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—
Chair

Mr. Kevin Sorenson

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• (1050)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Kevin Sorenson (Crowfoot, CPC)): I welcome you back here. We are in meeting number 53 of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development, moving into committee business. We have been discussing our draft report, but now we're in committee business.

Mr. Wilfert has brought forward a motion, and I'm going to ask him to read his motion and speak to it, please.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert (Richmond Hill, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The motion reads:

That pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development call on senior officials from the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade to provide the Committee with a comprehensive and detailed briefing on the Government's current strategy and involvement in the Horn of Africa, specifically Somalia.

As you know, Mr. Chairman, colleagues, the transitional federal government of Somalia is facing significant challenges. Obviously, if we're talking about failed states, as we have in the past, this is certainly one. The issues obviously of extremism, warlordism, etc., are there, and responding to a number of colleagues who have approached me with regard to this issue, I thought it would be appropriate—and I'm not asking to take up more than one session—to certainly get us up to speed on the situation. Of course, we have also a large diaspora in Canada. There have also been requests that we, at least, as members of the foreign affairs committee, be brought up to speed as to the current situation.

The Chair: All right.

Mr. Khan, would you—?

Mr. Wajid Khan (Mississauga—Streetsville, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Government of Canada is deeply concerned about the instability that has characterized Somalia for several years, and that has particularly characterized it in the last month. It has had an impact on human rights and political circumstances. I think the transitional government has proposed the formation of a national reconciliation congress, which has now been delayed till June 14. However, the government will encourage the transitional government to work towards an inclusive solution.

I support the motion. It is important that we do that and invite the senior officials of DFAIT.

The Chair: All right.

We have Madame Barbot and then Ms. Nash.

Madame Barbot.

[Translation]

Mrs. Vivian Barbot (Papineau, BQ): The French version of the notice of motion is incomplete. It should read "Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2)"; that's what is written in English. I should also point out that I agree with the motion. I think that it's crucial that we hold hearings on this issue.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you for taking note of that, Madame Barbot, so we can see that it be added to the written text.

Madame Nash and then Madame Lalonde.

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I am fully supportive of this motion. There are many members of the Somali diaspora in my community, and I hear from them about the extreme circumstances of the Somali population. I know our foreign affairs critic, Alexa McDonough, wrote to the minister a couple of months ago about this. We've yet to receive a reply on it.

It would be very helpful to get an up-to-date analysis about the situation. Hopefully, that will lead us to some recommendations, because the situation, from media reports, seems increasingly dire.

The Chair: All right. Thank you, Ms. Nash.

Madame Lalonde.

[Translation]

Ms. Francine Lalonde: Mr. Chairman, I hope that Mr. Wilfert is listening.

• (1055)

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Wilfert is here.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: I haven't gone anywhere.

[Translation]

Ms. Francine Lalonde: I hope that he will agree to a friendly amendment to include the words "and from CIDA", because the international aid Canada provides is important, as is the fact that Ethiopia receives a lot of aid.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Madame Lalonde.

Mr. Wilfert, you have been asked for a friendly amendment to include CIDA representatives.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: Since it was posed in a friendly manner, I'll be more than happy to do so.

The Chair: All right.

Mr. Khan.

Mr. Wajid Khan: Mr. Chair, I think it is imperative that we first learn what efforts the Government of Canada is making, what it is proposing, and to have the senior officials of DFAIT come. You can always get the minister for CIDA to come back after, but I think we need to educate ourselves—

The Chair: Well, we aren't asking for the minister, because—

Mr. Wajid Khan: It's the senior officials who are to come. Sorry, I take that back. Yes, it's the officials.

There's no objection to that, but I think we need to understand the situation better and see what the government has done so far.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Francine Lalonde: And that includes international aid.

[*English*]

The Chair: You know what? I still think we can do this in one session and have them both here together. I'd accept that as a friendly amendment.

Is there anyone else on this?

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: We do have our delegation here, so perhaps we'll suspend for one moment. We'll meet with them, and then we'll have them come in and sit down. I hope no one is going to leave. I hope we can have 15 to 20 minutes. Are we all right?

So much for my hopes and dreams. Mr. Dosanjh thwarts them once again.

A voice: You can still have your dreams.

The Chair: I can still have my dreams, just not my hopes.

All right, we'll suspend.

• _____ (Pause) _____

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• (1100)

The Chair: I call this meeting back to order.

It's a real pleasure today to have some guests with us. I can tell you that when we as a committee travel abroad, it's always something we look forward to when we can meet with other parliamentarians and with other committees.

On behalf of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development, I would like to welcome His Excellency Jaime José Matos da Gama, Speaker of the Portuguese Parliament, and members of the Portuguese Parliament. We have four different parties represented here from Portugal.

I think some very exciting things are happening in Portugal, and we appreciate a warm relationship with Portugal.

For the committee's understanding, this July—it's either June or July—Portugal will assume the responsibility of the EU presidency until December. I think Germany at the present time has the presidency in the EU. Portugal will step into their role. I know that's something Portugal has looked forward to, and rightfully so. After Portugal, Slovenia will assume the presidency. This all transpires over 18 months, and it began in December 2006.

The central issues of the program are the continuation of the EU's reform and constitutional process; the implementation of the Lisbon strategy for growth and employment; further progress towards the completion of the European area of freedom, security, and justice; and strengthened cooperation regarding EU joint action on foreign policy.

In light of the trio program, there is much potential for continued cooperation between Canada and the EU in the areas of trade and investment, peace and security, and environment and energy challenges throughout Germany, Portugal, and Slovenia.

A transatlantic dialogue meeting is expected to be held between Canada's Minister of Foreign Affairs and his EU counterparts under the Portuguese presidency. That would mean sometime between June and December.

I know the committee members are looking forward to hearing from you.

I've mentioned the members of Parliament, but I haven't mentioned His Excellency, the Portuguese Ambassador to Canada.

We've had the opportunity to meet a number of times now. A number of our committee members met with you last night, as did our Speaker. We certainly did appreciate the time we had there last night, visiting and getting to know you a little bit better.

I'm going to ask His Excellency if he would introduce the members of his delegation.

As well, tell us a little bit about what you've done while you've been here. I know you've visited the western part of Canada, and you've been to Toronto and other places. Perhaps you could tell us a little bit about how long you will be in Canada and what you want to achieve while you're here. Then you can take some questions from our committee.

Your Excellency.

• (1105)

Mr. Jaime José Matos da Gama (Speaker of the Portuguese Parliament, Parliament of Portugal): Thank you very much for this welcome and opportunity.

We are here to reciprocate a visit from Speaker Milliken, who went to Portugal in late 2005 with a delegation of members from the House of Commons. Also, two weeks ago we received a delegation in Lisbon from your Senate, which is the delegation handling European affairs. They came to Portugal and also to Strasbourg because there were discussions on topics related to Canadian interests.

We started our visit in Vancouver and Victoria, where there is a significant group of Portuguese citizens, who were received by the Parliament. Then we went to Toronto and met with the mayor and representatives of the Portuguese clubs and associations there. Ottawa is the official visit to Parliament. This morning we were with your foreign minister. He was arriving from Korea. We have this meeting and others with special groups and committees in your Parliament. We'll be having lunch with the Speaker of the Senate and a group of senators.

I will start by introducing the Ambassador of Portugal. Mr. Ricardo Rodrigues is an elected MP in the Azores region. He was a former member of the regional government, and now he is the chair of the Portugal-Canada parliamentary friendship group. He is a Socialist Party member.

Mr. Honório Novo is an MP for Oporto in the north of Portugal. He is a Communist Party member, and he was an MP for a long time in the European Parliament in Brussels.

Mr. Mota Amaral was also elected in the Azores, and for 20 years he was chief executive of a regional government. He was my predecessor as Speaker of the House, and now he is vice-president of the friendship group in our Parliament. He is from the Social Democrat Party.

Ms. Teresa Caeiro is from the Conservative Christian Democratic Party, CDS/PP, and she was elected in Leiria, a district in the centre of the country. She was the civil governor of Lisbon—a very young civil governor—and she has also been Secretary of State for Cultural Affairs.

We have a party system in Portugal, which is basically social democrat. There are the Socialists, the Social Democrats, the Communist Party, CDS/PP, which are the Conservatives, a small party on the left called Left Wing Block, and an even smaller party with two MPs, the Green Party. This is our political system.

• (1110)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Your Excellency.

We have four parties that are represented in our Parliament, and we have a number of other parties that are not represented in Parliament. You also have proportional representation, which is a different style than we have here.

Thank you for your comments.

We're going to go to Mr. Patry. Mr. Patry is the vice-chair of this committee and the former chair of this committee. He is from the Liberal Party, which is the official opposition.

Mr. Jaime José Matos da Gama: I must also say that I am a Socialist Party member. I was elected in the Lisbon district, although I was born in the Azores islands.

Mr. Bernard Patry (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.): *Merçi beaucoup.* Thank you very much. It's a real pleasure to have you here today. I have visited your country, mainly as a tourist in the south, but I've been in the north. I think it's a great country.

My question is very easy. Next July, Portugal will have the EU presidency. There is the one in Germany right now, and before it was

in Slovenia. It seems that all three countries, as a trio, have approached your presidency.

My question is regarding the future of Europe. Can you give us an update on the European constitution and your sense of the discussion in regard to the future treaty.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Patry.

Maybe Mr. Eyking would have a question too. You can kind of take a mental note of Mr. Patry's question in regard to the EU and the constitution.

Mr. Eyking.

Hon. Mark Eyking (Sydney—Victoria, Lib.): Yes. I would like to welcome you very much. I wish you luck with the EU presidency and also your economy. I know you're hoping your economy does a little better than it has. That's my understanding.

I got to know the Portuguese quite well 20-some years ago. I'm from the Atlantic Ocean, and the Portuguese fishing fleet used to come into our area. I'm a farmer, so we used to supply the ships with vegetables and eggs. I used to see the captains and they would have me on board. They were very gracious and good hosts. Both countries really are—You know, it's a big shock, the collapse of the cod stocks, and it was hard on both of us.

Because Portugal is a marine country, what challenges are you facing with regard to global warming with sea levels in your country? And also with the fish stocks, is it going to be as bad in your country as it is in our country?

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Eyking.

To the delegation and to His Excellency, maybe you would like to answer some of those questions or would know who would best be able to answer them.

Mr. Jaime José Matos da Gama: I can say something about the fishing question, and one of my colleagues can comment on the constitutional treaty.

On fishing stocks, we have made assessments on the implications of the weather situation and climate change for our area, in conjunction with people from Spain and Morocco. The medium- and long-term forecasts are bad for our region. Desertification will grow a lot in northern Africa—Morocco is our close neighbour. In the Iberian Peninsula it is foreseen that one-third of its territory will become a desert. The biggest part of the desert will be in the south of Spain, but one part in southeast Portugal will also be immensely affected.

There are simulation studies on what could happen there. They are not one-sided; they have diverse assumptions. A small increase in sea level is predicted, with some effect on the coastal areas that are less protected against the tides and all those effects. But I confess that I have not read anything special about modifications to the fishery.

We are at the same time improving our artificial production of fish and seafood, like mussels, through some strong investment. As you may know, Portugal is, per capita, the biggest fish-eating country in Europe. In the world it ranks fifth or sixth after certain small Pacific archipelago countries and Japan.

We are in a big deficit regarding fish because we have been expelled, through the normal deliberations of the sea law, from some traditional long-distance positions. Our coastal resources are not very plentiful, and for that reason we've become huge customers of fish imports from the Spanish fishery industry; they have very long-distance positions in Chile, Peru, and other parts of the world that are very aggressive. We also import from Morocco. For crab and all those types of things, we import from the U.K., Scotland. We get codfish basically from Norway, which has improved a lot, the U.K., and I hope from Canada. The Russians have also entered those markets through their North Sea production.

As you know, codfish was very much eaten in the past in the Catholic countries of southern Europe—Portugal, Spain, southern France, Italy, and Croatia. It was the type of fish, when brined and salted, that could be used through the summertime when there was no refrigeration.

•(1115)

Prices have increased a lot. Some countries, especially Norway, have highly developed their industry and can now deliver to Portuguese customers all these things dried and salted according to the tastes of local consumers—very well done. New types of semi-salted and semi-humid-preserved codfish are a very big industry. It is very professional and very good. We also import from Iceland, as you know.

The Chair: Thank you for that.

I know there are a lot of people who want to ask questions. I'm wondering what time you—

Mr. Jaime José Matos da Gama: [*Inaudible—Editor*]

The Chair: Yes, we're going to come back to the constitutional question.

As far as time goes, what time do you have to leave? We're scheduled to go until 11:30. Do you have your facilitator with you?

Mr. Jaime José Matos da Gama: Yes, 11:30.

The Chair: All right, so we'll need quick questions and streamlined answers on the constitution.

Mr. Joao Bosco Soares Mota Amaral (Member of Parliament, Parliament of Portugal): On the constitution, being brief, I dare say it's a major challenge that the Portuguese presidency will face. The constitution has been rejected in France and in the Netherlands, and in some other countries it is under very serious debate.

Now I feel that there is a change from the constitution, an ambitious new organization for the European Union, to a more modest institutional treaty that will deal with essential needs for the functioning of the union, with 37 members, and even open to more members, avoiding some of the difficulties raised by a very comprehensive document that is the constitutional treaty.

I wish all the luck to the Portuguese prime minister, even being a member of the opposition, because it will be of great service to the European Union and to the stability of the world if he succeeds in providing good leadership for the solution of this problem.

•(1120)

The Chair: Thank you very much. I know all Canadians wish you well in that presidency and in those challenges of reforming the

constitution. I think that would be a remarkable achievement, if under your presidency you could see significant advancement towards that reform that we want to see.

Madame Lalonde, do you have a question?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Francine Lalonde: Yes, I do. I'm also vice-chair of the committee.

Your Excellency, we are delighted to have you here today. Yesterday, I read in the online newspapers that the United States and the European Union have signed an agreement on a single market and that efforts were being made to bring both countries' regulatory frameworks into line. I am a member of the Canada-Europe Parliamentary Association and unfortunately I wasn't able to attend their meeting this morning. I know this is a subject which may be of interest to my colleagues. This market or this agreement with the European Union was something that Canada had high hopes for.

Now that you're taking over the presidency, perhaps you have some insight into the possibility of continuing along the same lines, especially now that important steps have been taken by the United States and the European Union.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Madame Lalonde.

Do you want to respond?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jaime José Matos da Gama: The relationship between the European Union and Canada is quite limited. It is quite unusual, given the size of the Canadian economy, that Canada ranks ninth among the European Union's trade partners, behind countries such as Norway, Turkey, Russia, and even South Korea. This isn't normal. Attempts have been made on several occasions to do more, and to move things forward. We have a whole slew of agreements and legal structures, but sometimes hesitation creeps in, even when it comes to political dialogue. When we chaired the European Union in 2000 we held a summit. The summits, however, have been cancelled twice over the recent years. Perhaps the Berlin Summit will be able to achieve more.

We need to work on developing a framework which is more conducive to bilateral trade and investment. Opening the markets on both sides is very important for the sectors which are crucial to economic cooperation such as public infrastructure, energy, shipping companies, and even for the structure of the decision-making bodies.

The European Union has cross-cutting regulations, and a single authority oversees trade. The law is clear on the fact that this is not the purview of individual state governments. All of these sectors abound with opportunities like the transatlantic open skies initiative for the environment, trade, development and development assistance.

More transparent common regulations are crucial to the financial markets and also to the political sphere given that we are partners in NATO. The European Union's emergence in the areas of justice, domestic affairs, immigration, and combatting organized crime is also important. Canada is our international and political point of reference when it comes to security and defence because it is the non-European country with which we share the most in common in terms of values. This dimension promotes and strengthens the collaborative efforts between Canada and the European Union.

Canada must not follow the United States. Canada might even overtake the United States by building a very special relationship with the European Union. Should Canada fail to develop such a relationship with the European Union simply because the United States would not do so, well then no one here should be surprised when the United States steps up to the plate in a big way. The United States and the major European cities want a very solid transatlantic economic base so as to compete with other hugely powerful economic bases in other regions which have sprung up due to globalization. Canada needs to be a very active partner in this process. And our challenge is to promote this enhanced Canadian role.

• (1125)

[English]

Mr. Peter Goldring (Edmonton East, CPC): Your Excellency, once again, it was a pleasure meeting with you last night over dinner.

I'd like you to comment just basically on your economy and how it's impacted by your power generation. My understanding is that your power generation is mostly coal-fired or oil-fired. How is that impacted by the vagaries of supply of oil fuel for that power generation, and is there consideration being given environmentally and in terms of supply availability to looking at nuclear power at some time in the future? How is that being received by your population, and what is the likelihood? Is that being looked at seriously for future consideration?

Mr. Jaime José Matos da Gama: I would like my colleagues to say something, but I will quickly summarize this point.

We also have a base for hydroelectricity, which is operative. We are oil fuel and coal organized, but we are very much engaged in gas, because we have a gas link jointly with Spain, coming from Algeria. It's less polluting and it's very important for our economy.

Besides that, we have been developing a lot of alternative energies, such as aeolian energy and solar energy. In the European Union, we have an open comparative method for comparing the level of aeolian and solar energy, and we are above the median average of EU countries in those trends, which is very excellent, although expensive.

As for nuclear, we never moved that way. We'll probably study the option. There is a popular sentiment against having nuclear production, but the fact that we are becoming highly dependent on extremely costly energy consumption also gives at least some window of opportunity for re-thinking the problem.

We import nuclear energy from France, because France has an overcapacity in nuclear production and they export through Spain. We also are generating an open market for energy with Spain,

concentrated in electrical power, MIBEL, which will anticipate liberalization all over the EU, and also concentrated in creating a common gas network with complete liberalization for companies to operate with them, the producer, the distributor, or the retailer. It's a positive thing.

• (1130)

The Chair: May I just interrupt quickly?

We have Ms. Nash with us, and I think her question was along the same lines, was it? It's chairman's intuition. I want to get her question, because I think what she's going to ask...you may be able to bring it together with the other question.

Also, we have only two minutes left, and I know you want to meet with the Senate Speaker and some of the senators.

Can I interrupt, Your Excellency, just to get this comment and question and then maybe you can sum up?

Go ahead, Ms. Nash.

Ms. Peggy Nash: You do have intuition, Mr. Chair, because my question is quite similar.

I'm a member of Parliament from the social democratic party, and I'm elected from the city of Toronto. I believe you said you met our mayor, David Miller.

Given that in our country we are rapidly urbanizing—about 80% of our population is in cities—I'm interested in what are the main things that Portugal is doing, especially in its urban centres, to deal with the issue of climate change.

The Chair: I think you've already talked about the importation of nuclear power and how that has affected Portugal.

In terms of her question regarding energy and urban centres, you've already touched on that.

Now I can at least tell all committee members that they had the opportunity to question the representation from Portugal.

Would you just continue with what you were...?

Mr. Jaime José Matos da Gama: On the energy, there are just two things. The first is that, in our assessment, we also have the potential for importing liquefied gas, because we do not want to be strictly dependent on Algeria. We have an open import port line for that basically now from Nigeria, but it is open to other countries that want to join those markets. It would be helpful to have a Canadian proposal for that, at least. It would increase competition for the customer.

On the nuclear question, the fact that Portugal has one of the biggest uranium resources in Europe is also something to consider, in our evaluation.

On climate change in the urban centres, I know there is some research basically regarding all the heating systems—the use of glass in construction and having the buildings self-sufficient for generating energy through solar means. That is something to work at for the future.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I can pretty well guarantee you that the wishes of this committee were that we would have much more time to be able to talk about Portugal. A number of our committee members, as has been stated, have visited Portugal. I have not visited Portugal yet, but certainly I look forward to seeing Portugal.

I thank you for coming to our committee today. We wish you a good time today as you meet with the Senate and as you come to

question period. Then, as you travel back, may you have a very good trip home later on this week.

Thank you so much for being here.

● (1135)

Mr. Jaime José Matos da Gama: Thank you, and welcome to Portugal when you come.

The Chair: We will adjourn.

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