

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, October 5, 1995

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[*Translation*]

PEACEKEEPERS IN FORMER YUGOSLAVIA

Hon. André Ouellet (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.):

Madam Speaker, allow me first of all to apologize to the representatives from the Bloc Québécois and the Reform Party for notifying them of this morning's ministerial statement on such short notice. This decision was made only late yesterday. The United Nations will announce a substantial reduction in its forces in the former Yugoslavia, and I thought that a statement should be made here in this House before the UN makes its announcement today.

I should point out that I was under no obligation to make a statement in this House, but I thought that, even on such short notice, the opposition parties, who have always been involved and who have always had the opportunity to express their views on the peacekeeping forces deployed in the former Yugoslavia, would appreciate this opportunity to participate in a parliamentary debate and express for the record their reactions and, I hope, their support for the government's decision.

Allow me to say that the situation in Bosnia has changed considerably in the past few weeks. The UN having concluded that it no longer needs all authorized UNPROFOR contingents, it has asked some contributing countries to reduce their forces and others to withdraw theirs.

These cuts and reassignments will affect some 9,000 soldiers. UNPROFOR strength will drop from 21,000 to 15,000, while the rapid reaction force added to the UN contingent will lose some 3,000 members.

Canadian Forces elements are among those that the UN feels are no longer needed in Bosnia. The details of this decision will be announced today by the Secretary-General of the United Nations.

The Canadian battalion now in Bosnia will therefore not be replaced when its current six month mandate expires in November. A parliamentary debate was held when this battalion was deployed; some members expressed their support for this action while others stated that we should withdraw from the former Yugoslavia. The return of this battalion that will not be replaced should, I presume, satisfy Reform members who told us at the time that we should substantially reduce the number of Canadian troops in Bosnia.

I should, however, point out that Canada will maintain a presence in the region, as Canadian military observers and Canadian personnel at the UN force headquarters will remain in Zagreb and Sarajevo. Canadian troops now assigned to NATO operations in the Adriatic Sea, whose job is to monitor the no-fly zone in Bosnia, will not be affected by this reduction either.

[*English*]

If current efforts to reach a peace agreement are successful the region will enter a new phase. Canada will contribute to reconstruction efforts in the former Yugoslavia. Once a settlement has been reached Canada will be there, if necessary, in the new force with our allies to help implement the peace under the authority of the United Nations and as part of Canada's continuing commitment to Europe.

Canada has been in the former Yugoslavia for three and a half years, since the beginning of peacekeeping in the region. Canadians have served with distinction in land, sea and air operations. We will continue to be involved with 13 military observers and one ship with a crew of 212 personnel. We will be involved in the Sarajevo air bridge with one aircraft and 45 personnel. We will also have six people in the AWACs aircraft and 50 people in headquarters.

I pay tribute to the courage and integrity of thousands of Canadian forces personnel who have served with honour under the Canadian and UN flags. I pay special homage to those who have paid the supreme sacrifice in the service of peace. I express on behalf of all Canadians appreciation to those who will continue to participate in the UN efforts to forge a lasting peace in the area.

[*Translation*]

I wish to thank this House for allowing us to make this short statement, which also gives the opposition parties an opportunity to express their views.