

Diplomacy This Week

Duelling powers hold duelling dos



SNEHA DUGGAL
Chatter House

Call it a coincidence, but Russian and European Union parties falling on the same evening is really the king of flukes (or a premeditated attempt at outshining the other).

The Russian Embassy in Ottawa's Sandy Hill neighbourhood played host to a Victory Day reception on May 8. One hour later, the European Union Delegation started its Europe Day celebration over at Ottawa City Hall.

Tensions between Russia and the EU have ratcheted up in recent months in a tug of war over Ukraine, with the EU slapping more sanctions on the Russian bear after another Ukrainian region declared independence on May 11 and then asked to join Russia.

Russian Embassy press conferences with Ambassador **Georgiy Mamedov** are known for being blunt, witty and lengthy. A brief press conference was broadcast live on CBC TV's dinner-hour Power and Politics program amid the reception.

"Let them have 15 minutes of fame and try and take me apart," Mr. Mamedov spoke of the assembled journalists and film crews.

Guests huddled tightly in a room that started getting rather hot as more and more people crammed in. Some guests held tissues in their hands, continuously wiping their faces.

Mr. Mamedov started speaking in Russian and then assured the crowd that he was just asking the veterans in the room if they would be okay with him saying a few words in English.

"Not to have [all you] ladies and gentlemen scared...to understand that you didn't walk into a trap, that this is some kind of Russian imperial or Soviet propaganda," he said as the crowd broke into laughter.

"First of all, thank you for coming. I appreciate your bravery," Mr. Mamedov said.

He said he felt for those in the crowd, including diplomats, who are forced to determine where to go and whom to interact with. "Sometimes I feel like I am back in USSR."

The reception marked Russia's victory over the Nazis during the Second World War.

"I would hate to see what happened 70 years ago repeated again...because people in my family lost their blood and life for this never to happen again," he said.

His words came as news broke of Russia expanding a list of Canadian officials under travel bans, something he said Russia was doing only as "a response."

But he tried to keep the focus on the war veterans. "They are our collective conscience. We owe a lot to them. Our lives, our future and we still can learn from them about what unites us and what divides us," he said.

The few diplomats who did show up included South African High Commissioner **Membathisi Mdladlana**, the Israeli Embassy's deputy head of mission, **Eliaz Luf**, and Cuban Ambassador **Julio Garmendía Peña**.

Meanwhile, other diplomats were streaming over to city hall where there was more room to breathe.

Foreign Minister **John Baird** turned up, as did Trade Minister **Ed Fast**'s parliamentary secretary, **Erin O'Toole**.

As Mr. Baird went around glad-handing, guests suddenly turned their attention to a young man standing near a railing above. They were in for a surprise.



Russian Ambassador Georgiy Mamedov answers reporters' questions at his country's Victory Day reception. Embassy Photo: Sam Garcia

The man belted out the first few lyrics of the Phantom of the Opera's All I Ask of You (a fine song choice!) and a hush spread over the crowd. On the main level, a young lady's voice rang out from within the crowd. Soon another man and lady joined in.

It was like a mini flash-mob, with singers sprouting from the crowd. Guests, searching for the source of the newest voice, looked delighted.

Spotted were Cameroonian High Commissioner **Anu'a-Gheyle Solomon Azoh-Mbi**, German Ambassador **Werner Wnendt**, Peruvian Ambassador **José Antonio Bellina**, Iceland's ambassador, **Thórdur Aegir Óskarsson**, Serbian chargé d'affaires **Mirjana Šešum-Curcic**, Swedish Ambassador **Teppo Tauriainen**, Japanese Ambassador **Norihiko Okuda**, Spanish Ambassador **Carlos Gómez-Múgica Sanz**, the Greek Embassy's press office director, **Sia Papatriantafyllou**, and German deputy head of mission **Jörn Rosenberg**.

Mr. Baird lavished much praise at the 28-member bloc, saying his respect for the EU had grown each day since he became foreign minister and that it was a "powerful force for good."

EU Ambassador **Marie-Anne Coninx** said it's an important year for the Canada-EU trade and political deals (which have yet to be completed), and that the two sides would celebrate this at a Canada-EU summit.

Mom deserves 40 days

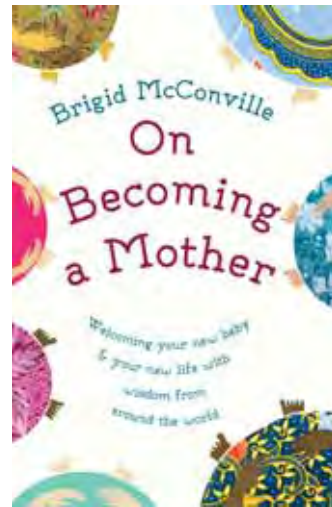
It was a **Joe Clark** family affair. When one member of the family takes on a cause, the others are right there in support.

Such was the scene at British High Commissioner **Howard Drake**'s home, Earncliffe, on May 7 when **Brigid McConville** of the White Ribbon Alliance for Safe Motherhood launched her new book, *On Becoming a Mother*.

Maureen McTeer, the Canadian representative for the White Ribbon Alliance and wife of the former prime minister, Mr. Clark, said the family has worked together on issues related to women's equality.

Standing close by was their daughter, **Catherine Clark**, host of CPAC's Beyond Politics.

The alliance, which aims to inform women and uphold their right to a safe and healthy childbirth process, has helped send mammogram machines to Ghana, for example.



Ms. McConville, who is director of the alliance's United Kingdom branch, said she used to be a journalist, but after discovering the plight some women faced while giving birth, she became an advocate. She spoke of a region in Tanzania where a woman experiencing complications during birth would have to travel 200 kilometres to get to a health centre.

"I'd been talking for years about the sad and bad stories. I got to the point where I wanted to hear some of the plus side," said Ms. McConville of her idea to write the book.

So she started to ask women what they were most proud of and what others could learn from their culture on giving birth.

"And the stories began to flood in. And the stories were so encouraging and so warm. It's been an absolutely delight to gather them together," she said.

Much to the envy of many ladies in the room, she spoke of one custom across many African and Asian countries where a mother is doted upon for 40 days after giving birth and isn't made to do any work.

Forget one Mother's Day in Canada. We need 40!

MP turned honorary dip

First he was a Liberal member of Parliament for 14 years. Now **Bryon Wilfert** is taking on something a little different.

The former politician was named as an honorary consul for Myanmar and officially



Meanwhile, Foreign Minister John Baird, left, makes an appearance at Europe Day alongside EU Ambassador Marie-Anne Coninx, right. Embassy Photo: Sam Garcia



Gender equality advocate Maureen McTeer; her daughter Catherine Clark; Ms. Clark's father and Ms. McTeer's husband, Joe Clark, a former prime minister; with women's health advocate Shirley Greenberg. Embassy Photo: Sneha Duggal

started his voluntary duties in March.

Mr. Wilfert has deep links to Asia. He did a master's degree in Chinese politics and chaired many parliamentary groups related to Asia. He often led delegations to the region during which he would meet with officials from Myanmar, which is also known as Burma.

"I would have meetings and talk about...how we can't do business until there are significant political changes in the country. And we would have very frank and open discussions," he said.

But the country has come a long way in terms of development and reform in recent years, he said. The Canadian government has warmed up to the country, having worked to set up an embassy there, and appointing the first resident Canadian ambassador to Myanmar in March 2013.

After Myanmar's ambassador, **Hau Do Suan**, arrived in June 2013, Mr. Wilfert said they talked about how to boost the country's footprint in Canada. And so the idea to create an honorary consul position to promote education, tourism and business ties was born. Mr. Wilfert made his first trip to the country in August.

Officials from Canada and Myanmar had to sign off on his nomination.

The honorary consul, who is based in the Greater Toronto Area, shuffles between Ottawa and Toronto often. He is the only honorary consul for Myanmar for now.

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