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• (1100)

[English]

The Chair (Hon. Bardish Chagger (Waterloo, Lib.)): Good morning, everyone. I call the meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 112 of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. The committee is meeting today to continue its study of parliamentary protocol related to an incident in the Speaker's gallery on Friday, September 22, 2023.

It's really exciting today to have, from the Canadian Polish Congress, Dominik Roszak, first vice-president, who is joining us by video conference. I understand you have opening remarks. We look forward to hearing them.

Welcome to the procedure and House affairs committee.

The floor is yours, Mr. Roszak.

Mr. Dominik Roszak (First Vice-President, Canadian Polish Congress): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Honourable members of Parliament, on behalf of the Canadian Polish Congress, thank you for this opportunity to address the serious matter of the former member of the SS Galicia unit who was invited to be honoured in the House of Commons last year.

Canada's Polish community, much like Canada's Jewish community, watched in horror as members of Parliament, inadvertently prompted by the then-Speaker of the House, rose in the chamber to applaud Yaroslav Hunka as a "Ukrainian hero and a Canadian hero" who fought against the Russians. That wording immediately caught our attention, as it quickly became evident who Mr. Hunka had fought for: namely, the SS Galicia unit. This moment was a shock for Polish Canadians, who were baffled at how such an event could have come to pass in our House of Commons.

To properly address that question, it is important to set out the relevant historical context. First, the Waffen SS was not a conventional German Wehrmacht military unit. Rather, it was quite literally the combat wing of the Nazi Party's Schutzstaffel organization, which was created to implement its aims. Its members were required to swear personal fealty to Adolf Hitler. The SS Galicia, also known as the 14th Waffen Grenadier Division of the SS, 1st Galician, was created by Nazi Germany as a part of a broader strategy to recruit and mobilize non-German ethnic groups in occupied territories to fight alongside the German armed forces.

The SS Galicia was composed mainly of Ukrainian volunteers from the Galicia region, then part of Nazi German-occupied Poland. These volunteers were motivated by various factors, in-

cluding opposition to Soviet rule, nationalist sentiments and promises of autonomy. Nazi Germany exploited these sentiments to bolster its military forces and further its goals of expansion and domination in eastern Europe.

Mr. Yaroslav Hunka was a member of the SS Galicia, and proudly so. In his own words, published in a readily accessible online blog from 2011 in the *The Combatant News*, Mr. Hunka recalled, "The Polish army and the civilian population are fleeing along the road in the direction of Berezhany in a continuous stream, and German planes are catching up with them from time to time. Every day we impatiently looked in the direction of the Pomoryans [the Germans] with the hope that those mystical German knights who give 'bullets' to the hated cowards will appear."

Another quote reads, "At the call of the OUN [Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists], many joined the ranks of the UPA [Ukrainian Patriotic Army]. Others, at the call of the Ukrainian Central Committee, went as volunteers to the 'Galichyna' division. In two weeks, eighty thousand volunteers volunteered to join the division, including many students of the Berezhn Gymnasium.

Poland's Institute of National Remembrance documents SS Galicia's role in the Huta Pieniacka massacre, which occurred on February 28, 1944, in Nazi German-occupied Poland. This massacre involved the murder of approximately 500 Polish civilians, including women, children and the elderly, by a joint force of soldiers from the SS Galicia and other units under German command.

Further, in a speech to the soldiers of the 1st Galician Division, Heinrich Himmler, the infamous head of the SS, is quoted as saying:

Your homeland has become so much more beautiful since you have lost—on our initiative, I must say—those residents who were so often a dirty blemish on Galicia's good name, namely the Jews...I know that if I ordered you to liquidate the Poles...I would be giving you permission to do what you are eager to do anyway.

Given historically documented examples like this, it is unfortunate that some have attempted to minimize the criminal nature of the Waffen SS by selectively using Canada's Deschênes commission report as a sort of fig leaf. What is not often mentioned is that the Deschênes commission was limited by the scope of its investigation, which focused on identifying individuals suspected of involvement in war crimes who had emigrated to Canada after World War II. Moreover, its ability to access evidence, especially from witnesses, foreign governments and agencies was limited, given that the region was still behind the Iron Curtain at that time.

The question of whether or not Mr. Hunka himself was involved in perpetrating war crimes is not central to the debate. What we know is there is no ambiguity about the criminal nature of the SS, of which he was a voluntary member, and this historical fact cannot be dismissed as Russian disinformation.

The brutal attacks carried out by the Waffen SS units, including the Galician Division and others, such as the massacre of Poles in Volhynia and eastern Galicia, are forever part of the tragic legacy of the Second World War in what Yale historian Timothy Snyder appropriately termed the "Bloodlands."

• (1105)

From the perspective of Canada's Polish community, there is no question that a former member of the 14th Waffen Grenadier Division of the SS (1st Galician) should never have been recognized in the House nor, as we later learned, been invited to a reception hosted by the Prime Minister of Canada for visiting Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy. This regrettable incident, which this committee has been investigating, embarrassed President Zelenskyy during his visit, damaged Canada's reputation and played right into Vladimir Putin's false narrative about modern Ukraine at a critical time in its heroic fight for survival against Russian aggression. Worst of all, it was easily avoidable. Mr. Hunka's words, which I quoted earlier, and his association with SS Galician were readily accessible via a cursory online search.

The Canadian Polish Congress sincerely hopes that the House of Commons and the Government of Canada will reflect on this situation and leverage the significant resources at their disposal to ensure that guests it wishes to single out for recognition are properly vetted and meet our standards of human rights and dignity.

Thank you. I look forward to any questions you may have.

The Chair: Thank you for those opening comments.

We'll now enter into six-minute rounds, starting with Mr. Kmiec, followed by Mr. Duguid and then Madame Gaudreau and Ms. Mathysen.

Mr. Kmiec, go ahead for six minutes, through the chair.

Mr. Tom Kmiec (Calgary Shepard, CPC): Thank you, Chair, for that.

Dzień dobry, Panie Roszak.

[English]

I will not continue in Polish, so don't worry; you won't need to do live translation from Polish to English.

First of all, Mr. Roszak, is the Canadian Polish Congress satisfied with the apologies issued so far both by the Speaker's Office and by the Prime Minister's Office?

Mr. Dominik Roszak: I think it's important to focus on whether or not the historical context here was understood properly, which is why I led with that in my opening remarks. Certainly the Speaker ultimately resigned and apologized and in his resignation recognized the Jewish and Polish communities, so we appreciate that. Certainly when it comes to the other event—and I understand there was some discussion, at previous committee meetings, about a particular stakeholder involved—I hope there would still be an opportunity to get further clarity on that question.

• (1110)

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Okay.

For the Canadian Polish Congress, what do its members think is that path forward? Is there a fixed position on how Canada and the Parliament of Canada and the Prime Minister's Office can fix the damage that's been done to their reputation?

Mr. Dominik Roszak: I think the only way to do that is to openly discuss the historical context and to, frankly, engage with the communities involved, to engage with our community, with the Jewish community and with the Ukrainian community to chart our path forward from this.

Of course, as I mentioned, it's a critical time. Ukraine is fighting for its survival. Canada's Polish community and Poland have been some of the strongest allies of Ukraine in this fight, and we want to focus on that. Nevertheless we cannot ignore the importance of historical truth as the foundation of moving forward in a situation like this.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Would you then say, through you, Madam Chair, that it's fair to say that Canadians of Polish heritage in Canada and the Polish Canadian Congress are very strong supporters of Ukraine in its fight against the Russian Federation of Vladimir Putin and the Kremlin?

Mr. Dominik Roszak: Absolutely.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Has the congress perhaps passed a motion indicating that support?

Mr. Dominik Roszak: Yes. We, as an organization, have participated in numerous efforts, including fundraising efforts. I personally have attended almost every single rally in support of Ukraine and have spoken on behalf of the Canadian Polish Congress in support of the Ukrainian-Canadian community, Ukraine and its people in this existential fight. We are strong supporters and we will continue to be. However, moving forward, we would like to work closely with our Ukrainian-Canadian friends to chart a path forward in which these types of historical disagreements can be discussed.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: I was also going to ask you about reconciliation and how the communities can be reconciled after the damage that was done by the Prime Minister's Office and by the Speaker personally in Canada, with respect to the views that all the communities have of each other. You mentioned the Huta Pieniacka massacre. You mentioned the Polish Institute of National Remembrance and the considerable research it has done.

President Duda of Poland and President Zelenskyy, for three years before that incident, had worked on reconciliation, holding joint masses together and making joint statements to try to reconcile the two peoples to events that happened during the war. What can we do in Canada, and how could the Canadian Polish Congress help to reconcile that difficult past history?

Mr. Dominik Roszak: I would love to work with communities, like the Ukrainian community, and for us to join together on this issue.

From the perspective of Parliament and the Government of Canada, it is important to allocate resources to navigate these very sensitive issues. These aren't restricted to our communities. There are other communities around the world that have difficult pasts and different perspectives on those pasts.

However, there needs to be a broader understanding amongst parliamentarians and government officials on those questions. That is where a lot of effort should go to ensure proper staffing and proper resources to be able to understand the nuances of these issues, particularly in a multicultural country like ours.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: In the case of the Parliament of Canada, what could we do on Parliament Hill to reconcile the series of events that led to Mr. Hunka being recognized, the lack of background checks, the lack of security checks and the grave error by the Prime Minister's Office and by the Speaker?

What could the Canadian Polish Congress add? You said resources, so there are things we could do here.

What could the Canadian Polish Congress help us with to achieve that goal of reconciliation and fixing this damaged reputation that Canada now has internationally?

Mr. Dominik Roszak: One of the things we can do is to serve as that resource. Where there is a question that involves the Polish community, please reach out to us. We have historians, we have documentation and we have resources we can provide to assist parliamentarians in making those judgements. Certainly, we are here as a resource, as I am sure are any of the other community organizations.

There are other ways we can do that. There are two very active and great parliamentary friendship groups on the Hill, namely, the Canada-Poland Interparliamentary Friendship Group and the Canada-Ukraine Friendship Group. Perhaps there is something we can do jointly. I would suggest that would be something of worthwhile consideration going forward.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: When you mention academics and research, I think you're familiar with the work of Wiktor Poliszczuk entitled "Dowody zbrodni OUN i UPA", which is evidence of crimes of the OUN and UPA. It's actually a Toronto publication from 2000.

Do you have other examples of academics and researchers who have extensively written on this subject?

• (1115)

Mr. Dominik Roszak: Yes. All of the quotes I have shared with you today are sourced. I didn't come with anything that wasn't backed up. I'm happy to share those resources with the committee and parliamentarians. I'm not a historian myself. I like to think I have a good understanding of history, but I'm not a historian. We certainly have contacts that can assist in these questions for sure.

The Chair: Thank you.

We look forward to receiving those documents. If you send them to the chair, we'll get them translated in both official languages, and share them.

That brings us now to Mr. Duguid. You have six minutes.

Mr. Terry Duguid (Winnipeg South, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Dzień dobry. That is the extent of my Polish. I apologize. I know a little more Ukrainian, having Ukrainian ancestry on my mother's side.

Thank you, Mr. Roszak, for appearing today and providing that historical context.

We had the Ukrainian Canadian Congress before us a few weeks ago. They provided a historical context from their vantage point. I would say there is a pretty marked difference between the points of view, which you have acknowledged in your comments.

I wonder if you have sat down with the UCC to kind of explore a common path forward, so incidents like this don't happen again. While I think everyone agrees that it was a very, very unfortunate incident that we don't want to repeat, these are learning opportunities for Canadians. Unfortunately, Canadians forget their history and the sacrifice that our armed forces made in two world wars and other conflicts around the world.

I wonder if you would provide us with a few reflections on how those two important communities, the Polish and Ukrainian communities, can perhaps help us better understand those periods in history, and move forward in a positive way.

Mr. Dominik Roszak: Thank you for that great question.

Certainly, we've engaged with our friends in the Ukrainian Canadian Congress on this issue. In some cases, we just agree to disagree on certain points. It's not necessary to fully agree. However, there needs to be a forum for honest discussion of difficult issues. Since the end of the Communist era in Poland, there's been a great effort to speak honestly about historical challenges, especially given the context.

I referred to Professor Snyder's book, *Bloodlands*. That's appropriate because Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union perpetrated numerous crimes in the lands of eastern and central Europe and, frankly, pitted communities against each other.

However, now that Poland and Ukraine are free, and especially here in Canada where we have a commitment to multiculturalism and mutual understanding, we should really take the opportunity to lead, to have those difficult conversations. Maybe we won't come to a full consensus, but at least we'll be able to air out those difficult issues and focus on what's really important right now, whether it's for Canada or Poland or especially Ukraine, which is defeating Russia in the context of Russia's unprovoked aggression on Ukraine.

Mr. Terry Duguid: I have a concern that I know is shared by many. It's that the issue we're dealing with has taken a very partisan tone. There's no party that is blameless. I would note that you previously worked for the Harper government and obviously have some views.... At least formerly you were partisan.

I'm just wondering if you would have a view on how we tone down the rhetoric and again move towards solutions that I think all of us around the table can agree with. What would be your recommendations? How do we move forward in a less partisan way so that these incidents don't happen again and so that we don't give fuel to Mr. Putin and what he has been doing with this particular issue?

• (1120)

Mr. Dominik Roszak: First, just to address that, I'm here in my capacity as an elected representative of the Canadian Polish Congress, which is a non-partisan organization. We're committed to that. In this role, I've worked with numerous MPs over the recent years, particularly the MPs for Mississauga East—Cooksville and Windsor West, your colleagues.

However, my government experience, especially in the ministry of multiculturalism, has sensitized me to these challenges and issues. Certainly, at the time, when it came to sensitive situations, I know that we always had staff to do some extra research. I think that is critical, whether it's on the political side or the public service side. Making that extra effort of having those staffing resources to delve into a greater understanding of these historically difficult issues is important. That's what I would suggest.

What makes this situation tragic is that it was preventable, from our perspective. We should seek to prevent these types of situations from happening in the future because they do not serve Canada's interests, and they inflame tensions unnecessarily.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Roszak, I'm not sure what your level of French is. Madame Gaudreau will be asking questions. I would like you to take your

time to hear the interpretation, if you need it, before answering. That time will not be taken away from Madame Gaudreau, just so you know. You'll perhaps see a little delay. Take your time. She will also have a little bit of a delay. It will just be part of the experience, but that time will not be taken away from either of your times to have the exchange.

Mr. Dominik Roszak: Thank you.

[Translation]

The Chair: Ms. Gaudreau, you have the floor for six minutes.

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): I really appreciate your efforts to ensure that we understand each other well in our respective languages.

Thank you, Mr. Roszak. You've actually answered some of my questions. The topic we're discussing with the witnesses is obviously very sensitive.

As parliamentarians, how should we draft our report to convey a clear understanding of the dynamics of two foreign countries, while taking into account the sensitive nature of these historical files? We don't want to hurt anyone, but we want to find ways to make sure this doesn't happen again.

What do you think?

[English]

Mr. Dominik Roszak: Thank you, Madame Gaudreau. It's a very good question.

I would focus on the prevention aspect. How can we anticipate and look at the issues before they become issues? In this case, we clearly had an issue that could have been prevented simply by some quick research on the part of staff in the Speaker's office, the Prime Minister's Office or relevant ministers' offices. It seems like a simple recommendation, but I think it is the best one to offer.

Also, consult with organizations such as ours—the Ukrainian Canadian Congress and CIJA—to gain their perspectives and build that capacity to anticipate the issues before they become a problem, as in this case.

[Translation]

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: How can we make sure our report doesn't offend anyone, given the historical context?

• (1125)

[English]

Mr. Dominik Roszak: In addressing this specifically—the historical context—I think it's important to acknowledge everything that's been expressed by the witnesses so far and to summarize what we brought as our perspectives and that we've been heard. I think that's important. I don't envy the committee's putting that into a report, because it is such a challenging topic.

However, focusing on moving forward is the key. How do we prevent these types of situations from happening? How do we improve the understanding of historical context among parliamentarians and staff, and leverage all the resources in that area available to Parliament at a moment's notice, should they wish to understand a future complex issue similar to this one?

[Translation]

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: As I understand it, our report should focus on identifying potential solutions. One of the things I heard was that, as a preventive measure, there should be more thorough and detailed research and a robust communication system.

Do you agree with that?

[English]

Mr. Dominik Roszak: Certainly, although I would be interested in hearing what, specifically, that idea is.

However, in broad terms, that sounds right. If you have a specific example of what you think this would look like, I'd love to hear about that, as well.

[Translation]

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: We've also seen that there's a difference between inviting individuals who can roam around Parliament and attend question period, and inviting individuals for the purpose of recognizing them in the House. The issue in this case is the speed of execution and the secrecy aspect, because it was a legitimate thing to do.

If there's no way to standardize the security check process to avoid situations like the one we experienced, would you agree that this would prevent us from recognizing an individual in the House?

[English]

Mr. Dominik Roszak: I'm not sure I understand the final point. I do understand the complexity of coordinating these resources, but I don't think it actually is that complicated from an institutional perspective. It's very simple: If there is doubt as to whether someone is an appropriate invitee or someone to be recognized, then serious thought and serious research should be put into looking into that particular individual before any kind of invitation is sent out.

Out of respect for the sensitivity for communities and in a diverse landscape like ours here in Canada, that can be a challenge, but I think that for all of us it's not just about an institutional approach. It's also about broader awareness and engagement on the parliamentary level between parliamentarians and community organizations like ours on a regular basis. That is harder to put into a process, but I think it is just as important.

[Translation]

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Thank you very much.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Mathysen, you have six minutes through the chair.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I want to build off what was just touched on, but also off part of your testimony, Mr. Roszak. You mentioned the Deschênes commission.

As part of that complicated security process, the government has indicated that it is thinking about potentially publishing that commission. It has been mentioned. Could you give us your thoughts on that, even if it's a partial opening, on the ability for other security forces to have access to that list? What do you think about that? I would love to hear your recommendations.

• (1130)

Mr. Dominik Roszak: Well, I think that in my view transparency is always a good thing. In this case, we are dealing with files that were looked at in the 1980s. I certainly think that there's no harm in opening them up to improve Parliament's and the public's understanding of those issues, but the reason I mentioned the Deschênes commission in particular is that it cannot be seen as some kind of full answer to all questions relating to this type of issue, because it was a fairly narrowly focused commission and had its limitations. I just wanted to point that out.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: It's one small piece, but it could be helpful.

Mr. Dominik Roszak: Of course, yes.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: Just to switch gears a bit, a lot of our conversations on this study have been about processes and how we potentially change them. I wanted to shift a bit. As a larger organization, you come onto the Hill a great deal. You advocate with all parties. You throw events. You host those meetings.

This has been referenced in previous meetings as well on this study, but can you talk about and share any insights you may have on hosting events on the Hill and navigating those relationships, navigating through security and ensuring we don't make mistakes similar to those that we have made in the past?

Mr. Dominik Roszak: Thank you for the question.

Yes, we've had the privilege of hosting events on Parliament Hill. We have very good relationships with members of Parliament from all parties who are members of the friendship group and otherwise.

I think one of the important things is to have those relationships, and that's on us as an organization to develop those relationships, but in terms of parliamentarians and staff, it's also a two-way street, right? It's a two-way relationship. If there are questions or concerns, or if there is an interest in learning more about what we do or why we do it, we're just a phone call away.

We want to ensure that we're accessible. We certainly haven't had any challenges from our community perspective in terms of dealing with those processes. I'm happy to elaborate if you can be more specific.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: Well, for example, other groups have opened it up to members of the larger community. I don't know if that's the case for the Canadian Polish Congress. I would assume that it is, but do you do your own security checks?

Would you want to see in the future having to provide more of a set guest list weeks in advance to ensure that our own parliamentary security forces would do those security checks to avoid problems with potential guests? What do you think about that in terms of the openness, and also of the openness of Parliament, because it also speaks to that?

Mr. Dominik Roszak: It's a fair question. I think it's incumbent upon organizations like ours to make sure that when we're submitting lists to institutions, to government and parliamentary institutions, we have done our due diligence in reviewing who is on that list. Yes, certainly there are time pressures sometimes. There are unexpected things. However, we have to really put in that effort because it's also our reputation on the line as the representative of our community.

Therefore, we take that very seriously. If there are ever people who should not be [*Technical difficulty—Editor*].

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: Sir, your connecton froze there. You might want to repeat the last 30 seconds.

Mr. Dominik Roszak: I'm sorry.

In the last bit, I was saying that it's incumbent upon us an an organization to do our own due diligence in terms of researching what lists we submit to government institutions for invitations. I think that's an important responsibility because governments certainly trust stakeholder organizations, but we have a responsibility to do that research on our own, as well, to prevent situations like this from happening.

I think it can happen at both levels.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: You mentioned that sometimes organizations such as yours are limited by the resources that you have. Is there a way to sort that through large organizations versus small organizations?

• (1135)

Mr. Dominik Roszak: The reason that congresses like the Canadian Polish Congress exist is to help coordinate that engagement of our member organizations with institutions like Parliament and the Government of Canada. Certainly, at our level, at our board level, we have experienced individuals who understand the nuances and can help navigate these issues with our member organizations. Therefore, we serve as a conduit between the 1.2 million Polish Canadians and the people in the Government in Canada. Even though we're volunteers, we put a lot of effort into making sure that we're representing our community properly and avoiding embarrassment for ourselves and for parliamentarians.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll now enter our second round, starting with Mr. Kmiec, who will be followed by Mrs. Atwin.

[*Translation*]

Then it will be Ms. Gaudreau followed by Ms. Mathysen.

[*English*]

Mr. Kmiec, you have five minutes.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Thank you, Madam Chair.

To go back to continue the questioning I had at the beginning, I want to ask about or put something directly to you, Mr. Roszak. I'd just like the Canadian Polish Congress's view and the view of many Poles in Canada and you to comment on this.

One of the statements made publicly by many people who were defending Mr. Hunka is that there were many people who were given no choices during the war. People had very little opportunity to exercise full freedom of conscience and choose the sides they wanted to fight on. However, I'd like to comment on the Polish community. We have something that Poles call *żołnierze wyklęci*, the "cursed soldiers", people who fought against the Soviet Union and who fought against the Nazis. They had no home once Poland was fully occupied by the Soviet Union, and some of them continued to fight. The last one was Józef Franczak, who was murdered in 1963. He was a man who continued to fight well after the Home Army was stood down and amnesty was declared. So, men—in this case, practically all men—who chose to continue to fight the good fight, who had fought the Nazis and fought the Soviets.... They made that difficult choice of conscience. How does the Polish community see that? How does the Polish community see those arguments when they're made in public?

Mr. Dominik Roszak: I think it's important at this point to even take it out a little bit further and to remind people, as part of the historical context, that Poland was invaded by Nazi Germany. However, on September 17, it was invaded from the east by the Soviet Union. That's a fact that's often forgotten. Once Poland was forced to surrender, a lot of Polish soldiers and other volunteers joined one of the largest World War II undergrounds—if not the largest—the Polish Home Army, which fought Nazi German occupation and helped save Jews from the Holocaust. Jan Karski voluntarily went into Auschwitz to report back to the Allies about what was going on there. Then, after the war.... Even during the war, you still had the Warsaw Uprising, which was the, kind of, last effort of freedom-minded Poles to free Warsaw before the Soviet Army came in so that some measure of Polish freedom could be maintained—and then after the war.

Poles did not have any large-scale collaboration with either the Nazi German or Soviet regimes. In fact, they resisted both right up until 1989 when Poland finally became free after so many years of Soviet domination.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Chair, I'm glad Mr. Roszak mentioned Jan Karski, but there was another one too, Captain Witold Pilecki, who is credited as being—

Mr. Dominik Roszak: I'm sorry—yes, Captain Pilecki, of course.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: —the one who volunteered to go to Auschwitz and spent several years there. He saw countless things that he then reported to western allies and then gave the final reports that the Holocaust was in fact happening.

Also, another one I think we saw was a priest named Maximilian Kolbe, who gave up his life for another man.

I'm again going back to the idea of reconciliation in Canada between the Polish Congress and the Ukrainian congress, fixing the damage that's been done between the communities, because we're all on the same side. You've mentioned before that the Polish community in Canada are very strong supporters of Ukraine's fight for its freedom and to remain an independent, free, pluralistic democracy—that's what the Ukrainian congress wants, that's I think what parliamentarians on all sides of the House want.

Having an act of reconciliation, let me put it to you—you asked me if it's a good idea—would you participate in something like this, both in facilitating it and having a presence there in doing something like having Rabbi Moshe Azman of Kyiv or Rabbi Yaakov Bleich of Ukraine...? What could be better than one rabbi? You have two, so if you don't like the first one's opinion, you have the second one. Ask them—they love this joke all the time.

You could have both of them here, bring a mezuzah from Ukraine, and have both community leaders present, the Speaker of the House of Commons, someone from the Government of Canada and from all opposition parties to participate in an act of reconciliation where we literally hammer into the building, preferably on the door of the Speaker's office.... This could be a constant reminder—a beautiful mezuzah—of what not to do and that people need to do their homework before they make parliamentarians make a grave mistake that damages the reputation of this institution, and all of our personal reputations as well.

Would you participate in something like that? What do you think of this idea?

• (1140)

Mr. Dominik Roszak: Absolutely, I would. I think it's a great idea, and I'd love to work with parliamentarians on this on behalf of the Canadian Polish Congress as vice-president for Canadian affairs. I'm certainly open to working with other organizations like the UCC, CIJA, B'nai Brith and others to foster that reconciliation and understanding. I was born in Canada. I grew up here, and I value the relationships I have with members of the Jewish and Ukrainian communities, and I think there's definitely more we can do. If there's leadership from parliamentarians and a willingness to organize an initiative like this, we'd be happy to participate.

The Chair: Thank you.

We have Mrs. Atwin for five minutes, through the chair.

Mrs. Jenica Atwin (Fredericton, Lib.): Thank you very much, Chair.

Thank you for having me here today. I think it's my first time being at PROC, but I'm really grateful for the insight into this incident.

I'm really grateful for your testimony as well, Mr. Roszak. Thank you so much for being here and for sharing how your organization is dealing with the fallout, and also for offering recommendations and suggestions for solutions and how to ensure this never happens again.

I am a former student of Canadian and international military history, so the other piece about this as well is that I think we need to revisit our histories to really look at how they impact our present and our future. That's a piece I'm grateful you highlighted as well.

You mentioned the importance of properly vetting anyone who comes into our Parliament, but, of course, anyone who might be honoured in the chamber, and, of course, those who support our view of human rights. I appreciated that specific quote.

We certainly recognize the hurt, the horror and humiliation we all felt as members of Parliament, and, for me personally, the chilling effect it's had on future people being honoured in the chamber. I'm very hesitant now. I feel like I'd like to know more about anybody who's suggested to receive applause in the House. I certainly think on a personal level there are certain things we're taking into account, but, again, this is broader on how we can ensure this never happens again as far as the entirety of our government is concerned.

As I mentioned, these are some of the impacts I see as a member of Parliament, but can you explain a bit more about the impacts you're seeing on the Polish Canadian community since the incident? Can you give us any personal anecdotes or anything you've been hearing within the community?

Mr. Dominik Roszak: As you mentioned, there was shock and surprise in the community over this situation and, from our perspective, puzzlement as to how someone wouldn't know the connection was there. I mentioned how right away—even from the Speaker's quote—we knew there was something off here.

Unfortunately, for the Polish community, this is something we struggle with sometimes: ensuring that history, from our perspective, is understood, as well. The Canadian Polish Congress, in its 90-plus years of existence, has been actively advocating for and teaching people about Polish history and its links to Canada. There are so many great stories of bravery, such as Canadian airmen dropping supplies to Warsaw operation participants who were fighting Nazi-German occupation, or of Poles being trained in Canada to fight abroad. Those are great stories that we try to highlight as an organization to help foster that historical understanding.

For us, it was a responsive shock, but I certainly appreciate your comment about how this has a bit of a chilling effect on recognizing future guests. I hope a way can be found to take the lessons from this, in order to ensure we still recognize people who represent the best of the values we all share. We just have to put in that extra bit of due diligence to make sure we don't do something inadvertently that we will all feel badly about.

I hope that answers your question.

• (1145)

Mrs. Jenica Atwin: Yes, thank you very much.

In the same vein, what kinds of international impacts do you see this event having, as far as reflections on Canada and the current illegal invasion of Ukraine by Russia? Can you speak to some of those international implications, as well?

Mr. Dominik Roszak: Yes. I think it was an unfortunate, regrettable distraction from what should have been a very excellent—and which was—visit by President Zelenskyy, along with his speech to Parliament and his presence at the community rally in Toronto. I was proud to be present there on behalf of the Canadian Polish Congress and appreciated that invitation to show our support for the community.

Then, for that incident to happen and the days and days of distraction.... Of course, the Canadian Polish Congress had to address this issue and put our perspective on the record. However, personally, as the VP for Canadian affairs, I wanted to quickly reflect back on the fact that Ukraine is facing an existential crisis. They're fighting for their lives. They're fighting for our values in the west. We have to ensure they win this war, because it is a question not just of their survival but also of western values.

My perspective is also that we can talk about these difficult issues while still focusing on the present. When it comes to the propaganda coming out of Putin's Russia, attempting to connect these things is absolutely outrageous and we have to resist those who try to leverage these things for the murderous aims of the Putin regime.

Mrs. Jenica Atwin: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you so much for that.

[Translation]

Ms. Gaudreau, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Honestly, I must say that our witness did a good job of answering most of my questions, including my last question.

I'm pleased to see that people are open to dialogue and that we can learn from this experience. Much of what we've heard about things like vigilance, rigour and communication can be used in our report. The more uncertainty there is, the more rigorous the process needs to be, even if that means not proceeding.

Madam Chair, I'll give the rest of my time to Ms. Mathysen.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Gaudreau.

[English]

Ms. Mathysen.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: Thank you so much.

I'm following up on the last round of questions. I was asking about the security and organization around events on the Hill.

Your organization would have been, I assume, doing similar things at other levels of government—within the provincial legislature, for example. Do you do things differently? Can you provide us with comments on lessons learned that you've seen, where you do things better than we do on the Hill for those kinds of events and security?

Mr. Dominik Roszak: That's an interesting question. Certainly, in my experience in the Ontario provincial context, there's a strong element of parliamentary.... Some parliamentarians are very much involved in hosting and coordinating events on behalf of organizations like ours. There's usually a champion we would work with who would help organize these things and would also take responsibility for ensuring that all of the necessary work in advance had been done, and, presumably, that the appropriate research had been done. However, I don't know of any specific formal processes that may or may not exist in that regard.

Again, the challenge here is, how do you reconcile instituting some kind of formal mechanisms while also leveraging the informal mechanisms that are based around relationships between parliamentarians and stakeholders, such as ourselves and community members?

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: There have also been many comments today on fact that Putin did weaponize what happened in the House of Commons. There have been movements in the United States and here in Canada to move away from providing support for Ukraine.

I know your organization has done a great deal to support Ukraine. I was hoping you could end the conversation by telling us about this in more detail. You referenced that support, generally, but could you tell us in more detail the sorts of supports that organizations like yours are doing to support Ukrainians here as we move forward?

• (1150)

Mr. Dominik Roszak: I'd like to remind the committee, first of all, what Poland did in the initial stages of the war. As most parliamentarians will remember, Poland accepted over three million refugees from Ukraine in the immediate days following Russia's invasion. Poland, regardless of political party, has been a staunch ally of Ukraine and has been speaking up alongside Canada on behalf of Ukraine.

In Canada, our community has organized fundraisers, big and small. They range from a few hundred to a few thousand dollars at each opportunity to help and provide aid. There was one member of our community who provided goods that were transported to Ukraine. It's been an ongoing thing in terms of fundraising and support for Ukraine. It's a fight, and it's people stepping up and being there and speaking on behalf of Polish Canadians at rallies, and moments like that, to express our support for our friends in their time of need.

The Chair: Thank you.

I'm not sure that we're going to need full rounds, because I think we're wrapping up.

Mr. Lightbound, please go ahead.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Joël Lightbound (Louis-Hébert, Lib.): Mr. Roszak, thank you for being with us today.

Like you, this is my first time speaking at the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. I think the work we're doing today is important. It's important to examine this incident, which should never have happened. Thank you for sharing the perspective of the Polish community and the Canadian Polish Congress.

In my opinion, the incident that occurred in the Speaker's gallery in September 2023 definitely shows a fundamental lack of understanding of historical facts. It also shows that we need to shine a light on these episodes in our history to increase awareness.

You were absolutely right about how we can take a clear-eyed view of past events while being very aware that they have no impact on Canada and the Polish community's support for Ukraine, which is fighting the Russian invasion. It's important to keep things in perspective, and you did a great job of explaining that.

I'd like to pick up on what Mr. Kmiec was saying earlier. We're taking steps toward reconciliation with the Ukrainian and Polish communities, among others, who were hurt by this incident. In Canada, there is controversy over a number of monuments honouring members of the Waffen-SS division.

What is the position of the Canadian Polish Congress on these monuments?

In the interest of reconciliation, can there be dialogue with the Ukrainian community about removing these monuments?

[*English*]

Mr. Dominik Roszak: Yes, there was one particular story that came up several years ago—about five years ago now, I believe—about a monument in Oakville. At the time, the Canadian Polish Congress and B'nai Brith issued a joint statement criticizing the presence of that monument. That position was stated then, and it remains the same now.

The issue is having an honest conversation about these difficult moments in history and really being honest about what happened. From the perspective of reconciliation, we're ready to have those discussions at any time. The question is, to what extent are our interlocutors and our partners willing to have those conversations? As

a representative of the Canadian Polish Congress, as an organization, I would be happy to coordinate a joint meeting to discuss these issues further. I know that other communities have been doing things like this already on controversial and difficult issues like this.

Certainly, we've expressed our position on that issue before, and that's something you can find on our website.

• (1155)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Joël Lightbound: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

That was the only question I wanted to ask.

Mr. Roszak, thank you for your testimony.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you so much.

Mr. Roszak, I wanted to say thank you to you. The perspectives and insights you have provided are very valuable, and just in the manner in which you carry yourself—the congress—we, as Canadians, are really lucky to have you. The fact that you've taken time to be with us today means a lot. I appreciate your time and attention, on behalf of all PROC members.

If there is anything that you're sending—I know that you did have an exchange—please send it to the clerk and we will get it circulated. If anything else comes to mind that you wish you had said or shared, just share it with the clerk, and we'll make sure that all members are aware of it.

Mr. Dominik Roszak: Thank you, Madam Chair. If I may, I will just quickly say just a few more things in conclusion.

Thank you for the wonderful questions and the wonderful conversation.

[*Translation*]

I regret my lack of confidence answering questions in French, but I hope I will be able to do so in the future.

[*English*]

Finally, I would like to remind members of Parliament about this May being the first ever Polish Heritage Month in Canada.

We will be doing a flag-raising on Parliament Hill on May 2 at noon. I thank the member for Windsor West for helping the Canadian Polish Congress coordinate that. We look forward to welcoming all parliamentarians and Polish Canadians and others at that celebration.

The Chair: We look forward to being with you as well.

[Translation]

Thank you for making an effort to speak to us in French. You speak it very well.

[English]

With that, have a really good day. We will be suspending and will start our next panel at the top of the hour.

Have a good day. Thank you.

[Translation]

Mr. Dominik Roszak: Thank you.

[English]

Take care.

• (1155)

(Pause)

• (1200)

The Chair: Welcome back for the second hour of procedure and House affairs.

We are now meeting with the Parliamentary Protective Service. We have with us Mr. Mitch Monette, the director of PPS, who is accompanied by Matthew Ritchie, associate chief, operations.

Welcome to the procedure and House affairs committee. The floor is yours for your opening comments.

Chief Superintendent Mitch Monette (Director, Parliamentary Service, Parliamentary Protective Service): Good morning, Madam Chair and honourable MPs.

[Translation]

My name is Michel Monette. I go by Mitch. I'm pleased to be with you today to testify before this committee for the first time since I was appointed director of the Parliamentary Protective Service, or PPS, last November.

[English]

While I will keep my remarks brief, I do want to take a moment to highlight a few things that I bring to this position.

For 31 years, I proudly served as a Royal Canadian Mounted Police officer. I spent 23 of these 31 years specifically in protective operations. As a result, Parliament Hill and many members of its community are already quite familiar to me.

[Translation]

To date, my career has given me the opportunity to live and work in many parts of the country, from the Maritimes to Canada's Far North. That said, my roots are in Timmins, Ontario, and I call myself a proud Franco-Ontarian at every opportunity.

Ever since my appointment a few months ago, I've been committed to strengthening the PPS's solid relationships with its security partners, both on and off the Hill, and to building new ones. Collaboration, communication and consultation are at the heart of everything I do as director.

[English]

Given my personal commitment to client service, my love of history and my sincere respect for those who dedicate themselves to serving our democracy, I am thrilled to contribute my protective experience to supporting the PPS's privileged mandate. Strong and efficient relationships with both our internal security partners, such as the Sergeant-at-Arms and corporate security office, and our external law enforcement partners are pivotal to me, and I nurture and value these connections immensely.

• (1205)

[Translation]

Since my arrival at the PPS, I've thrown myself into the work, spending day after day on site to take the pulse of our community as a whole, from my employees to parliamentarians to Hill employees in general. My commitment to them and to all of you is that I will continue to be present and collaborative in advancing our shared goals with respect to safety and protection. I am always here and always at your disposal because I want to establish and strengthen collaborative relationships that lead to positive outcomes for our communities.

[English]

Finally, please trust that I am honoured and privileged to serve the parliamentary community in my role as director, and that the PPS remains very grateful for your continued support.

Madam Chair and honourable MPs, this concludes my opening remarks. I will be pleased, alongside my colleague Matt Ritchie, who has been around for a long time, to answer your questions.

The Chair: Thank you.

We will have six-minute rounds, starting with Mr. Duncan, and followed by Mr. Duguid, Madame Gaudreau and Madam Mathysen.

Mr. Duncan, you have six minutes, through the chair.

Mr. Eric Duncan (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, CPC): Thank you, Madame Chair.

Thank you, gentlemen, for being here with us this afternoon, and, most importantly, for the work you do to help protect us, our democracy, our staff and all the folks who work here within the parliamentary precinct.

I think the Parliamentary Protective Service and the role of security have evolved over the years, and are constantly changing. In your years of service, you've probably seen changes to the scope and range of protective services you need to provide not only in the vicinity of downtown Ottawa but also in terms of constituency security for members while they're in their ridings or at home.

Could I ask you to discuss that evolution? In your experience, how has that evolved in recent years? As part of that, maybe you could also discuss the staffing complement and the size of the team required to provide your services here, and the broad mandate you have to assist and protect us.

C/Supt Mitch Monette: Let me answer that wearing two hats.

Of course, as a member of the RCMP and having worked extensively on the protective side with the Prime Minister's detail, with the VIP units and with the Governor General's detail, and having been involved in putting together several major events, as well as in my current role as director here, I can say that unless you've lived under a rock, the evolution and polarization of the population have grown significantly. Clearly, the people are right or left. Call it what you will. That's always existed, but now the temperature has changed. That has had a significant impact on security.

How do we do that, and how do we do that in a way that provides the people we serve—and, for that matter, the general public—whereby we find a balance?

The jobs our parliamentarians do, beyond the actual work they do every day, clearly represent something. They represent, of course, Canadian values, democracy and all of that.

How do we provide an adequate security posture that is commensurate to the threat, while leaving an impression—more than an impression, but the fact—of the proximity of the public to our parliamentarians?

I wish I could say there's an easy answer to that. There is no easy answer to that. In fact, we struggle with that on a regular basis. How do we do that?

As we're building the new Parliament in the LTVP context, the Centre Block and all of the projects, how do we find that balance of security, using modern technology—because technology is evolving greatly—while making sure that it doesn't look like a police state? We don't want to replicate that. We see that happening in other places on the planet, and that's not what Canadians want. It's not what this place represents.

We're constantly struggling. I wish there was an easy answer to that. All we can do is try to stay on top of the threats.

I think all police departments, law enforcement, the RCMP inside here and the Sergeant-at-Arms have all increased our intel capacity to try to get ahead of the threat and try to make the difference between what is an actual threat and what is a perceived threat. This is understanding that a person who is receiving negative comments or some kind of security threat, although it may not necessarily be something that's actionable, is going to be concerned. Of course, they won't be well. Of course, it may have an impact, if it's a parliamentarian, on how they do their job.

That's the crux of what this place represents—

• (1210)

The Chair: I'm going to pause quickly. I was trying to get the connection.

We had a really good first hour. We had a really rough Tuesday meeting. Today, we are here to speak about the incident in the gallery.

It's really exciting to have you here in your new role. We have not had you come and join us before, but I really hope we stay connected to why the committee is meeting.

Perhaps you didn't hear my opening comments, but I mentioned that we're meeting today for the committee to continue its study of the parliamentary protocol related to an incident in the Speaker's gallery on Friday, September 22, 2023.

I hope, Mr. Duncan and colleagues, that we can stay connected to why we are here, so that the analysts can do their good job in being able to provide us with something we can report back to the House.

[*Translation*]

C/Supt Mitch Monette: Understood, Madam Chair.

[*English*]

I'm just putting it out there that I'd be more than happy to meet with the committee separately on this issue, or with members individually, to talk about this. I can talk about it all day long.

The Chair: It feels like it. Excellent.

Mr. Duncan, it's back to you on the study.

Mr. Eric Duncan: Thank you.

When I asked the first question, I was getting to my second one to bring it to the topic, once again, that we're talking about here, which is the incident in the gallery. My point, and what you laid out well, is about the evolving nature of physical threats and cybersecurity, and the protection of the precinct and the work you do.

I think the issue, from what we heard from a lot of witnesses over the course of this study, is that for guest lists and vetting, you would have access to, or get for security purposes...to see if somebody has a history of being a physical threat to the precinct and what's going on.

The challenge we had with the individual we are speaking about and this incident, when things were recognized, was there wasn't further vetting. We had a witness earlier this week who said, "I wish we had done a simple Google search. Maybe this wouldn't have happened, to a certain extent."

My question to this point is about your capacity and ability to deal with that. I think we've narrowed it down, and PPS does not do an online search of individuals for an issue such as the one that happened here. It's more about a physical nature and the physical threat that members of the precinct have to deal with.

I'll ask you to speak about the capacity. You do not have the capacity, I believe, within existing resources to go and do that extra layer, but please talk about it again and confirm that, and whether you would be the ones best suited to handle that.

C/Supt Mitch Monette: First of all, it's not our mandate to do it. As you mentioned, our mandate is clearly physical security.

We receive the names of individuals who will be given access to the precinct. Other than that, to answer your specific question, we clearly don't have the capacity for a significant list. Again, we're not built for that.

As you mentioned, we have an intel unit that could definitely do those searches, but we would, respectfully, return them to the units responsible for that here.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Duguid, you have six minutes, through the chair.

Mr. Terry Duguid: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'd like to join my colleague in thanking you for your long service, both in the RCMP and in your new role—protecting us, protecting Parliament and protecting our democracy. Thank you for keeping us safe, and thank your staff on our behalf, as well.

We clearly highlighted that the vetting PPS does doesn't go beyond physical security threats. We talked about the evolution of the PPS. I'll refer to the word you used a number of times: collaboration.

Do you see PPS potentially playing a role in sharing information beyond the physical threat area?

• (1215)

C/Supt Mitch Monette: I can speak about the strong collaborations we currently have from an intel perspective. I'm putting aside the fact of whether or not we would be given a list to check individuals. It's just, generally, the threat environment. We have a unit. We work very closely with the Sergeant-at-Arms' intel unit, the RCMP, the Ottawa police and the Senate's security.

I want to say that it's getting better and better all the time. As things evolve, we're getting better and better at it, as well.

Mr. Terry Duguid: Madam Chair, to be clear, would you screen invitees to the Speaker's gallery for security threats, like all guests?

C/Supt Mitch Monette: That's correct.

Mr. Terry Duguid: Okay. The Speaker would not.... Well, I think you've answered the question.

C/Supt Mitch Monette: I can add that there could be an exception to the screening, which happens regularly. If the Sergeant-at-Arms provides us with a note to exempt someone from screening, that implies they're vouching. Those individuals can proceed without an actual physical screening through the “mag and bag”, as we call it.

Mr. Terry Duguid: I'm sorry. Can you amplify on “mag and bag”?

C/Supt Mitch Monette: That's our jargon for the magnetometer and checking bags. It's police talk.

Mr. Terry Duguid: Thank you. You've added to our vocabulary today, which is greatly appreciated.

Fundamentally, what this committee is trying to do is come up with recommendations so an unfortunate incident like this does not

happen again. The country was embarrassed. This incident was used by Putin in Russia for propaganda purposes. We know it has had a very negative and dramatic effect.

Would you have recommendations for this committee on how to prevent this kind of incident from happening again, from the vantage point of vetting? I realize that you do the security threat analysis, but you might have advice for other arms of the government you work with.

C/Supt Mitch Monette: I would say this is a protective principle at large: The more information we have about individuals the more it provides whoever is responsible...so they can do every part of it and have more time to do the checks that might be necessary. Clearly, we have to establish protocols for how we do it, and respect the protocols.

One thing we see sometimes in security is this: Things happen on paper. We agree on protocols. However, when the rubber hits the road, not all of those protocols are respected to the extent they were. A lot of thought is generally put into those protocols. Cutting those protocols clearly puts us at greater risk.

In this case, the establishment of protocols in terms of having the names early enough to provide the time to do it.... We don't bypass those protocols.

Mr. Terry Duguid: Thank you very much.

The Chair: You just said that the Sergeant-at-Arms can send a note to have somebody bypass security.

C/Supt Mitch Monette: Yes.

The Chair: That's—

C/Supt Mitch Monette: It's not to bypass security; it's to bypass the screening.

The Chair: On September 22, was such a note provided to PPS for anyone?

C/Supt Mitch Monette: There was, yes.

The Chair: There were notes.

Would there be a list of those individuals?

Mr. Matthew Ritchie (Associate Chief, Operations, Parliamentary Protective Service): Through you, Madam Chair, typically, if there are any exceptions to be given to various people, whether it be for a parliamentary appearance or whatnot, it comes from the Sergeant-at-Arms office advising our teams, through an established procedure, that, for example, person X does not need to go through the detection. They would potentially be coming in through a different entranceway, not necessarily through the visitor welcome centre. They would typically be met at the entrance by the person who is expecting them. We take the direction from the Sergeant-at-Arms office.

The Chair: Only...?

Mr. Matthew Ritchie: Exactly. If we've followed protocols, yes.

The Chair: Thank you.

[Translation]

Ms. Gaudreau, you have the floor for six minutes.

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I have to say I was all ears when my colleague started talking about security. I've been an MP since 2019, and I feel that the atmosphere is changing dramatically. I feel safe, but when you compare our security with that of MNAs in Quebec, for example, there's still a long way to go.

Having said that, I'm happy to see all the changes that have taken place so far. I'm also very aware that sometimes the legislative element—which is a partisan game here—is missing, and we have to accept that. I'm concerned about that, because the security challenges are piling up faster than we can address them. I'm very worried about this, and it's on many people's minds. Maybe we'll take action when there's an urgent need to do so.

My question is about the whole security process. Preparations had to be made for President Zelenskyy's visit. Can you tell us what was done to prepare for the French Prime Minister's arrival? What's the procedure for ensuring adequate security when we receive a high-profile guest?

• (1220)

C/Supt Mitch Monette: Are you talking about a visit like today's?

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Yes.

C/Supt Mitch Monette: Okay.

There are very clear protocols. Typically, the host group, either Global Affairs or, in the case of members of the royal family, Canadian Heritage, notifies us of an upcoming visit. As soon as we receive notice, we organize meetings with all the partners involved in managing the visit. That may include the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, the RCMP, or other police forces.

These briefing meetings enable us to begin preparing for the visit and obtain all the necessary information as soon as possible. The more information we have about the plan and the itinerary, the better we can organize the visit. This also allows us to plan each step and each layer of security.

Once all those elements are in place and we know where the visit will occur, whether it's Parliament, where the infrastructure is already in place, or elsewhere, all we have to do is determine the level of security based on the threat. If the location is elsewhere, we call on all the relevant partners to ensure it goes smoothly.

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: With regard to President Zelenskyy's visit, everything was done quickly and secretly. How do you handle that?

C/Supt Mitch Monette: For President Zelenskyy's visit, the security level was very high.

We have all the elements in place already. It's just a matter of putting them together and knowing how to deploy them quickly. The human resources aspect is complicated. For a major event, we don't have the local or specialized personnel needed to secure the location, so we have to get help from the RCMP, provincial police forces or other divisions.

Here in Ottawa, we're fortunate to have the RCMP C Division in Montreal, Quebec, and the O Division in Ontario. They're relatively close, and we often work with them when we're organizing major events. A lot of visits happen in the Montreal-Ottawa-Toronto triangle, so we can help each other organize those visits.

It's all coordinated centrally. On the day of a visit, we use the RCMP command centre, a large room a bit like this one where all the staff and all the specialized protective services are located, as well as support staff and cameras. There's a central command structure to ensure the visit goes smoothly.

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Let me back up a bit. It's my understanding that the Sergeant-at-Arms can ask that an individual be subject to the lengthy security check process.

Was Mr. Hunka the subject of such a request?

C/Supt Mitch Monette: You have to understand that what happens on the Hill stays on the Hill when it comes to these kinds of situations.

If there are security concerns, we can make an external request to find out if more thorough research is required. However, if no one raises a red flag and nothing comes up in terms of intelligence, we don't necessarily follow up.

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: We sometimes see people getting agitated in the galleries. There's no way to know if these people are, shall we say, reacting spontaneously, even if they have gone through the whole security process.

What checks do you do?

• (1225)

C/Supt Mitch Monette: Do you mean a physical search?

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Yes, but a somewhat more extensive check for visitors who come here to the House of Commons.

C/Supt Mitch Monette: I can let Mr. Ritchie elaborate on that, but I will say briefly that in this case, exemptions had been granted. We had neither a first nor a second level of verification in place.

We sometimes implement a second level of verification before letting people into the gallery. However, in this case, to the best of my knowledge, we had not done so. We only intervene afterwards if something happens. We take it for granted that these are people who have been invited.

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Does the fact that the atmosphere has changed in the galleries worry you? Should we try to find a balance?

As I'm out of time, I'll ask my question later.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Mathysen, you have the floor for six minutes.

[English]

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I, too, want to thank you both for being here today, and also for the service you provide to us.

In terms of that temperature rising, I was a staffer here during the shooting. There's been quite a change over those years. I'm always so grateful that you're there at those doors and in our hallways. Thank you so much.

I know this is a weird question, and probably the hardest one to ask. On any given day, on average, how many events are run on the Hill?

C/Supt Mitch Monette: I guess there are all kinds of different levels of events. I will ask Matthew to respond.

Mr. Matthew Ritchie: We have about 3,500 a year, and those range from one person with a sign to the President of the United States coming to visit. There are several events daily of varying levels that we need to manage while balancing accessibility and parliamentary business.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: Many conversations have taken place about how we can better look at the processes, who we allow in and whose responsibility that is. If it's an organization's responsibility to manage that, is it left to the parliamentarians, our security or PPS itself?

Could you give us your thoughts on that?

I know you had said that you are mainly involved in the physical threat but, again, in terms of that reputational threat, what would that do to the overall process if we were to implement a stricter system? I'm thinking of receptions and meetings, and people in MPs' offices, and those kinds of events.

C/Supt Mitch Monette: Do you want to handle this one, Matthew?

Mr. Matthew Ritchie: There's a lot we can do through partnerships with everyone on Parliament Hill. We need to ensure that we have the three pillars in place to ensure a secure precinct, which includes IT, infrastructure, and people.

Through our posture and the support we receive from institutions, we are able to ensure that everything goes relatively smoothly. The way we ensure that happens is through preparedness, practice, exercises and training.

To answer your question, the way we achieve that is through preparedness and having the ability to respond quickly and being nimble with our posture.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: In terms of an increase, are you at capacity now? If we were to increase that at all, what kind of impact would that have on your ability to do your job now?

Mr. Matthew Ritchie: I think that right now we are hovering around where we should be, from a numbers perspective. If we added more responsibility, we may need to look at more people to ensure that we're able to achieve our mandate.

Also, based on the ever-evolving threat, we do need to ensure that we're well positioned to support Parliament. Currently, we are where we need to be to meet our mandate, as it stands now.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: One of the issues that I think we'll have to tackle in terms of the recommendations we see is that balance of that physical threat and reputational threat.

There's also been the balance of the partisan and the non-partisan and the independence of certain offices versus the over-control of certain offices that are partisan. We certainly saw a little bit about that insistence that the Sergeant-at-Arms or the Speaker's office have that independence, yet there may have been some instances where there was a belief that the PMO should have more or shouldn't have more.

Can you talk about the importance of the independence between those offices?

If we're talking about who vets those lists more, how do we ensure that independence of your office in particular?

• (1230)

C/Supt Mitch Monette: Through you, Madam Chair, I can assure you that, from a PPS perspective, we do the job and we proceed without influence one way or the other. We are completely neutral in our approach to how we do security and to how we serve our clients. We are depoliticized. We don't look at it that way, as we should not. Those are the marching orders we receive and those are the marching orders I provide to our workers.

In terms of specifically how you perceive it, my answer is that I don't think we get the influence that some might think others might have on us.

I don't know if this answers your question.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: Yes.

One concern I've had is that throughout the exchanges after the incident occurred in the chamber, this committee received documents showing that political staff changed from maybe emails to phone calls when discussing the issue.

When you're liaising with those political staff and so on, even if it's the PMO or so on, how do you ensure your paper trail and that accountability?

Please give a quick response.

C/Supt Mitch Monette: We do it through record-keeping. It's all related to an event, so we open files. We maintain all the correspondence and exchanges we have with parliamentarians, with the Sergeant-at-Arms or with whomever we're dealing with when it's attached to a file.

Does that kind of answer your question?

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: I don't have any more time.

The Chair: You were very good with your time.

We will do our second round with Mr. Calkins, followed by Mrs. Atwin.

Mr. Calkins, you have five minutes, through the chair.

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Red Deer—Lacombe, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I want to thank both the witnesses here today.

I've been a member of this place for quite some time. I remember October 2014 very well. I want to say thank you once again to our PPS staff for the work they did that day. They weren't PPS at the time; they were the House of Commons security.

I recognize that this is your mandate. Your mandate is the physical protection of the precinct—the assets that are here and, of course, the human beings who come here either for work or for visitation. I commend you for the excellent and difficult task that it must be.

I do believe that the issue that's before this committee is one of reputational damage and how we mitigate reputational damage. I don't believe that's in your mandate at all.

Madam Chair, given that and given that these are very busy individuals who are looking after the care and control of the physical security of this place, I would like to move a motion, which I believe you'll find is in order, that will broaden the scope of the current study to fully ascertain how we can get to the reputational portion of this.

I'm certain that the motion is being circulated right now to the clerk. When you're ready, Madam Chair, I'll happily read the motion into the record.

The Chair: It's related to the study.

Just for process, if we're in public and there is a motion expanding the scope in relation to what we're doing, notice is not needed. I understand that the interpreters have a copy of it, and I understand that it should be hitting everyone's in-boxes. Has it been received?

Mr. Duguid, do you have it?

• (1235)

Mr. Terry Duguid: I'm just changing my password.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Chair: Do you have it, Ms. Atwin?

Mrs. Jenica Atwin: I do, but can we just briefly suspend just so we can take a look at it?

The Chair: Why don't we take a two-minute break?

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Can we present it first?

The Chair: We'll get it read into the record. As long as you have it, that's all they're concerned with.

Mr. Calkins, are you suggesting that our guests not stay?

Mr. Blaine Calkins: I can only speak for us. We're happy with the testimony that we've received from our witnesses. I'll leave it up to the discretion of others.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Ms. Gaudreau, do you have any further questions?

I see you don't have any.

[*English*]

Let's just see what happens. Let's read this into the record.

Go ahead, Mr. Calkins.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I move:

That, given that on September 19, 2023, the Prime Minister invited Yaroslav Hunka to attend his exclusive reception with the President of Ukraine in Toronto on September 22, 2023, and that the hurt and international embarrassment that resulted from the honouring of Yaroslav Hunka could have been avoided had the Prime Minister's Office done its due diligence to vet the list of guests that it sent to the Office of Protocol of Canada, and that neither the Prime Minister nor any member of his Cabinet has apologized for that invitation, the Committee expand the scope of its study on Parliamentary Protocol Related to an Incident in the Speaker's Gallery on Friday, September 22, 2023, to include the events leading up to the issuing of the aforementioned invitation, to explore the potential correlation between the invitations issues for both events; and

That, given that the former Speaker of the House of Commons is a central figure in the events leading up to recognition of Yaroslav Hunka during the President of Ukraine's Address to Parliament on September 22, 2023, and that the former Speaker has declined the Committee's invitation to appear as a witness, the Committee instruct the Chair to write a letter to Anthony Rota strongly urging that he appear, along with his current and/or former staff who were involved in arranging for Yaroslav Hunka to attend and be honoured at the Address, for two hours.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Calkins.

I have Mr. Berthold on the list followed by Mr. Duguid.

I'm going to take a two-minute break to bring us back up to speed and continue this.

• (1235) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1240)

The Chair: There are some more questions remaining for you fine people, but I do believe the majority of the members are okay with the information they have obtained, so perhaps what we can do is continue with the motion on the floor. I do have a speaking list and I would like to see us get this resolved before one o'clock.

Therefore, I am going to thank you both for being with us today. We wholeheartedly appreciate the service you provide. I think you guys know that I personally especially will never walk by a PPS officer without giving a compliment on the weather and commenting on what you have to bear. You do really important work, and I know all members do really appreciate you, and we look forward to having you back at another time when you can stay for longer. With that, have a great day. Keep up the good work. Thank you.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Can we go to my motion now?

The Chair: No, I'm going to Mr. Berthold. You gave me back the floor. I was going to him next.

We are now going to continue.

Can we just focus, everyone?

Mr. Blaine Calkins: It's the motion now.

The Chair: On a point of order, go ahead, Mr. Calkins.

• (1245)

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Madam Chair, out of due respect, I'll respect your ruling, which I simply do not understand. I would like to speak to the motion that I just moved.

I moved the motion. I put it on the floor. I gave colleagues an opportunity to see and hear the motion. I gave you an opportunity, respectfully, to see what the will of the committee might be to deal with other things, but I have not yet been granted an opportunity to speak to the motion that I've just moved.

It is a very standard thing that happens, when a member of Parliament moves a motion, that they then be granted an opportunity to speak to the motion. If you thought, in some way, shape or form that I had ceded the floor back to you for anything other than ruling whether my motion was at least in order so I could continue talking about it, then, in my opinion, you've misinterpreted my intentions. I would like to have the floor, Madam Chair.

The Chair: We'll add you to the list. Perhaps there was a misunderstanding. My understanding was that you wanted to read it into the record. Whatever you said was not necessarily exactly what was there, but it's all good. Then you gave me back the floor, and I told Mr. Berthold that we would be coming back to him. I will add you back onto the list, but I do have some people on the list—

Mr. Eric Duncan: I have a point of order.

The Chair: Perhaps I can finish.

Mr. Eric Duncan: Sure.

The Chair: I do believe there is agreement as to what this motion is and that we can resolve this motion really quickly and get

done what you're asking to have done. I will just say that I think it's important that we continue and have the discussion, which seems to be being well received by all members.

Mr. Duncan, go ahead.

Mr. Eric Duncan: Thank you, Madam Chair. On a point of order, if we just recall the events, there was an understanding and a good-natured move by Mr. Calkins to allow you to suspend following your request. Ms. Atwin had asked for a suspension to be able to read it, look at it and see it. That's why that was done in good faith, to allow that to happen. Mr. Calkins laid that out very well, so I do not think it's a big deal.

I think everyone is looking around here. When an individual introduces a motion and then in good faith agrees that there will be a suspension so people can collect their thoughts or look at it not just on their phones, then once people have seen it, the individual can speak to it. Everybody had that impression and that understanding. Therefore, Madam Chair, in good faith, we should try to conclude this and give people an opportunity for some commentary on it, and I think it would be only fair that Mr. Calkins have the floor to do that. It's in good faith. We should keep that.

The Chair: Mr. Calkins, go ahead.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Colleagues, thank you.

I apologize to any of my colleagues who had more questions for the Parliamentary Protective Service. I feel and I think a number of my colleagues here feel—at least those on the Conservative side—that we haven't fully gotten to the end of where the issue lies, insofar as coming up with appropriate recommendations and finding out what truly happened are concerned. There seem to be enough inconsistencies in the testimony on whether information was or wasn't shared between parties.... We've heard clearly and have seen through the documents and some of the testimony given that certain lists were vetted, that information was shared, it was said, that wasn't supposed to be shared between parties, and we haven't come to a clear understanding of how Mr. Hunka was invited and who ultimately should have done the reputational vetting portion.

I don't believe that we can do that, Madam Chair and colleagues, until we actually hear from the person central to the invitation, who is our former Speaker, colleague and, frankly, friend, Mr. Rota, and some of the staff he would have been engaged with who directly reported to him. We've heard from the House of Commons administration. We've heard from parliamentary protocol. We've heard from Government of Canada protocol. There are enough inconsistencies, I believe, in the information, such that we actually need to figure out not only how Mr. Hunka was recognized in the House of Commons, but how he also was further invited by the Prime Minister to a fundraiser, a special event, an exclusive reception, as laid out in the motion, in Toronto, as a guest of the Prime Minister of Canada.

The reputational damage, I don't think we need to belabour any more. Everybody here acknowledges that, and if we want to have a fulsome set of recommendations, I believe, which would perhaps change the protocols for how we ensure that no further reputational damage is done while at the same being able to recognize and honour Canadians in the gallery.... Some of the more amazing things I've ever been able to do in the 18 plus years that I've been here have been to stand and applaud not only great leaders from around our country and abroad, but great human beings, and not only Canadians but people from abroad.

I would hate to think that with insufficient information, without fully understanding how this particular incident came to pass, we would make a recommendation that would somehow jeopardize our ability to be an open and free democracy willing to celebrate great achievements and great achievers, without fully understanding how we can vet to make sure that something as unfortunate as the Hunka incident doesn't happen again.

I would encourage my colleagues to consider this. The motion is written with good intent. I believe that there is still more information this committee can receive to help fill in the missing pieces of the puzzle, to help close the gap on the inconsistencies in the testimony that we've heard, so that we can come up with the best recommendations possible, not only for the betterment of our country but the betterment of this institution and the betterment of our democracy.

With that, I'll give up the floor.

Thank you, Madam Chair, for letting me speak to my motion.

• (1250)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Berthold.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Berthold: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I'd like to express my support right away for the motion that was tabled by my colleague Mr. Calkins.

Without rereading it in its entirety, I'd like to come back to its main elements and explain why it's important.

Remember that this all stems from the study we're conducting on the event that took place here in the House of Commons. It appears that another event to which the same individual was invited took place during the same period.

The wording of the motion begins as follows:

That, given that on September 19, 2023, the Prime Minister invited Yaroslav Hunka to attend his exclusive reception with the President of Ukraine in Toronto on September 22, 2023...

In his motion, Mr. Calkins is obviously talking about the damage and international embarrassment resulting from the honour that was bestowed on Yaroslav Hunka here. It's an embarrassment that could have been avoided if the Prime Minister's Office had done its due diligence in checking the guest list it had sent to the Office of Protocol of Canada.

It even states in the motion that neither the Prime Minister nor any member of his cabinet has yet apologized for this invitation. Therefore, we ask to be given the opportunity to speak about it.

This week, we held a meeting. As you can see, Madam Chair, we made several attempts to ask questions about the Toronto event. The representatives of the government party were quick to raise a point of order and tell us that our questions were out of order and not specifically related to the motion under discussion. You responded to their opposition by asking Mr. Duncan, who was present at the time, to return to the subject at hand, namely Mr. Hunka's presence in the House.

The two events are so intertwined that, when I had the opportunity to question the protocol officer, he himself started talking about the Toronto event. From then on, I was able to continue asking my questions.

Then the point of order was raised again by our Liberal colleagues, asking you to call us to order. However, as you quite rightly pointed out, I was able to continue on the subject since it had been addressed by the witness himself. Unfortunately, I was coming to the very end of my turn to speak.

This leads me to tell you that I had several questions to ask regarding the link between the two events. Unfortunately, if we keep going the way we're going, we won't be able to ask these questions. We weren't able to ask them of the protocol officer, and we won't be able to ask questions related to the Toronto event because every time we do, a representative from the government side raises a point of order saying they're out of order.

However, we can't treat these two events, which took place within hours of each other, as if they were unrelated. We absolutely must be able to make connections. It's not true that the lists haven't been released or that we can't get answers.

What we wanted to know about Mr. Hunka's presence is: Why was he invited to this exclusive reception with the President of Ukraine in Toronto?

We know that a guest list was provided by the Ukrainian Canadian Congress. Again, is it normal not to check a list of 1,000 people? We could have asked. Unfortunately, we were prevented from pursuing the matter further.

Does Canada's Office of Protocol, which I'll talk about later, have some role to play in conducting background checks on people invited to events requested by the Prime Minister?

I don't know the answer, because I didn't get to ask the question. However, if the answer is yes, couldn't we borrow the process followed by the Office of Protocol and apply it to invitations issued by the House of Commons?

• (1255)

Are there any differences between the two protocol offices, which must act in concert when it comes to events taking place in Parliament and must otherwise act completely independently? After the meeting, which was unfortunately not public, I had the opportunity to speak with the Chief of Protocol. He explained to me that the Office of Protocol of Canada was called upon for all events, without exception, where diplomats or foreigners were expected, or for any event requiring, in one way or another, protocol activities. This is normal.

On the other hand, this does not apply to protocol activities organized by the House of Commons, which are automatically excluded because this is another area of jurisdiction. This is not a problem. Indeed, we don't want the government's protocol office to handle House of Commons protocol, because we don't want to see the government tinting or colouring the activities of the House of Commons, which is non-partisan by nature and allows every party to be present.

We can still wonder if the Office of Protocol of Canada could have helped us by using the event in Toronto, giving us examples of how it unfolded and letting us know exactly how we could have handled the situation.

Could the folks at Canada's Office of Protocol tell us how they receive these lists and manage the invitations? After the meeting, I also had the opportunity to ask a question that I wouldn't have been able to ask during the meeting, since, as I recall, it wasn't public. My question was about how people are received, who is responsible for making sure that the person coming to the event has their invitation, that it's really the person who's been invited, and so on. This is the responsibility of the Office of Protocol of Canada for all other events. Here, however, our way of operating is different.

There are a lot of very pertinent questions that could be asked, in my opinion, so that we can get to the bottom of this and come up with a report that includes not only answers, but above all, ways of proceeding so that an incident of this kind doesn't happen again.

As you know, I receive comments at least once a week about the fact that we honoured this person in the Speaker's gallery. I'm not going to quote the content of those comments. I think all the members here have received them. I'm still receiving them, even though it's been several months since the incident. We have no choice but to act responsibly.

We can't close our eyes, put on blinders and consider only what happened here, without taking into account the other event, which happened almost at the same time and involved two completely different protocol services. I absolutely want to know the difference between them. I want to be able to ask questions about this incident so that I can put these events into context.

The Office of Protocol of Canada organizes a very large number of events, many more than the Parliamentary Protocol Service. This is to be expected. Canada is a vast country, with events taking place all over the country and guests attending. For example, today we met people from the Parliamentary Protective Service who were preparing for the visit of the French Prime Minister. For its part, the Office of Protocol of Canada had to manage the rest of the visit

across the country, which is no mean feat. It's a useful experience, and one we need to address here.

For all these reasons, we need to be able to ask questions about the Toronto event, because it involves the same individual. Even though he declined the invitation, he was invited. I want to know how the process went in the case of that invitation, how far it went, why, who was involved, and so on. The question arises here too.

The second part of the motion refers to Mr. Rota, for whom I have a great deal of respect. He accepted responsibility for this unfortunate event. He subsequently resigned. It's quite rare for someone to resign following a mistake. Since 2015, it hasn't happened very often. It could also be for reasons we don't know. Indeed, we haven't had the opportunity to ask him about it.

• (1300)

Since the beginning of the study, everyone has been beating about the bush. We're trying to get answers from the Prime Minister's Office and the Office of Protocol. We want to know how the invitation was made and transmitted.

We received a letter from Mr. Rota, who assumed his responsibility in a very dignified manner, to say the least. That said, Mr. Rota has the answers to many of our questions.

As I said, I personally received reprimands in connection with this event, and still do. Mr. Rota could explain things to us. He could give us the last word on the situation or tell us something else. We need to ask him questions and give him the opportunity to defend his reputation. Maybe that's what Mr. Rota will do, but I don't know, because we haven't had a chance to ask him any questions. How did things unfold? How did Mr. Rota pass on the invitation? How did he find out about Mr. Hunka? When did he decide to pay tribute to him? Who wrote his speech? How was the speech written? Did he submit this information to the Prime Minister's Office?

It has to be said that this was an important visit, especially in the context of the conflict with Russia. One thing's for sure, though: the government stumbled. In fact, if it wasn't aware of every step and every second of Mr. Zelenskyy's visit, it blundered. If it was aware, then there's a lack of due diligence regarding the guest.

On several occasions, we tried to get answers from several witnesses. Unfortunately, it seems that until we hear, first-hand, the comments of the former Speaker of the House of Commons, that is, Mr. Rota, we won't be able to get answers to these questions.

Mr. Rota and his team—

• (1305)

The meeting is adjourned.

The Chair: Mr. Berthold, I'm sorry to interrupt.

[*English*]

It's 1:05. We've asked for extra resources. We know we're tapped out, so that provides me the ability, as chair, to adjourn the meeting. We will find a way forward.

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