. The first is stealing directly from the budget. The second is public procurement, and the third is state-run enterprises.

I think Ukraine has shown tremendous progress in the first two. We don't see direct stealing from the budget, as was the norm during the Yanukovich years. In terms of public procurement, I think Ukraine has demonstrated tremendous progress with the introduction of our wonderful electronic system, which is called ProZorro. It's an award-winning, world-class electronic system. I think our state-run enterprises remain a major challenge, yet even in that field, we see tremendous progress.

It's a big challenge for the country, and the road that we have travelled is very impressive. Again, we are thankful to Canada for supporting us in that.

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen:** Thank you very much.

Mr. Chair, I'll yield the rest of my time to the member from Etobicoke Centre.

**Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj (Etobicoke Centre, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Gerretsen.

I have two quick questions, since time is limited.

Both Russia and Ukraine are parties to the Geneva conventions, and more specifically, to the fourth convention. Based on the wording in the fourth convention, Russia has committed what are defined as grave breaches, in the incident in the Kerch Strait, namely—and I take this out of the wording of the convention—"the taking of hostages". That's the first point.

The second point is about unlawful deportation, transfer or confinement. Signatory nations of the Geneva conventions are obligated—it's not optional—to search for persons having ordered these hostages to be brought to trial, regardless of nationality and the location where the crimes took place.

First, has Ukraine initiated any actions under the Geneva conventions towards those who have ordered this illegal seizure of Ukrainian soldiers, and also for the fact that they're not being treated as POWs?

The second question is in regard to the actual incident, the ramming, firing upon and seizure of ships and sailors. Importantly—and perhaps it wasn't clear in the presentation—this occurred in the international waters of the Black Sea, outside of the Kerch Strait. This undermines our international rule of law system safeguarding

maritime law and shipping. It seems to be working in conjunction with what I call the de facto embargo of the ports of Mariupol and Berdyansk. As you noted, this is economically destabilizing a region that's very vulnerable to this sort of destabilization, and militarily has potential value as a land bridge to the Crimean peninsula.

The west has regularly issued strong statements directed at the Kremlin. I don't think Mr. Putin loses any sleep over strong statements, diplomatic statements. The port of Rostov-on-Don and the sister port Novorossiysk—which is actually the mother port, as you could call it—are 300 kilometres apart, the distance from Toronto to Kingston. Do you think sectoral sanctions that target the corporate entities of those two ports as well as the oligarch owners would have an impact on Mr. Putin's actions in the region?

● (1210)

**The Chair:** Ambassador, I'm going to have to hold it there. Unfortunately, we're out of time, but we will have time at the end, and potentially we can circle back on an answer to that question.

I'm going to have to yield the floor to MP Dzerowicz, for five minutes, please.

**Ms. Julie Dzerowicz (Davenport, Lib.):** Thank you so much, Mr. Chair, and thanks to everyone for their excellent presentations.

I might actually have time at the end of my presentation to pass it over to Mr. Wrzesnewskyj.

Most of my questions are also directed to Ambassador Shevchenko. One piece of the story that I'm missing, and I'm sure it's there somewhere, is the Ukrainian tugboats. What were they doing? Is it just part of their normal routine, that's what they usually do, and then, all of a sudden, out of the blue, the Russian ships came out and just attacked them? Could you explain to me what the Russian tugboats were doing there?

**Mr. Andriy Shevchenko:** I would like you to take a look at this map. It actually shows the movement of the Ukrainian vessels. The blue line shows that, from your right to your left. Our three vessels were heading towards the Kerch Strait, as part of their normal routine procedure. The first time they were attacked, it happened on their way towards the Kerch Strait. That's where the ramming happened. That happened on their way to the stand-by zone. The normal procedure is that the ships would go to the stand-by zone, and then they would wait for their turn to go through the Kerch Strait. The first attacks happened even before that, and then, after our vessels decided to get away from the Russian military ships, on their way out, they were attacked. The first attacks happened again inside of the 12-nautical-mile zone, and the final attacks and the seizure of the vessels happened in international waters.

**Ms. Julie Dzerowicz:** Okay.

**Mr. Andriy Shevchenko:** To make a long story short, they followed normal routine procedure. That's what they had been doing throughout many years. This time, things turned a very different way.

From the legal point of view, our actions are based on the United Nations convention, and it's based on the bilateral treaty between Ukraine and Russia, which grants free passage for Ukrainian ships through the Kerch Strait.

**Ms. Julie Dzerowicz:** For me, it seems odd that there was a normal routine procedure that was happening, and then all of a sudden on that particular day, they decided that they were going to ram the boat, capture the Ukrainian soldiers and then arrest them.

There was nothing out of the ordinary that had instigated that action, to your knowledge.

**Mr. Andriy Shevchenko:** There might be several reasons for that.

First, Russia had deployed major forces into the region. One year ago, the situation was different.

Second, I think they could have some other reasons for this provocation: the upcoming presidential election in Ukraine, the G20 summit or some other things. I would not like to make any presumptions on that, but the situation is very clear. They had been escalating the situation in the region, and that was a natural continuation of the upgraded military presence in the region.

**Ms. Julie Dzerowicz:** I've read about the poor economic situation in Russia. To what extent is there a correlation between their escalation in the region and the poor economic situation in Russia?

Do you have a response to that?

**Mr. Andriy Shevchenko:** Many of us believe that one day a refrigerator will win over a TV set. That's exactly what happened in the end of the Soviet era. The economic sanctions against Russia make a huge difference, and I would strongly encourage us to work together on more punishing sanctions.

As was mentioned, I think we need to discuss very specific sectoral actions, and the avenue that was mentioned, meaning specific navigation of Russian commercial vessels, is something that we should look into. I'm absolutely sure that we should consider closing European and western ports for the Russian vessels that illegally operate in Crimea and that are related to illegal activities across the region.

**Ms. Julie Dzerowicz:** Okay. I think I'm out of time.

Thank you.

•(1215)

**The Chair:** MP Alleslev.

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

It's critically important that you are here, so thank you very much for this incredible presentation.

I often get people in my riding sending me emails and letting me know that they don't feel Russia is a threat.

I wonder if you could help me with that. Would you see an increase in Russian militarization and capability? You've given us pictures of increased nuclear missiles and capability—tanks, airplanes and ships. Have we recently seen an increase in military capability, and have we also seen an increase in Russian aggression, from 2008 in Georgia, to then in Moldova, to the Ukraine? We've also seen the poisoning of U.K. citizens on their soil, as well as now military aggression in the Sea of Azov.

Could you help me explain to Canadians why they should take the Russian aggression threat seriously?

**Mr. Andriy Shevchenko:** I can start.

It's about this enormous interconnectivity of the world today. The same ships that were part of the Russian aggression into Georgia were part of the Russian annexation of Crimea and part of the Russian navy operations at the coast of Syria.

Greater Russian military presence in the Arctic means more threats and more risk to Canada, and to all our other partners in the region. The Salisbury attack really tells us that no one should take for granted peace and the safety on our land.

Russia wants to destabilize the international order. They will try to interfere with the elections in the western countries that they are concerned about. It's not just about Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova. For me, obviously it's about Canada as well.

**Ms. Leona Alleslev:** Thank you.

Ambassador Beleavski, you were quite clear when you said that today you don't need to have a war to jeopardize the national security and sovereignty of a nation. You highlighted some of the cyber-attacks. Again, Ambassador Shevchenko just mentioned the Arctic Ocean.

Would you comment on whether or not Canada should take seriously Russian aggression that could happen right here on Canadian soil, and why we should, therefore, care about what's happening over there?

**Ms. Ala Beleavski:** I'm assisting a very interesting discussion. I want just to comment on the previous questions and what you have mentioned.

You can imagine that having the frozen conflicts in the two countries and war in Ukraine is leverage for Moscow to keep these countries weak, to keep them under their control and to prevent the countries from moving towards integration into the space of democratic values. This is leverage that is used very skilfully.

Moldova's frozen conflict, as I mentioned, has a history of 28 years. Since Moldova's independence, it has chosen, as a strategic direction of its development, European integration, and since then, it has been so difficult to move forward because of the obstacles we are getting.

•(1220)

**Ms. Leona Alleslev:** Exactly. Could you talk briefly about cyber-warfare, things like money laundering and threats to banking and information systems, which is why perhaps Canada should also recognize that there don't have to be troops on the ground to jeopardize the sovereignty of a nation?

**Ms. Ala Beleavski:** I mentioned in my presentation meddling in the election processes. This was real several times. I will also mention how much Russia has used the Transnistrian population in order to ensure that they had the best involvement in Russia's presidential elections. Out of 27 polling stations opened in the territory of Moldova, 24 were opened in the Transnistrian territory, because Russia believes that this is where the biggest share of the Russian population is living.

Cyber-attacks take place every day in Moldova. I believe there was a figure of over 1,000 per day that we are registering, so all this is used against moving—

**Ms. Leona Alleslev:** In summary, in your opinion, Canada should take the Russian aggression threat seriously, not only for its impact on the security and sovereignty of your nations but of Canada's as well.

**The Chair:** I'm going to have to hold you there. This has gone well over. We will have time to circle back. I think we know what the answer to that is, but I'm going to have to yield the floor to MP Spengemann.

**Mr. Sven Spengemann (Mississauga—Lakeshore, Lib.):** Mr. Chair, thank you very much.

Excellencies, thank you for being with us.

I want to start with a personal word of thanks to the Republic of Georgia. Just prior to the 2008 war between Russia and the Republic of Georgia, the Republic of Georgia provided the middle ring security for the United Nations assistance mission in Baghdad, Iraq, during very difficult times. I had the privilege of serving in that mission at the time, and I owe a debt of gratitude to the women and men from the Republic of Georgia who provided that security ring.

I say this with a view to highlighting for Canadians the importance of the Republic of Georgia as an ally in upholding the rules-based international order. It's very important that you're here today with us, Ambassador, to represent your country.

I want to take you back to the mention of the 2008 war. I think your words earlier in testimony were that Russia did not pay a price for the 2008 invasion and aggression. Can you talk a little bit more about that and maybe give us your view? If you could roll back history, how could the international community have extracted more of a price on Russia for that act of aggression that really started the ball rolling towards Crimea and then today in Ukraine?

**Mr. Konstantine Kavtaradze:** Thank you very much. I really appreciate your kind words.

I fully agree with the assumption that, not formally yet, we are allies. We were side by side in Iraq and Afghanistan. I also mentioned in my presentation that Canadian and Georgian soldiers, officers and military, were fighting shoulder to shoulder there.

In a sense, this example that you gave now also shows interconnection. It's about the small Georgia there on the eastern flank of Europe and about Canada here. Also, it's kind of a continuation of our liberation that the distinguished member of the committee raised: questions about Russia and sometimes kinds of sentiments on why there are so many anti-Russian approaches. First, I'd like to stress that, when we are talking about Russia, we are not talking about Russian people.

Personally, I already mentioned that I have 30 years of diplomatic service, being part of Russia and Georgia negotiations back in 1995, when Shevardnadze was the president of Georgia. He was a guy who was for balancing the issues, and he knew Russian politics. Then at the end of his career, he admitted that he knew nothing about Russia.

The issues that we are talking about are the regime, the Kremlin and the politics that they're implementing, not about the ordinary

Russians. Honestly, we can see that the Russian people are the same kinds of victims of the aggressive politics of Russia, the same as the Ukrainians and Georgians.

As to your question about paying the price, once again we don't want the Russian people to pay a price for that. However, at the same time when we are talking about these conflicts that we have, I agree with my dear colleague Ala about the assumption. Still, consider that they are not frozen conflicts. They're hard conflicts. When everyday people are killed and abducted.... It's not a frozen conflict in that sense.

In Russia they receive messages well. I know it from my experience. When there is no counteraction to the aggression, they continue with this aggression.

What we are talking about, not paying a price, didn't start in 2008. It started somewhere in the beginning of the 1990s. From the outset of the independence of these three countries, they were pro-western. Russia considered pro-western policies, although we all had—let's agree on that, somewhere in the 1990s—this perception that Russia one day might be a democratic state and part of alliances, even. They were ahead of Georgia in the 1990s in dealing with NATO.

However, the issues are that in the 1990s Russia invaded Georgia, instigated conflict in Moldova and didn't pay a price. It attacked Georgia in 2008 and didn't pay a price. Next was Crimea and the aggression in eastern [Technical difficulty—Editor].

Believe me, it's very important that the western alliance—not because the alliance is a military one but has shared values—be very vocal that Russia will pay a price if it continues with its aggressive actions.

Thank you.

• (1225)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

MP Martel.

[Translation]

**Mr. Richard Martel (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, CPC):** Good morning. Thank you for being here. Your testimony was very interesting.

Mr. Schevchenko, my question goes to you. I do not know if you will be able to answer this, but, on a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 representing all-out war on Ukraine's sovereignty...

...can you tell us approximately where we are on that scale?

[English]

**Mr. Andriy Shevchenko:** We are more used to counting the Russian aggression not on that scale, but on the scale of human lives that we keep losing every day. There was another Ukrainian life lost today.

It's hard to judge, but I think the dynamics are very clear. It has been escalating.

[Translation]

**Mr. Richard Martel:** You know that the elections in Ukraine are coming up. Are you in a position to predict whether Russian tension will increase as the elections draw nearer?

[English]

**Mr. Andriy Shevchenko:** I would not be surprised to see that, and 2019 is going to be a very important year, for both Ukraine and Canada, in terms of elections. In Ukraine we'll have two election cycles. Our presidential election is scheduled for March 31 and our parliamentary elections are scheduled for the end of October. I think this is a really important time when we would encourage our western friends to go to Ukraine and see, on the ground, what the Russians will try to do to interfere with the elections.

I'm sorry to say it and I hate to say it, but it looks as though Ukraine next year will be a workshop on Russian interference with the election. Thinking of cyber-attacks, thinking of media actions by Russia, I would strongly encourage Canada to learn from our experience. Going back to the question, I think there is a good chance we'll see Russia trying to influence the election, including through actions to escalate the military situation.

• (1230)

[Translation]

**Mr. Richard Martel:** In the past, there have been sanctions against Russia. I do not know whether I can put it this way, but the Russians seem rather unconcerned about it all. Do the sanctions get the Russians to calm down or do they make them react even more strongly? However, they are affected economically, and in other ways.

Do you feel that they have an effect on the the Russians?

[English]

**Mr. Andriy Shevchenko:** By now we have hard data proving that there is a clear economic impact on Russia associated with the sanctions.

Yes, it's true that sanctions themselves are a limited tool, but I think they are extremely effective when they're combined with other forms of diplomatic pressure, and when they're combined with more military presence in the region.

As has been discussed today, I think we need to explore very specific sectors through which we can punish specific Russian individuals and also some specific sectors of the economy. I think the time has come to upgrade our sanctions, and I strongly believe they do work.

[Translation]

**Mr. Richard Martel:** Thank you very much.

[English]

**The Chair:** Mr. Fisher, the floor is yours.

**Mr. Darren Fisher (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.):** I thought Randall was up next.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you very much for being here, first of all. I appreciate your being here, Your Excellencies.

We heard about election meddling, and I'm thinking about the election in Ukraine. What precautions is Ukraine taking to ensure that democracy is protected, and what international support might you perhaps need or request?

**Mr. Andriy Shevchenko:** There are some very practical steps that need to be taken. In terms of cybersecurity, it's extremely important to make sure that we can protect our equipment and our election infrastructure from interference. You know that Ukraine has been suffering a lot from very intense Russian attacks on our basic infrastructure. That includes nuclear plants and our other capabilities, so in 2019 it will be extremely important to protect the election infrastructure.

Second, I think we should be very serious about their interference in the media environment and in social media, and by now we already know a lot about the ways they operate. I think the next year will provide us with a lot of new material to analyze and to fight against.

Again, I would like to encourage Canada and our other western partners to learn from our experience. You'll help us and you will help yourself.

**Mr. Darren Fisher:** The misinformation war that Russia wages, has that already begun? Has it been non-stop for the last several years, and do you feel that Ukraine is, I guess, for lack of a better term, winning or at least understanding their misinformation war?

**Mr. Andriy Shevchenko:** The information war that Russia has been waging is not about Ukraine. They fight this war against you. They fight this war against the free world. Even here, on this wonderful Canadian soil, you have seen Russian information attacks based on specific individuals, based on groups of people. In general, they were targeted into the Canadian system.

I think there is a good chance we will see more of those kinds of activities in the next year, which is an election year. I think there is a risk they will try to interfere with some specific ridings and will try to influence the results of the elections there.

**Mr. Darren Fisher:** Thank you.

I think Mr. Wrzesnewskyj had asked a question and hadn't gotten an answer. Perhaps he would like to use the time now.

**The Chair:** We have about two and a half minutes left.

**Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj:** Perfect.

Ambassador, would you like to respond to the question about the fourth Geneva convention and the grave breaches that have been committed by Russia, and whether Ukraine intends to bring to trial those who ordered the abduction of the Ukrainian sailors?

• (1235)

**Mr. Andriy Shevchenko:** Yes, legal actions will be taken. I do not know all the details and I cannot share all of the ones I do know, but it has been said by Ukrainian Minister of Foreign Affairs Klimkin that Ukraine is preparing legal actions against Russia on this specific case.

**Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj:** Thank you.

In regard to the sectoral sanctions, Novorossiysk is a very significant export port for Russia. It's controlled or owned by Transneft and Summa Group, and the group of oligarchs who control them, especially with Transneft. Do you think specific sanctions would be effective against the corporate owners and the oligarchs who own the corporate entities that control those two ports that I mentioned earlier?

I'll leave it at that for now.

**Mr. Andriy Shevchenko:** Yes, I think we should look into this. We should understand that Russia has done a lot to limit or block other nations from normal commercial activities in the Black Sea region. I think we need to make sure that they will pay their price for this. Also, I think of all the Russian ships that illegally go to the Crimean ports, that illegally operate across the Black Sea and the Azov sea. I think we should make it extremely toxic for anyone to co-operate with them and I think we should consider closing European and international ports to those Russian boats that violate international law.

**The Chair:** That's your time.

I'm going to move the last formal question to Mr. Garrison.

**Mr. Randall Garrison:** Thank you, Chair.

I just want to continue on sanctions for a moment there. Ambassador Shevchenko, you said that sanctions were starting to have an economic cost in Russia. Mr. Wrzesnewskyj has given us some specific examples. What was your government thinking about when it called for strengthened sanctions? What did it actually have in mind?

**Mr. Andriy Shevchenko:** There are several specific sectors of the Russian economy that should be considered. I'll go back to the recommendations by the Atlantic Council, which were mentioned here. They specifically encouraged western powers to think of major Russian banks, which are crucial for the Russian economy and which some people in the Putin circle have a lot of personal interest in.

Second, I would think about the sanctions connected to the Russian commercial activities in the Black Sea region. Also, I would explore all the opportunities that the Magnitsky act of Canada provides us with.

**Mr. Randall Garrison:** Great. Thank you.

I know there's very little time but I want to come back to Georgia for just a second, and as Mr. Spengemann does, recognize the contribution that Georgia has made as an ally of NATO and Canada.

I'm wondering if there are ways in which Canada can do more to help strengthen that NATO integration preparation, I guess I'll call it, for Georgia. Are there things we could be doing now that would assist Georgia in that?

**Mr. Konstantine Kavtaradze:** I thank you for the question, because after the meeting I will be leaving for Saint-Jean military college, where the Georgian officers are. They go on courses within MTCP, the military training and co-operation program of Canada. We are really grateful for that. About 72 Georgian servicemen, servicewomen and civilians have already either undergone different types of courses or it's planned that they will be invited.

Canada is already part of Georgia-NATO co-operation. It's called "SNGP", a substantial package of Georgia-NATO co-operation. Canada has already assigned one expert on aviation. We really appreciate that. Now we are considering Canada's involvement in the foreign-language courses for the Georgian military who are preparing for international peacekeeping missions.

In a sense, then, Canada is already part of it. We were invited by the Department of National Defence to participate in Maple Arch exercises together with Ukrainians. We will be part of that. From our side, we invited Canada to be part of the Georgia-NATO joint military exercises that we have annually on the soil of Georgia.

Thank you very much.

● (1240)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Given the time we have remaining and the number of MPs who want to continue asking questions, I'd like us to move to four-minute questions. Thank you to everyone for their patience and discipline so far, but we'll have to be extremely disciplined on this next one to get everyone through in the time we have remaining.

I'll yield the floor to MP Dzerowicz.

You have four minutes, please.

**Ms. Julie Dzerowicz:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I have a couple more questions. Thank you again.

You know, just listening to the conversation today, to my mind, it sounds like.... I'm trying to figure out what the endgame is for Russia and what they're trying to achieve. It seems as though they're trying to cause quite a bit of havoc in the region. Whether they're in the U. K., whether they're in Canada, whether it's through cybersecurity, or whether it's through elections, what is their endgame? What are they trying to do? Are they just supposed to be the bad boy of the world? What is it that you think might be their endgame?

Maybe I'll start off with you, Ambassador Shevchenko. Then I'd like to hear opinions from the other two ambassadors.

**Mr. Andriy Shevchenko:** When it comes to Canada, I think there are a couple of threats. First, Russia clearly wants to destabilize the international order. I think their signal with all of this action is very clear: We do not care what you think about this; we are going to do what we want to do.

Yes, they want to destabilize the existing international system. I think they're also seeking new ways to influence politics from within western societies.

**Ms. Julie Dzerowicz:** Thank you.

Perhaps we could hear from Moldova.

**Ms. Ala Belevschi:** For me, the endgame is that Russia simply wants to maintain control and keep the countries of the former Soviet Union in their sphere of influence. They are doing everything for this.



Moldova has its parliamentary elections next February. Our elections will come a little earlier than the presidential elections in Ukraine. We see the “activation”, if I may use this word, of the Russians' presence in Moldova, be it in the media or be it in trying to influence the politics. Clearly, Russia is aspiring to bring pro-Russian forces into the Moldovan government. Then, perhaps, they will also try to push again to revitalize their plan for federalization of the country, which will give them full control of Moldova's foreign policy priorities.

**Ms. Julie Dzerowicz:** The last word goes to Georgia.

**Mr. Konstantine Kavtaradze:** Russian intellectuals in the 19th century were asking what Russia wants, and we are asking the same question today.

I'd like to refer to my opening statement. In order to understand what is happening in Russia now, we have to understand the mindset of the political elite there. President Putin said that the fall of the Soviet Union was the greatest catastrophe. He was referring to the Soviet Union that killed almost 20 million of its own people. The issue is that Russia tries to reincarnate this old Soviet pride, in a sense, but without having the means to achieve it. That's why we have this pattern of behaviour.

Once again, thank you very much for inviting us here, because at least we can try to show our perspective. It's very important to see patterns, not just in order to cope with existing challenges but also to predict, in a sense, and analyze how Russia might act. It's not about good guys and bad guys.

For example, Russian propaganda doesn't work in Georgia. Seventy per cent of Georgians are pro-NATO and 80% are steadily pro-EU. The issue is that undermining western institutions directly affects Georgia, Ukraine and Moldova. That's why we need you and the western institutions to be strong. That's why we have this interconnection.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

MP Gallant.

•(1245)

**Mrs. Cheryl Gallant:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Given that we've heard about repeated incursions and expansions into Georgia by Russia, invasions into Crimea and the Donbas, now blocking the Sea of Azov, the manipulation of the Transnistrian population, the election interference and the daily cyber-attacks of a thousand at a time, including the threat to Canada as we've learned, I'd like to move the following motion:

That the Standing Committee on National Defence invite the ambassador of the Russian Federation before committee to explain his country's intervention in the Republic of Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine. That the Committee report back to the House its findings.

**The Chair:** Is there any discussion?

We're going to distribute it.

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen:** Mr. Chair, I'd like to ask for a five-minute recess to caucus.

**The Chair:** I'll suspend for five minutes.

•(1245)

(Pause)

•(1250)

**The Chair:** Welcome back.

We were discussing MP Gallant's motion, and I would like to yield the floor to MP Spengemann.

**Mr. Sven Spengemann:** Mr. Chair, thank you very much.

This is clearly a motion that has significant, substantive import and warrants consideration of the ramifications, for which we don't have time at the moment.

Also, in light of the fact that we have three distinguished ambassadors as witnesses in front of us on a topic of importance, and a conversation has taken place already on that subject, I would move to adjourn debate on the motion.

**The Chair:** It's dilatory. We will vote on whether to adjourn debate.

(Motion agreed to)

**The Chair:** Madam Gallant, I believe you had about a minute left. Did you want to continue?

**Mrs. Cheryl Gallant:** I consider that disappointing, given that when there was less of a significant incursion into Canada's airspace, we invited the ambassador from Russia to Canada to appear before this committee and he did give us his fulsome explanation. It's a real disappointment that it looks like there will be no discussion on this. I would have liked to have had that on your behalf.

In any case, cyber-attacks have been a part of the Russian war against Ukraine, and we know that the attacks will be ramping up in advance of the elections. What steps is Ukraine, and Georgia for that matter, taking to counter the cyber-attacks? Do you have any advice for Canada as we prepare for our own elections?

**Mr. Andriy Shevchenko:** I can add to what we have already discussed on this issue. Right now, we are building very practical co-operation with our western partners in our fight against cyber-attacks.

We understand what objects of critical infrastructure Russia has been targeting. We actually tried to build our defence measures against that together with our western allies. That includes Canada. It's a very important joint experience. It will help, not just us but also our western friends.

**Mrs. Cheryl Gallant:** For the ambassador—

**The Chair:** I'm going to have to leave it there, your time is up.

Mr. Spengemann, you have five minutes.

**Mr. Sven Spengemann:** Thank you very much.

At the end of November 2018, Canada hosted the NATO Parliamentary Assembly in Halifax. I'd like to acknowledge the work, in particular, of the executive committee of the Canadian NATO Parliamentary Association chaired by my colleague, Borys Wrzesnewskyj, who is with us.

This committee passed a motion on November 27 with four crucial elements, declaring its unequivocal support via NATO to its ally, Ukraine: to condemn the Russian escalations of the war against Ukraine in the Black Sea; to call upon the Russian Federation to immediately release Ukrainian sailors and vessels; to cease the disruptions to commercial shipping; and lastly, to call upon NATO member countries to apply additional targeted, sectoral sanctions against the Russian Federation, should Russia not take immediate action to de-escalate.

In the context of this motion by the executive committee of the Canadian NATO Parliamentary Association, I want to put to the three of you the question of the role of parliamentarians in our respective bilateral and multilateral relationships. Feel free to comment on any ideas you have that specifically go outside of the parliamentary engagement on security.

In other words, what, if anything, can we do in the relationship of parliamentarian to parliamentarian to strengthen our connections and our belief in the international rules-based order, and to promote relations between our four countries?

• (1255)

**Ms. Ala Beleavski:** The role of parliamentarians is huge. I mentioned the parliamentary assembly that has been created between the three countries, which is a very strong tool to make the concerns of our countries better heard. With regard to the upcoming parliamentary elections in Moldova, I've repeatedly been asking Canadian members of Parliament, and also in my discussions with Canadian officials, to consider sending an observation mission to Moldova.

It would be very much appreciated if the government could also consider the participation of Canadian observers during our

elections. I hope that the Parliament of Canada can put pressure on the government to decide on this matter.

We are thinking of how we can involve Canadians more in supporting Moldovans and addressing the threats, especially the hybrid war threats, by developing various approaches that would help us take over best practices and see what we can learn from the Canadian experience.

I know there was an agreement after the G7 summit that Canada would create a special unit that would be considering measures to tackle the threats to democracy. We would really like to see these measures that would take into consideration the threats toward the whole region and certainly, Moldova. Also, listen to us and engage us in a discussion so that we can also make clear our concerns with regard to the democratic processes in Moldova.

**The Chair:** Thank you. We're out of time.

Russian aggression is a problem for global peace and security for all of us. I appreciate that from a hybrid warfare perspective—information, cyber and kinetic—many of the three of you are on the receiving end of all three, which is a problem.

This committee has been open to support you, especially on the information piece by allowing you time to come and tell the world what is actually going on over there. It helps to debunk some of the misinformation that usually spawns from actual physical instances like we saw a few weeks ago with the seizing of those Ukrainian vessels and sailors, whom we desperately want back.

Thank you all very much for coming, and have a nice afternoon.

The meeting is adjourned.

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