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**Chair**

**Mr. James Bezan**



## Standing Committee on National Defence

Tuesday, May 29, 2012

• (1145)

[English]

**The Chair (Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC)):** Good morning, everyone.

I see we have a point of order coming up.

But before I do that, I'll first apologize to our witnesses for being late. We had votes in the House. It is my understanding that we can extend our time to 12:30, since your next meeting has been postponed or cancelled.

Mr. McKay, you have a point of order.

**Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.):** It's just very brief, Mr. Chair. I don't wish to take any time away from the committee.

When the minister was last here on March 13, I asked a series of very specific questions on the supplementary estimates (C). He said that he would "appreciate the time parameters we're working with here, so I will undertake to give you more fulsome and specific information."

I've yet to receive that and I don't know whether our clerk has. If not, I'd ask that our clerk pursue it.

**The Chair:** We shall pursue it. We'll put a letter in to the minister and his staff, asking them to follow up on that question.

**Hon. John McKay:** That's all I wished to raise.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We have joining us today, from the Parliamentary Assembly of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina—and I apologize if I mispronounce people's names here—the chair of the House of Representatives, Milorad Zivkovic. We have the vice-chairman of the House, Denis Becirovic. We have a member from the House of Peoples, Martin Raguz. Also joining them is Her Excellency the Ambassador in Ottawa for Bosnia-Herzegovina, Biljana Gutic-Bjelica.

In the interest of time, I'll open it up to opening comments.

I understand that you have your interpreters with you. So with that, Mr. Zivkovic, perhaps you could bring your opening comments to the committee.

Welcome to Canada.

**His Excellency Milorad Zivkovic (Chairman, House of Representatives, Parliamentary Assembly of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina) (Interpretation):** Honourable Chair, ladies and gentlemen, Your Excellency, Ambassador, allow me to thank you for the warm welcome we've had over these days.

Before this meeting we had discussions with the parliamentary secretary regarding this issue. We understand you had voting and we parliamentarians understand that on a lively day such as today you need to spend much time in the House. We discussed several issues and I've updated the parliamentary secretary on issues in this area.

Briefly, allow me to say that the reform of the defence system in Bosnia and Herzegovina is considered to be one of the most important reforms. Before that, we had three armies that were at war with each other. Since that reform we have one army, whose command and powers are at the presidency. At the same time, our foreign policy orientation is for Euro-Atlantic integration.

I can inform you that in NATO integration we have accomplished much more than in EU integration, simply because the political demands were smaller. We have proved that we are trained and capable of acting on high NATO standards. That was proven in the peacekeeping operation in Afghanistan, which was a theme of the summit in Chicago. The redistribution of military property is under discussion. After we finish, this will give us full membership in the NATO alliance.

We can say that in Bosnia and Herzegovina, currently we are satisfying accommodations in the area of security. We are not immune to terrorist activities, but I can say that we handle them maybe even better than some European countries.

• (1150)

Regarding the parliamentary dimension, we in the parliamentary assembly have a joint committee on defence and security composed of members from both houses of the parliamentary assembly.

That is a specific characteristic of the parliamentary assembly of Bosnia and Herzegovina. We have several joint committees where representatives from both houses are members, and one of those is the committee on defence.

I'm taking this opportunity to thank Canada for its support to Bosnia and Herzegovina on its road to NATO, and for all the assistance and help provided with the demining of the land and all of the other help. Of course, there is a lot of work still to be done there, and we are in need of your help.

**The Chair:** Thank you so much.

We'll go to our first round of questioning.

Mr. Harris, you have seven minutes.

**Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP):** Thank you very much, Chair.

I want to thank you all for coming today. As you may know, in our Parliament there are the government members who sit on that side and the opposition members who sit on this side of the committee meeting. So we represent the opposition party, just for your information.

I'd like to ask first of all about the following. We in Canada, of course, assisted you throughout your struggles and difficulties over the last number of years. I'm reading something here telling me that you now have an armed forces consisting of 15,000 soldiers. Is that correct? If so, how did you accomplish the process of disarmament and integration of the three groups who were hostile—though not all toward one another of course?

**Mr. Milorad Zivkovic (Interpretation):** According to the law on defence and on armed forces, we have 9,000 soldiers and an option to have a reserve of up to half that number of soldiers.

As I've said, the reform of defence was one of the most successful reforms. The process of destroying ammunition was transparent, which we managed to do successfully with the co-operation of the international community.

In order to achieve our two goals, the first one to increase security and the second one to decrease the cost of the army, we had to decrease the number of soldiers. We want to achieve NATO standards with their full equipment. Our soldiers are well trained physically according to those NATO standards.

Since we have agreed on military property, we will manage to save in that area, so basically we won't have to cover up for the inadequate property that we had so far.

•(1155)

**Mr. Jack Harris:** I'm sorry, may I interrupt? We only have seven minutes.

I wanted to be a little bit more specific. You've downsized. There's a small military force, and you say that you've been very successful in disarmament of the population. Is it true, then, that you have no concerns? You've mentioned terrorism, but I don't know what you mean by that. Do you have no concerns about any latent hostilities from the conflict, from a military perspective within your country?

**Mr. Milorad Zivkovic (Interpretation):** Well, I said it was the political assessment that NATO membership would provide more security in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the region, and when I mentioned decreasing the number of soldiers, I meant actually that those discussions are run by the presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The political resolution is that we don't need armed forces for Bosnia and Herzegovina, but for peacekeeping operations.

**Mr. Jack Harris:** Thank you.

Can you tell me what the partnership for peace membership means for Bosnia and Herzegovina and what obligations you have undertaken as part of that arrangement?

**Mr. Milorad Zivkovic:** *[Witness speaks in his native language]*

**Mr. Denis Becirovic (Vice Chairman, House of Representatives, Parliamentary Assembly of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina) (Interpretation):** I greet you also most heartedly.

Your question of whether security is expensive, and the answer is yes. But instability and insecurity is even more expensive.

We, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, are aware of all the global challenges and global changes. It is clear that for global challenges we must find global solutions. Bosnia and Herzegovina has three theoretical and practical solutions when it comes to security. One is membership in the NATO alliance. Second, a theoretical solution, is an alliance with Russia. Third is to proclaim political neutrality.

We have committed ourselves to the road to NATO, but we must not forget that Russia is increasingly more active in the economic area and every other aspect.

Our country, regardless of the fact that it is a really small country, wants to keep, maintain, and preserve peace in alliance with other countries. Isolationism, as an option, is out of the question. Of course, North America did learn the hard way in 1941 with Pearl Harbour, and in 2001 in New York.

We want to become a member of the strongest political alliance in the history of humanity. To us, membership in the NATO alliance primarily means stability and security for all of our peoples. Stability in Bosnia and Herzegovina means stability of all of southeast Europe and the entire region.

In 2014, we will mark the 100th anniversary of the First World War, which was initiated in Sarajevo.

•(1200)

**The Chair:** I'm going to have to cut you off there. Unfortunately, the time has expired for Mr. Harris, and I do have other members who have other questions.

Mr. Chisu, you have the floor for seven minutes.

**Mr. Corneliu Chisu (Pickering—Scarborough East, CPC):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you very much to our guests for showing up.

**Mr. Denis Becirovic (Interpretation):** I have one more sentence to say, if you'll allow it.

You must understand that we have taken serious steps to achieve all of this, and our troops are in Afghanistan in peacekeeping operations. Several days ago, we agreed on a settlement regarding military property in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

**The Chair:** Thank you for that clarification.

Mr. Chisu.

**Mr. Corneliu Chisu:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you very much, honourable guests, for coming to our committee.

In 2004, I was in your country for a year, and I have noticed great progress since the war and after the implementation of the Dayton accords. Most of the army was at the forefront of the entire reconciliation in your country between various ethnic groups.

In 2009 you applied to NATO's membership action plan, MAP, and in April 2010, at the NATO foreign ministers' meeting in Tallinn, Estonia, you were officially invited into MAP, which is the next step to integration in NATO. However, I would like you to clarify a couple of things.

NATO members have three major concerns. The first issue is that in Bosnia and Herzegovina, there are still 23,000 tonnes of high risk, unsafe, and unstable surplus ammunition and weapons. Some of it is hidden and needs to be destroyed. The second issue is the lack of political support for the proposals of the military leadership on defence review, defining the long-term plan for the development of the armed forces in Bosnia and Herzegovina by 2020. The third issue is the technical and political challenges related to the precise technical description of the inter-entity boundary line.

So can you elaborate not only on the defence property issue, but also on these three points I expressed?

● (1205)

**Mr. Denis Becirovic (Interpretation):** On the first question, weapons are still not cleared in Bosnia and Herzegovina, as you've said. We must state that the process is mainly finished, and Bosnia and Herzegovina is as stable as the countries of Croatia, Serbia, Montenegro, and other neighbouring countries.

Regarding long-term support to the armed forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina until 2025, the Minister of Defence has made a plan, and that plan has support that was proven at the last summit in Chicago.

On the third question about inter-ethnic boundaries in Bosnia and Herzegovina, such boundaries do not exist in Bosnia and Herzegovina. It is a unified, single, multi-ethnic country, and people of all three ethnicities live in both entities. We must be objective. You can still feel the reason, the feelings, tied to the previous nineties conflict.

It is also a fact pointed out by numerous foreign analysts that there is no similar conflict that we have had and no similar progress that we have achieved in such a short time. Bosnia and Herzegovina is an example of the success of the west, the international community, and local domestic parties.

● (1210)

**Mr. Corneliu Chisu:** I have a question, continuing on this issue. I was in Strasbourg in January and saw a report on the progress of Bosnia and Herzegovina at the Council of Europe. Of course, membership in NATO will also depend on the situation you are resolving—the political issues inside Bosnia and Herzegovina.

How do you think these issues will reflect on membership in NATO?

**Mr. Milorad Zivkovic (Interpretation):** I spoke on these issues as the speaker of the House of Representatives of the Parliamentary Assembly of Bosnia-Herzegovina, and I presented the opinion and standpoint of Bosnia-Herzegovina.

I was referring to the conditions set up for Bosnia-Herzegovina, to the settlement. After they finalize the military property, I expect that the map will be finalized in October this year.

Allow me to say that as parliamentarians we came here on this visit to exchange opinions. As I said, we have advanced much further in NATO integration than in EU integration because there were no political conditions.

I come from the part of Bosnia-Herzegovina that's called Republika Srpska, where we have special, separate opinions regarding NATO integration and the revision of the Dayton Peace Agreement. There's the opinion of the National Assembly of the Republika Srpska, which is binding for us as parliamentarians at the state level. There will be a referendum held regarding the application to NATO.

We are carefully monitoring what our neighbours also do, especially Serbia. If the NATO conditions are too detailed and we change the Dayton agreement, the constitution, more thoroughly, I'm afraid that we might be stuck on that road.

**The Chair:** Thank you. The time has expired.

I know it's going by fast, but in every round we've actually been between nine and ten minutes already.

Mr. McKay, you have the floor.

**Hon. John McKay:** Thank you, Chair.

What does Bosnia-Herzegovina see as its greatest military threat?

**Mr. Martin Raguz (Member, House of Peoples, Parliamentary Assembly of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina) (Interpretation):** The biggest security threat and challenge for Bosnia-Herzegovina, if we look at it historically, has come from abroad. Of course, that was helped by the lack of internal consensus. Now it's time that this new political generation achieves a definite political consensus regarding the future of our country, and that's our biggest challenge.

● (1215)

**Hon. John McKay:** So is the military prepped? Historically, it's from abroad, and I assume that means Russia. Do you see your biggest threat as actually being internal at this point?

**Mr. Martin Raguz (Interpretation):** Internal threat means various political positions that are still not harmonized. That's the challenge, but I believe we will settle that very successfully. With that, we will reduce many security threats and possibilities, and I believe that's the biggest priority for us.

**Hon. John McKay:** Is that the biggest thing that slows you from getting into the EU?

**Mr. Martin Raguz (Interpretation):** I would say that it is the biggest delay of all. That's why we proceed so slowly.

**Hon. John McKay:** What is your perception of Russia's changing role vis-à-vis NATO?

**Mr. Martin Raguz (Interpretation):** It is strategic. In these past few weeks, we have seen an anti-missile shield positioned in Turkey and some other countries. We see that Russia has answers to that. The Western Balkans have always been subject to the penetration of big foreign powers. That's why this situation is reflected in that area.

**Hon. John McKay:** What do they think of Turkey's changing perception—it's expansionary views—of its place in the world?

**Mr. Martin Raguz (Interpretation):** Turkey is seeing economic and every type of progress, and they ask to be recognized for that progress and validation of its influence in other areas.

**Hon. John McKay:** Is it a good influence on Bosnia and Herzegovina?

**Mr. Martin Raguz (Interpretation):** We believe that Turkey can be a constructive factor.

**Hon. John McKay:** What is more important to Bosnia and Herzegovina, membership in NATO or membership in the EU?

**Mr. Martin Raguz (Interpretation):** At this time, it's definitely NATO.

• (1220)

**Hon. John McKay:** Would you like to answer a bit?

**Mr. Denis Becirovic (Interpretation):** You asked about the role of Turkey, and I can offer you an answer, since I am a professor of contemporary history at one of the universities in Bosnia and Herzegovina. You are aware that in some Islamic countries there is a campaign being run that the west is against Islamic countries. The answer is that Turkey, a Muslim country, is a member of NATO. There is also Albania. So the hypothesis does not hold water: The west is not fighting the Islamic countries. That is crucial in viewing the global fight against terrorism.

**Hon. John McKay:** That's an important insight—that the west is not anti-Islam.

**Mr. Denis Becirovic (Interpretation):** Yes.

**Hon. John McKay:** How am I doing?

**The Chair:** You've got one more minute.

**Hon. John McKay:** Canada has essentially withdrawn at this point—and certainly militarily, and in other ways. Is there any role that you think Canada could play that would be useful?

**Mr. Denis Becirovic (Interpretation):** Of course. We need Canada's support on our road to NATO. Canada is one of the most influential countries in the NATO alliance and, for us in Bosnia and Herzegovina, it is crucially important that we have your support. Just as in other countries in southeast Europe, there are NATO skeptics.

**Hon. John McKay:** What about in terms of institution building, political institution building?

**Mr. Martin Raguz (Interpretation):** I believe that is an important question. The crucial answer to how we succeeded in merging three armies into one is that we had excellent cooperation and partnership with crucial countries. I believe that partnership is essential at this stage on our road to NATO. There was a point in time when the focus shifted from Bosnia and Herzegovina because of other priorities in the world, because of the fatigue and other reasons.

In our work the tempo slowed down; we sensed that, it was noticeable. So we do not run away from being personally responsible but we do need partnership as it was developed from the previous conflict.

• (1225)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

The time has expired.

We're going to go to a five-minute round now, starting with Mr. Norlock.

**Mr. Rick Norlock (Northumberland—Quinte West, CPC):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and through you to the witnesses, thank you for coming today.

I'm going to continue the discussion on NATO, as this committee has been studying NATO, and its strategic concept in particular. The observations I've made during this study and, in particular, when the minister of defence of Lithuania attended, were the differences in capabilities, policies, and postures of nations in NATO. I wonder if you could comment, because it's important for Canadians to understand the capabilities and contributions that other nations are able to bring to the alliance.

In your opinion, what are the current defence priorities and postures for Bosnia and Herzegovina? Then, the second part of that has to do with the smart defence. I guess simply put, what are your thoughts on smart defence and, in particular, very succinctly, what does Bosnia and Herzegovina bring to NATO that NATO would want to have?

**Mr. Milorad Zivkovic (Interpretation):** As I stated previously, we in Bosnia and Herzegovina have well-trained soldiers, morally, physically, psychologically. In those missions where it came to demanding healthy assistance, we proved ourselves. We see that even Canada is going to withdraw its troops in 2014, so there is a general lack of people volunteering to participate in these missions. NATO can look at Bosnia and Herzegovina as a back-up country that will try to compensate for the lack of people and resources in missions throughout the world. On the second side, Bosnia and Herzegovina, with membership of NATO, gains regional and internal security.

**Mr. Denis Becirovic (Interpretation):** Allow me an additional view regarding this issue.

The only country where NATO had to intervene after the Second World War was in Bosnia and Herzegovina, not including Kosovo. Bosnia and Herzegovina not entering the NATO alliance is a message of unfinished NATO business.

**Mr. Rick Norlock:** I was particularly interested when you mentioned some of the capabilities of Bosnia and Herzegovina has with regard to its contributions to demining. I note that Canada actually has helped, by contributing some \$11 million to the United Nations Development Programme's mine action centres. And there's training as well; I see there are some 40 mine detection dogs for deployment and demining internationally.

I thank you for that intervention, as far as what can be provided is concerned, because, as we've noted in this committee, specifically, European nations have cut back significantly in their contributions to NATO. Therefore, the tremendous financial burden is placed on some countries like Canada. It's very difficult to convince the people who pay taxes that you need to increase an organization, and at the same time you need to be able to convince Canadians that this additional contribution is going to be a plus or a benefit rather than a negative. That's why I asked specifically what you can bring to the table.

Mr. McKay began to head towards the relationship between Bosnia and Herzegovina and Russia. I noted that in your introduction you mentioned that you wanted to explore more fully your relationship with Russia. Am I correct in assuming that the game of chess you're playing is making sure that NATO is here, as well as keeping Russia on the friendly side? Would that be a correct observation?

• (1230)

**Mr. Denis Becirovic (Interpretation):** No. Our commitment to the NATO alliance is unquestionable. So it's not "NATO and Russia"; it is "NATO". We referred to the fact that the influence of Russia is increasing in the Balkans. You are aware of the fact that in southeast Europe you have pro-European and pro-Soviet forces. When we talked about other countries of southeast Europe, Serbia has a new president. His first visit was to Moscow.

**Mr. Milorad Zivkovic (Interpretation):** Just as Macedonia has more soldiers in Afghanistan than any other country there, so Bosnia-Herzegovina can contribute to what is most dear to everybody, and that's human life. On the other hand, do not ask us to politically determine or clarify ourselves as having one position only, because we want our diversity, the differences that exist there. We want to turn those to our benefit, to our wealth. The Serbian Orthodox would want to cooperate with Moscow. Bosnia says that Muslims want to cooperate with Turkey. Croatian Catholics want to cooperate with the Vatican. So that's our diversity, our differences, and we want to turn them to our best advantage. Just as you don't force Turkey to be against Iran in NATO, do not make Bosnia, as a government, be against Russia.

• (1235)

**The Chair:** We have some options right now to consider. I understand that our witnesses have a luncheon arranged in the parliamentary restaurant right now. We could adjourn, and those of us who are available are invited to join them for lunch. They were supposed to meet with the NATO parliamentary association, but they've cancelled. For those of you who are available, you could look at having lunch with our guests.

We could do that or we could have another round of questions and till a quarter to the hour and let them go, but....

**Mr. Jack Harris:** Let's finish this round.

**The Chair:** Okay, I'm getting an indication that Mr. Kellway has a question.

Okay, Mr. Raguz.

**Mr. Martin Raguz (Interpretation):** I would just like to mention a fact that will happen next year in terms of Bosnia-Herzegovina. Croatia will become a full member of the European Union next year and the Croatian border is over a thousand kilometres long with Bosnia-Herzegovina. So next year you won't have Croatia; you will have the European Union bordering big Bosnia-Herzegovina. That was a really important strategic moment that I reflected on in my opening words.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Kellway, I understand you have a burning question. I'll let you ask a couple of quick questions, and then we will adjourn.

**Mr. Matthew Kellway (Beaches—East York, NDP):** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and through you, thank you to our guests for coming today. It's been very interesting.

I understand there are two: there's the Federation of Bosnia-Herzegovina and Republika Srpska. I've heard you say you're fully committed to NATO. But I also understand that in the republic the decision about NATO membership is subject to a referendum. Did I understand that correctly?

**Mr. Denis Becirovic (Interpretation):** This is where we have differences of opinion. My colleague, Mr. Zivkovic, has said that a referendum on that issue will be conducted in Republika Srpska. My opinion is that a referendum on such an important issue should be in the entire Bosnia and Herzegovina. All countries that have entered the NATO alliance had a referendum on that issue on a state level and that is in accordance with our constitution. So if there is a referendum, it should be in the entire Bosnia and Herzegovina. Of course, once we come to that point we would want to provide full consensus of all actors.

**Mr. Matthew Kellway:** NATO rejected your application to join the Partnership for Peace the first time, I understand. Is that true?

**Mr. Denis Becirovic (Interpretation):** That was in 2009.

**Mr. Matthew Kellway:** But now you have membership in that partnership?

• (1240)

**Mr. Denis Becirovic (Interpretation):** That was when we had the previous government, the old government. Now we have a new government that has implemented important reforms and now the situation is completely different in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Just a few days ago leaders of the main political parties made an agreement in Bosnia and Herzegovina regarding military property. So we can optimistically say that 2012 is the year of NATO for Bosnia and Herzegovina and the year of the EU, because we have implemented and are implementing important reforms that were previously pending. We want our friends to recognize that.

**Mr. Matthew Kellway:** I wonder if that entry into NATO is a bit too much too soon in light of the constitutional disagreement, which seems very fundamental, about who has the authority to hold a referendum on the issue and agree to entry.

**Mr. Milorad Zivkovic (Interpretation):** I'd like to say that in Bosnia and Herzegovina, there are issues on which we haven't reached final agreement. Although it has been regulated within legal documents of our country and the ministry of defence that the goal of Bosnia and Herzegovina is to enter NATO, it isn't stated when that will happen.

As you've seen, we have differences of opinion regarding the referendum. I think that time is required, as certain regional things need to take place. Then it will be decided when it is time for us to join.

I'll go back to the MAP where we have received conditional agreement to enter the NATO alliance once we settle and agree on military property. If everyone keeps their word, that should be done after we finalize the distribution of military property.

For the rest, we should give it time to be settled.

**The Chair:** I have one quick follow-up by Mr. Raguz.

**Mr. Martin Raguz (Interpretation):** Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The question of the dynamics towards NATO is an important one. We in Bosnia and Herzegovina are not in a situation where we can calculate much on security alone, considering that there are other aspects. We need investments. We must mobilize more resources. We must stop negative tendencies. Right now that is really noticeable; we shouldn't deceive ourselves.

The general interest of both entities in Bosnia and Herzegovina is in peace and security, and development. Objectively, that is unreachable without an umbrella such as NATO. That doesn't exclude our cooperating with Russia or everybody. I fully agree with what Mr. Zivkovic has said.

● (1245)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We are going to adjourn. I really appreciate our witnesses coming today from the Parliamentary Assembly of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina. This has assisted us in our study of NATO's strategic concept and Canada's role in international defence cooperation. We definitely appreciate your input into this process and, of course, the aspirations that you've expressed here today to be part of NATO.

Again, I will extend an invitation to those of you who are able to come, for lunch with our guests in the parliamentary restaurant. I know there are a couple of members from the government side who will be going. I'm hoping that one or two members from the opposition parties will come. That would be great as well.

With that, I will again say thank you very much. Enjoy your stay in Canada. Safe travels.

I'll entertain a motion to adjourn.

**An hon. member:** I so move.

**The Chair:** The meeting is adjourned.

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