



HOUSE OF COMMONS  
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES  
CANADA

44th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION

---

# Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development

EVIDENCE

**NUMBER 071**

Tuesday, June 13, 2023

---

Chair: Mr. Ali Ehsassi





# Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development

Tuesday, June 13, 2023

• (1105)

[English]

**The Chair (Mr. Ali Ehsassi (Willowdale, Lib.)):** Welcome to meeting number 71 of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format pursuant to the House order of June 23, 2022. Members are attending in person in the room as well as remotely using the Zoom application.

I'd like to make a few comments for the benefit of the members and the witnesses as well. Please wait until I recognize you by name before speaking. For those participating by video conference, click on the microphone icon to activate your mike, and please do mute your mike when you are not speaking.

Interpretation for those on Zoom is at the bottom of your screen. You have the choice of floor, English or French. For those in the room, you can use the earpiece and select the desired channel.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on Tuesday, February 7, 2023, the committee is commencing its study of the destabilizing impacts of the Wagner Group.

It is my great pleasure to welcome before us four witnesses from the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development. We have Ms. Heidi Hulan, the assistant deputy minister and political director of international security issues. We also have Mr. Marcel Lebleu, the director general of the West and Central Africa bureau. We have Ms. Rebecca Netley, the executive director of the accountability, human rights and United Nations law division; as well as Mr. Andrew Turner, director of the Eastern Europe and Eurasia division.

You will be provided with a maximum of eight minutes for your opening remarks, after which we will go to the members for questions.

Ms. Hulan, the floor is yours.

**Ms. Heidi Hulan (Assistant Deputy Minister and Political Director, International Security, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I really appreciate the invitation to brief the committee as part of your study on the destabilizing impacts of the Wagner Group.

The Wagner Group is variously described as a private military company, or PMC, a network of mercenaries or a de facto private army of Vladimir Putin. It is part of Yevgeny Prigozhin's vast and

overlapping network of businesses and private military activities, a network that has been active for decades and enjoys the implicit support of the Russian state.

As a private military entity, the Wagner Group first emerged in 2014 during Russia's annexation of Crimea. Since then, it has expanded into the Middle East and Africa fighting on the side of forces aligned with the Russian government. Beyond its combat role, there are persistent reports of Wagner meddling in and destabilizing countries, committing widespread human rights abuses and extorting natural resources.

Yevgeny Prigozhin, a Russian businessman, restaurateur and former convict, has long been known to control the Wagner Group but has historically sought to conceal this fact. Only after the invasion of Ukraine in 2022 did he publicly acknowledge his lead role within the organization. Although he does not hold any official government position, Prigozhin is understood to have a close personal relationship with Putin. He is described as a confidant, including in matters of state.

Recently, Prigozhin has robustly criticized defence minister Shoigu and his military chief for, quote, incompetence, and a lack of support for Wagner soldiers fighting in Bakhmut, Ukraine. This public criticism marks a shift, and there has been speculation that this indicates his relationship with President Putin is strained.

However, we're cautious about speculation of this nature, as President Putin is known to tolerate rivalries within his inner circle. We are also tracking the Russian ministry of defence statement this past weekend, which I'm sure members of the committee will have seen, regarding the requirement for volunteer formations in Ukraine to sign contracts with the Russian military. This appears to be an attempt to bring all so-called volunteer corps, including Wagner, under the Russian command and control structure. Prigozhin has publicly rejected this idea for Wagner.

Nothing about Wagner is straightforward. It is a private military company operating openly in St. Petersburg and Moscow despite the fact that private military companies are illegal in Russia. It is a corporate enterprise, yet it is deeply enmeshed in Russian defence affairs and advances the Russian state's strategic objectives around the world. It is not part of the Russian military, yet it has been reported to train on a military base with Russian special forces. It has a founder who has denied his relationship with the company until he didn't.

What role does this group play? Generally, Russia uses the Wagner Group to advance its strategic interests where official Russian government intervention is perceived to be too costly or the risk of battlefield losses too great. His proxy forces serve as force multipliers. They help to expand the influence and financial gain of the Russian government and oligarchs in fragile and conflict-affected states, while obfuscating Russia's role in those conflicts and circumventing attribution through disinformation, deception and propaganda.

● (1110)

[Translation]

Here are some examples of the group's activities.

The Wagner Group has been active in Syria since 2014 and supports Russia's efforts to prop up Bashar al-Assad's regime.

In 2018, the Wagner Group entered the Central African Republic, and since 2021, it has played a significant role in military operations against rebel groups there. It's now an integral part of the country's security and business environment, and even acts as an adviser to the president.

In 2021, the military junta in Mali hired the Wagner Group to support military operations against salafist extremists and jihadists. The group deployed between 1,000 and 1,500 people to Mali.

The United Kingdom and the United States have estimated that approximately 50,000 soldiers taking part in the conflict in Ukraine are members of the Wagner Group. It has played an increasingly visible role in that country as the war has evolved. The actions of the Wagner Group in Ukraine, notably in Bakhmut, were particularly bloody and controversial.

Everywhere it operates, the Wagner Group is accused of human rights violations. Reports indicate that its troops regularly targeted civilians and attacked them opportunistically, including by committing sexual violence and pillaging. Marginalized groups are disproportionately targeted, fuelling suffering and increasing the risk of violent extremism and instability.

[English]

I have described the Wagner Group as a private military company. It is important to telescope out a little bit and situate this group within the broader context of private military and security companies, which are common and are contracted by a wide variety of actors for an equally wide variety of purposes, many of these very legitimate.

States, including Canada, as well as such international organizations as the UN contract private military and security companies to provide vital support along a continuum of security-related activities. This includes logistics, perimeter security and close protection, to name a few. The UN, for example, uses such companies to provide security for UN staff, facilities and convoys in conflict zones.

The bottom line is that private security companies are not all created equal. The Wagner Group stands out due to its dubious legal status, its close affiliation with the Russian state, its record of supporting state-sponsored violence, its commission of human rights

abuses, its malign influence activities and the sheer number of countries in which it is present as a fighting force.

Canada and international partners have responded accordingly. The U.S., the U.K. and the European Council have all sanctioned the Wagner Group and Prigozhin personally. Canada has likewise sanctioned Wagner as well as Prigozhin personally in addition to 13 other individuals and nine entities with links to the company.

Mr. Chair, that brings me to the end of my statement. I welcome questions from the committee.

● (1115)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Ms. Hulan. That was perfect timing. We just hit that eight-minute mark.

We will now open it to questions from the members, beginning with Mr. Genuis.

Mr. Genuis, you have six minutes.

**Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC):** Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, officials, for being here and for your important work.

On January 30, Parliament unanimously adopted a motion calling on the government to designate the Wagner Group as a terrorist organization. Does the Government of Canada support that motion or did they abstain on that motion?

**Ms. Heidi Hulan:** I'm very sorry. It was a unanimous motion, you said?

**Mr. Garnett Genuis:** Well, it was unanimous insofar as nobody spoke against it. I'd like to know the government's position on that. Did they abstain or did they support it?

**Ms. Heidi Hulan:** On the substance of the question, that is, should this entity be listed as a transnational terrorist entity, I would just note that those questions of listings under the Criminal Code fall under the Minister of Public Safety's responsibility. If you have further questions on the substance of that, I'll be happy to pass those along.

**Mr. Garnett Genuis:** Substantively, my question was about what the Government of Canada's position is on whether the Wagner Group should be listed. Presumably, your department advised the government in the preparation of that motion. It shouldn't be that complicated a question. What was the government's position on that motion? Did they support it or did they abstain from it?

**Ms. Heidi Hulan:** Mr. Chair, the government is involved in an iterative and ongoing process related to the question of which entities to add to this list. It does not disclose the specifics of those iterative discussions publicly.

**Mr. Garnett Genuis:** I'm a little familiar with this process. The House passed a motion calling on the government to list the IRGC as a terrorist organization five years ago, and we had a similar response, that there's a process of ongoing consideration. At some point, after five years, it becomes obvious that the government has decided not to list and simply didn't want to admit as much.

There have been cases where the government has moved very quickly on the listing of terrorist organizations. I can think of, for instance, the Proud Boys, following a parliamentary motion. It was a month or two after that that the government proceeded with listing, so we know the process doesn't take that long.

What should we read into the delay in the government listing? The Wagner Group had been active, of course, long before January 30; but there was the January 30 motion in the House and there was the February 14 recommendation from this committee. What should we read into the government's delay in listing the Wagner Group as a terrorist organization?

**Ms. Heidi Hulan:** Mr. Chairman, it's not for me to advise Parliament on what to read into the government's actions, but generally speaking, determining whether to designate an entity as a terrorist organization is the result of a very rigorous and continual process based on evidence, intelligence and legal analysis. It must meet a specific legal threshold, as laid out in subsection 83.05(1) of the Criminal Code, where there are reasonable grounds to—

**Mr. Garnett Genuis:** I'm sorry, Madam, but I understand the process. What I'm trying to get an understanding of is simply what the government's position is on listing Wagner and why they've delayed. I know there is a process required, but I also know that process has unfolded very quickly in certain cases past, and there's been a ragging of the puck in other cases past.

I'm not asking you to comment on the merits one way or the other of listing; I'm just asking what the government's position is. From what you're saying, it sounds as if the government doesn't have a position on it. They haven't listed. You're not prepared to say whether or not the government supported the motion. Is it fair to conclude that the government simply does not have a position on listing the Wagner Group one way or the other?

• (1120)

**Ms. Heidi Hulan:** Thank you for the question, Mr. Chair.

The government does not comment publicly on ongoing investigations and consideration of whether to list an entity. For the government's position, the honourable member would need to ask a member of the government.

**Mr. Garnett Genuis:** Okay. I would love to have a minister testify as part of this study, but in the absence of a minister, I would think that our officials.... If there's a government position, you'd be able to tell us, and if there's not a government position, you're obviously in a difficult spot.

I would say, in terms of the government commenting publicly or not, the government chose to allow the passage of the unanimous consent motion on January 30. We had a report of this committee, which included members of the government caucus and parliamentary secretaries, who supported a recommendation to list the Wagner Group.

I have one final question in the time I have. Various other allies—I'm thinking of France, the U.K. and Lithuania—have designated the Wagner Group as a terrorist entity. Have you been in discussions with those countries about their experience with listing the Wagner Group and the effect it's had in terms of their engagement.

**Ms. Heidi Hulan:** Thank you very much.

In fact, the Americans have listed Wagner as a transnational criminal organization.

On this question, we are not in a position.... We do not have the same mechanism in this country to list Wagner.

**Mr. Garnett Genuis:** I'm sorry. My question wasn't about the U.S. It was about France, the U.K. and Lithuania, though. I didn't mention the U.S. in my question.

**The Chair:** We will now turn to Madam Bendayan.

You have six minutes.

**Ms. Rachel Bendayan (Outremont, Lib.):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

It seems there's some confusion on the part of my Conservative colleague. There was a unanimous consent motion in the House with the government members and certainly this government member in support of listing the Wagner Group as a terrorist organization.

To continue on the train of thought of my colleague—I believe you mentioned it, Ms. Hulan—the United States has listed the Wagner Group as a transnational criminal organization.

I was reading what some experts in the United States have been discussing about some of the issues they are facing with listing the Wagner Group as a terrorist entity. One expert noted that if they were to be listed as a terrorist group, that would mean many states, predominantly African states, that do engage with Wagner could be criminally liable.

Is that an issue you can help us unpack, Ms. Hulan?

**Ms. Heidi Hulan:** Terrorist activities fall outside of our normal treatment of government-sanctioned activities. Activities undertaken as part of a states military apparatus do not count as terrorist activities. If Wagner is operating in African countries and is designated as a terrorist entity, then in certain jurisdictions, I understand they could be held liable for Wagner's behaviour.

I would defer to my colleague from the legal branch on the finer points of that.

**Ms. Rebecca Netley (Executive Director, Accountability, Human Rights and United Nations Law Division, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development):** Thank you.

With respect to your specific question regarding whether African states could then be held responsible for Wagner's activities, if indeed they were listed as a terrorist entity, I do believe there would be challenges, because dealing with a terrorist entity engages criminal liability. In that case, yes, there would be the potential of criminal sanctions for those kinds of activities on the part of African states.

**Ms. Rachel Bendayan:** Thank you.

In your introduction you referenced the important role that Wagner Group had in Bakhmut. Their takeover of the town was significant in it being one of the only Russian so-called successes of their war effort.

I wonder if you can give us a sense if you expect the Wagner Group to continue operating in Ukraine as they have been or perhaps to refocus their operations elsewhere, such as in Africa.

I understand the Wagner Group is said to have left Bakhmut and been replaced by regular Russian forces. I'd like to hear you on what information you may have.

• (1125)

**Ms. Heidi Hulan:** I can't speak to the presence of Wagner and exactly who they may have been replaced by, although we are tracking all of those kinds of questions.

I would fully expect that Wagner would remain in Ukraine. They are a very important part of the Russian illegal operations in that country. This is despite the fact that Wagner has taken incredibly heavy losses. One estimate suggests that of the 50,000 troops it has deployed, it has lost 30,000. I can't verify those numbers, but they are really testament to the fact that Wagner is willing to be present in the most dangerous and active fighting zones of Ukraine. Of course, their motive is not ideological. It is profit-based. They are being paid for their activities in that country, which are substantial.

**Ms. Rachel Bendayan:** In connection with that comment, I would point to the fact that Mr. Prigozhin explicitly called out Russian military leadership on various occasions. In your view, does that show some fragmentation in the Russian war effort? Do you feel this might present a challenge to Putin's leadership in Russia?

**Ms. Heidi Hulan:** I'm sure everyone has seen the profanity-laced comments that have been made on video by Prigozhin in which he has very harsh criticism of the defence minister, the chief of the Russian defence staff, etc. I think you can conclude from those comments that there is not unity within the Russian presence in Ukraine.

There is, at minimum, rivalry between some elements of the Russian military and Prigozhin and his private forces present in the country. Whether this has any impact on President Putin's stability and hold on power, it is very difficult to say. As I mentioned in my opening remarks, Putin does have a history of tolerating rivalries within his inner circle, for reasons I think we can speculate on, but perhaps it's best not to.

**Ms. Rachel Bendayan:** Thank you.

I only have a few moments remaining. I wonder if you could provide us with some sense of how effective our sanctions have been in this regard. If you do not have time to provide a full an-

swer, perhaps you could table with the committee some suggestions that we might pursue in order to strengthen our sanctions against Wagner Group individuals.

**The Chair:** Respond very, very briefly, please.

**Ms. Heidi Hulan:** I think our sanctions have had both direct and indirect impact. I can particularly speak to the indirect impact, which is that they are bleeding resources from the Russian military, which Wagner depends upon utterly for equipment and cash.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We will now go to Madam Larouche.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Larouche, you have six minutes.

**Ms. Andréanne Larouche (Shefford, BQ):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to start with a brief comment. This morning, the committee held an informal meeting. I encourage the committee to rethink how such meetings are conducted, to ensure that interpretation into French is available. It can't happen any other way. We went through the same experience at the Standing Committee on the Status of Women, where interpretation is now provided during informal meetings. I hope, too, that we'll take into consideration the fact that receiving briefing notes in English only violates the rights of members. I urge the committee to reflect on that.

That said, I'll now move to the questions that I want to ask our witnesses from Global Affairs Canada.

Ladies and gentleman, we see that the emergence of the Wagner Group coincides with the annexation of Crimea by Russia in 2014, and that the group has become increasingly important throughout the world since then. It has positioned itself, particularly in Africa, as a paramilitary partner of choice for leaders of countries such as Syria, Libya, Mozambique, the Central African Republic and Mali. In those countries, the group's services are provided in exchange for privileged access to natural resources and commercial interests for companies owned by Russian oligarch Prigozhin. The alignment of the Wagner Group's activities and Russian foreign policy is a frequent occurrence, be it in the Middle East, sub-Saharan Africa or during the invasion of Ukraine.

I'd like to come back to the sanctions. When did you impose sanctions on the Wagner Group, and if recently, why not back in 2014?

• (1130)

[*English*]

**Ms. Heidi Hulan:** I don't have the date right in front of me, but I'll turn to Andrew Turner to answer that question.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Andrew Turner (Director, Eastern Europe and Eurasia Division, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development):** We imposed sanctions on Prigozhin and the Wagner Group on February 24, 2022, as a direct response to the invasion of Ukraine.

**Ms. Andréanne Larouche:** Okay. In your opinion, why wasn't that done in 2014? Why wasn't it done right from the start, knowing what that group was doing?

**Mr. Andrew Turner:** In 2014, the group was far less important and had a far lower profile than it does now. The invasion was an opportunity to demonstrate our determination to bring the strongest possible economic pressure to bear in response to the invasion of Ukraine in 2022. That's why it was done at that time.

**Ms. Andréanne Larouche:** We're wondering where the Wagner Group gets its funding. A documentary entitled *Wagner, Putin's Shadow Army*, by Ksenia Bolchakova and Alexandra Jousset, reveals how the Wagner Group started operating a mine in the Central African Republic, taking over from a Canadian mining company.

What's your response to that kind of manoeuvre? What's your response when someone uses Canadian mining companies?

[English]

**Ms. Heidi Hulan:** Wagner has many sources of financing. They are understood to be financed from within Prigozhin's own network of companies and his vast corporate empire generally. They receive direct payments, and they're also known to receive payments in kind through natural resources concessions.

I'd like to turn to Marcel Lebleu to answer more specifically about their African engagement.

[Translation]

**Mr. Marcel Lebleu (Director General, West and Central African Bureau, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development):** The Wagner Group does indeed have a presence in the Central African Republic, as well as in Mali. I'd say that the group's business model—if I can call it that—changes, depending on the country.

What Ms. Larouche said about the Central African Republic is true. In 2019, the Central African government confiscated a mining concession from AXMIN, a publicly traded Canadian mining company, and handed it over to the Wagner Group. AXMIN went to mediation and, in February 2023, announced that it intended to go to international arbitration for losses and damages in the dispute between that private company and the government. The model in the Central African Republic is clear: the Wagner Group is reportedly operating the mine.

In Mali, there's a traditional service contract, according to our information and open sources. Under the contract, the government is reportedly paying approximately \$10 million per month to the Wagner Group in exchange for the services of approximately 1,000 mercenaries, who are in the country and working alongside the Malian armed forces.

**Ms. Andréanne Larouche:** What discussions have you had with the Central African Republic and Mali about the presence of the Wagner Group? You're talking about arbitration involving companies, but I'd like to know what direct discussions you've had with those two countries.

**Mr. Marcel Lebleu:** In Mali, the government is the result of a military coup that took place in 2020. When the coup d'état occurred, we expressed our concerns publicly. When we received the initial confirmation that the Wagner Group was in Mali, we pub-

lished a statement with 15 allied countries expressing our very serious concerns with respect to that presence.

There are files documenting human rights abuses, if not crimes. The United Nations issued a report about a month ago detailing the massacre of 500 Malian citizens in Moura, carried out in conjunction with the Malian army. I would also highlight the use of sexual violence, resulting in 58 documented cases of rape. In a joint statement with the United States and the United Kingdom, we expressed our concerns and asked the Malian government to confirm those facts and contribute to an investigation.

● (1135)

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

For the final six-minute round, we'll go to Ms. McPherson.

**Ms. Heather McPherson (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP):** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you very much to the witnesses for being here and sharing their expertise with us.

Mr. Lebleu, that was very interesting testimony you provided with regard to Canadian companies using the Wagner Group. Can you give us a sense of how many Canadian companies are implicated in and perhaps working with the Wagner Group? Are they all within the extractive industries? Would there be, then, a role for the Canadian government, perhaps through the CORE or through the national contact point, to deal with these infractions, as I would call them?

[Translation]

**Mr. Marcel Lebleu:** Of course. To my knowledge, we've documented a single case, that of AXMIN, which is not co-operating with the Wagner Group and whose mining licence was confiscated by the Central African government.

In Mali, we aren't aware of any instances of collaboration with the Canadian private sector. Indeed, Canada has significant investments in the gold sector, with major mining companies operating in the country. We work closely with Canadian companies, not only through the Office of the Canadian Ombudsperson for Responsible Enterprise, but also in the context of the Voluntary Principles on Security and Human Rights initiative, which we promote to our companies. Canada is also a member of the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative.

The most important thing to us, particularly in terms of the trade commissioner service, is the integrity declaration that we ask companies to sign to obtain services from the Canadian government. The declaration is a commitment from the company with regard to its behaviour and conduct, and it must explicitly state that it isn't involved in any corruption, wrongdoing or any outstanding legal proceedings involving other countries.

[English]

**Ms. Heather McPherson:** Thank you for that.

Obviously, that doesn't always work. We've seen that Canadian companies have committed pretty horrific atrocities around the world and have not been held to account in any meaningful way.

You spoke about Mali. I assume what you're saying, though, is there are no examples, except from within which you've mentioned, where Canadian extractive mining companies are involved.

The other things we've been talking a lot about are Mali and the CAR, but the Wagner Group has been quite heavily implicated in what's happening in Sudan and certainly in South America. We have heard there is an African strategy that may or may not be an African framework that may or may not be coming.

Ms. Hulan, can you talk to us about where the Wagner Group stands with that? How is that going to be incorporated into that strategy or framework?

**Ms. Heidi Hulan:** Regarding the idea of an African strategy and where this fits in, I'll defer to Marcel.

Regarding the general issue of how its presence around the world feeds multiple objectives, it is very clear that Wagner is heavily, heavily invested in Africa. It is also present in Latin America, particularly in Venezuela, we understand, but the African presence is really notable.

As I said in my opening remarks, but I'll expand on it here, it serves as a force multiplier for Russian diplomacy, which is very active on the African continent, in an attempt to split the African continent from countries like Canada on issues like Ukraine.

Regarding the question of the Africa strategy, I'll go to Marcel.

• (1140)

**Ms. Heather McPherson:** I'm going to jump in really quickly before I go to the African framework or strategy.

You talked a bit about the absence and how they're using that as a diplomatic tool. Of course, it's vital that Canada is present on the ground as well, and I'm not sure that we are as much as we should be.

You also talked in your testimony about the idea that this group is not ideological, that it's profit-driven. Is it not also ideologically driven, though, especially if you're talking about it having a role with regard to diplomacy and having a role spreading Russian ideology around the world?

**Ms. Heidi Hulan:** I believe...no. I believe that it is non-ideological as an effort.

What we know is there's a close relationship with the President of the Russian Federation and the head of Wagner, but the driver is a profit motive. In the sense that their profit also serves to amplify Russian diplomacy, they're involved, but we see this as a corporate enterprise.

**Ms. Heather McPherson:** Thank you.

Also, I'll hear you on the Africa strategy, please.

[Translation]

**Mr. Marcel Lebleu:** To respond specifically to that question, I would say that the government launched consultations on the

Canada-Africa economic cooperation strategy approximately 10 days ago. The strategy was among the objectives set by the Prime Minister in the mandate letter for Minister Ng, which her department is implementing. As I just mentioned, we launched consultations about 10 days ago, and they will continue throughout the summer.

[English]

**Ms. Heather McPherson:** It is through the trade arm of foreign affairs, not through development and not incorporating aspects of development, diplomacy and trade. Is it predominantly being done through trade?

[Translation]

**Mr. Marcel Lebleu:** No.

[English]

**Ms. Heather McPherson:** Minister Ng is leading it.

**Mr. Marcel Lebleu:** Yes, but we have three ministers and, obviously, some other components are... We incorporated the development pillar and the political pillar. The development pillar, for example, is going to be—

**The Chair:** I'll give you another 10 seconds at best.

You will have the opportunity to answer more questions as we move forward.

Next we go to Mr. Epp.

You have four minutes.

**Mr. Dave Epp (Chatham-Kent—Leamington, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to the officials.

I'm going to pick up on a question because of the response to a question by my colleague Ms. McPherson. Can you confirm that, if—and when, hopefully—Wagner is designated as a terrorist group, any co-operation or relationship with Canadian companies will be automatically shut down?

**Ms. Heidi Hulan:** Our existing sanctions impose a prohibition on dealings with Wagner already. It is already impermissible for a Canadian company, either here inside the territory of Canada or internationally, to deal with Wagner under our existing sanctions.

**Mr. Dave Epp:** Is the Wagner group listed as a legal entity within Russia and the Russian legal framework, or is it just a smattering...scattering—that's probably the wrong terminology—of companies controlled by Prigozhin?

**Ms. Heidi Hulan:** I'll turn to my colleague from the legal department on that, but I'll say Wagner is Prigozhin's military entity. It's his military company. He has numerous other companies named different things for different purposes. Wagner refers specifically to this military operation.

**Mr. Dave Epp:** A private army is illegal under Russian law, is it not?



**Ms. Heidi Hulan:** It is, and I am not aware of any incorporation as a private military company in Russia, because it is illegal to have a private military corporation in Russia.

**Mr. Dave Epp:** Okay.

A number of us this morning were on a call with Latvia, and the representatives there, the ambassadors, identified that they too have listed the Wagner Group as a terrorist entity. That can be added to France, the U.K. and Lithuania.

How are those countries different from Canada in their ability to relatively swiftly list Wagner as a terrorist entity?

**Ms. Heidi Hulan:** Mr. Chair, this is an issue that I would like us to come back to the committee on in writing.

I am not aware of formal designations as terrorist entities. I am aware that the French Parliament has passed a non-binding resolution calling on the European Union to formally label Wagner as a terror group, but the EU has not taken that step.

Mr. Chair, I will be very candid and say that I would like to go and look at the specifics and respond to the specific question in writing.

• (1145)

**The Chair:** Thank you for that explanation, Ms. Hulan.

I would just like to add that, yes, during the course of our meeting today, we were informed by our Latvian friends that they are recommending to the EU that it be listed, and that, to your point, it was not a binding parliamentary resolution.

Mr. Epp.

**Mr. Dave Epp:** The legal frameworks for designating Wagner as a terror group do exist here in Canada. Are there any errors, omissions or holes in that framework that you would find more useful in more speedily responding to, quite frankly, the pressure to have it listed?

This afternoon we'll be debating Bill S-8 at third reading. This committee studied some updated legislation that links admissibility and the sanctions regime. Is there something missing in our terrorist designation legal frameworks that would allow for speedier responses?

**Ms. Heidi Hulan:** Mr. Chair, I believe the Government of Canada has all of the legal tools it requires to list individuals and entities under the terror designation.

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

For the next slot, we go to MP Zuberi.

You have four minutes.

**Mr. Sameer Zuberi (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for being here today.

We've been speaking about terror entities and listings and how groups get onto a terror list. You said that in Canada we have the Criminal Code. I believe, if I noted it correctly, that subsection 83.05(1) is the mechanism, the piece of legislation we use to list

terror organizations. That is housed under public safety. Is that correct?

**Ms. Heidi Hulan:** That is correct. That is the—

**Mr. Sameer Zuberi:** In the European Union, for a member state to have a group listed as a terror organization, it's done at the instance of the European Union. Is that correct?

**Ms. Heidi Hulan:** That is my understanding.

I'd like our legal colleagues to add to that.

**Ms. Rebecca Netley:** I'm sorry. At this point, I'm not able to add to that, but that can form part of the response that we provide to the questions that were requested earlier.

**Mr. Sameer Zuberi:** That's helpful.

From my understanding, for a state like Latvia or another member state of the EU to actually have an organization listed as a terror organization, it's done at the instance of the European Union, at which point the member states then implement the application of a group and the ramifications of its being a terror entity within their jurisdictions.

**Ms. Heidi Hulan:** Mr. Chair, that is my understanding. All sanctions within states in the European Union are done through the European Union and are then implemented by the members of the European Union.

**Mr. Sameer Zuberi:** We spoke a bit about America, what it has done and how it has listed Wagner as a transnational criminal organization. It is, in my understanding, similar to what America does for Mexican cartels. It's an in-between space between what we have in the Criminal Code subsection 83.05(1) and sanctions, let's say.

My colleague, Mr. Epp, asked if there are other devices you can suggest that might not be on the books right now. While our legislation is robust, does meet the moment and takes care of organizations if they should be taken care of, do you have any suggestions around what we can do in addition to what we have right now?

**Ms. Heidi Hulan:** Mr. Chair, I won't comment for the government on what additional measures it may wish to pursue in this domain. From the perspective of the civil service, we have all the tools at our disposal that are required in order to list individuals and entities when needed.

I would add that the Americans have a tool in their tool box that we don't have in our tool box, namely, presidential orders. In Canada, we pursue such listings through existing legislation and listings under existing legislation. Presidential orders are not a tool available in Canada.

• (1150)

**Mr. Sameer Zuberi:** In the 30 seconds that are left, can you outline a bit more what's happening in Syria, Libya, Mozambique, the Central African Republic and Mali with Wagner and what they are doing with human rights abuses?

**The Chair:** Answer very briefly, please. You have less than 15 seconds.

**Mr. Marcel Lebleu:** Canada is committed to these countries. We have long-standing relations with these countries, especially Mali, where we have been involved for 60 years.

To be honest, we have reviewed some of our development programs. For example, when there was a coup, we suspended all direct budget support. We're adapting to this new reality, but we will keep supporting the people most in need of humanitarian assistance. Humanitarian assistance will continue.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Lebleu. We have to go to the next member.

[Translation]

Ms. Larouche, you have two minutes.

**Ms. Andr anne Larouche:** Thank you, Mr. Chair

Mr. Lebleu, I want to talk a little more about Canada's policy on Africa. Canada stated on several occasions that it wanted to expand its presence on the continent of Africa—as it did with the Indo-Pacific region—but we know that the government is behind on that file. Canada's actions in Africa are unclear, and as you've clearly told the committee since the meeting started, there has been a parallel increase in influence by China and Russia on the continent. By examining the growing geographic reach of the Wagner Group in Africa, particularly in Libya, the Central African Republic, Mali and Sudan, we see that the group's objectives often intersect with the foreign policy objectives of the Russian state, which is gaining influence throughout the region with the help of that group.

Why are we waiting to take a more serious interest in Africa and in the influence of countries like Russia on the economic development and stability in countries on that continent? Has Canada assessed its international aid programs in countries where the Wagner Group has a presence, such as Mali, so as to take that reality into consideration? We fear that our aid in those countries will fall into the hands of the Wagner Group. Have you made changes, and if not, why not?

**Mr. Marcel Lebleu:** Not matter whether it's in countries in Africa or on any other continent, it's standard practice for the government to suspend direct aid as soon as the first coup d' tat occurs. No monies are paid directly to the government.

I can assure you that, for 100% of our current development programs, the funds are distributed through Canadian civil society or recognized international humanitarian aid partners, namely the World Food Programme and UNICEF. No monies are paid directly to the Malian government.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Lebleu.

We go to Madam McPherson.

You have two minutes.

**Ms. Heather McPherson:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

This has been very interesting. Thank you for all of the information you're sharing with us.

Very quickly on the sanctions and the Wagner Group, do you have any concerns that there are any Canadian assets associated with the Wagner Group in Canada still that have not been sanctioned?

**Ms. Heidi Hulan:** I am not aware of any Canadian assets or Canadians with assets tied up in Wagner.

I would ask if my colleague, Andrew, would like to add to that answer.

**Mr. Andrew Turner:** I'm not aware either, but I would note that we are working with all of the various investigative agencies and the RCMP to thoroughly look into any possibilities. As noted, because of the sanctions we have imposed, any such assets or financial dealings with Wagner or Wagner-related entities would be subject to criminal sanction.

**Ms. Heather McPherson:** Of course, the challenge we have is I'm not confident that our sanctions are being enforced as well as they could be. Obviously, we have limited resources compared to what other countries have associated with their sanctions.

I do want to go back, Ms. Hulan, to some of the things you were saying about them not being ideological. Obviously, the profit motive, from your perspective, is their key motivator, but the Wagner Group does have extremist right-wing views from my understanding and that does colour their work to some degree.

Could you tell us a little bit about the framework in which those right-wing views are being shown and expressed and how it could in fact influence some of their decision-making as a military?

• (1155)

**The Chair:** Answer very briefly, please. You have 15 seconds.

**Ms. Heidi Hulan:** Very briefly, yes.

Wagner is known to have a number of actors within it who have links to extremists and far right ideologies. There's no question about the personal inclinations of some of the members, including its military commander, Utkin, who's a former Russian military officer. He is now retired and runs the military operations of Wagner. In fact, his *nom de guerre* was "Wagner", because Wagner was Hitler's favourite composer.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Hulan.

We're going to have to move on. My apologies for that.

We'll now go to Mr. Genuis.

Mr. Genuis, you have three minutes.

**Mr. Garnett Genuis:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to clarify my earlier questions.

The legal frameworks among different countries are not identical when it comes to terrorist designations or anti-terrorism laws. I'm aware of the U.S. situation. A number of countries in Europe have, in effect, designated Wagner as a terrorist organization through parliamentary measures, but that does not have the same legal effect as the designation does in Canada. The U.K. is being widely reported as developing a legal case and being on the verge of making a terrorist designation, which, in the U.K., from what I understand, would be relatively similar in its legal effects to the Canadian experience.

My question, though, was mainly about our engagement with those other players and whether we're having conversations with our allies about the fact that they view Wagner as a terrorist organization, and how our approach should line up with theirs.

Could you update the committee on any discussions happening with the U.K., the U.S. or other allies on how we might take a coordinated approach to recognizing, as terrorist or otherwise, the nature of the violence the Wagner Group is responsible for?

**Ms. Heidi Hulan:** I'm in regular contact with the U.K. and the U.S. on a wide variety of issues, particularly pertaining to the conduct of the conflict in Ukraine. We are overwhelmingly preoccupied with responding to the effects of—

**Mr. Garnett Genuis:** I'm sorry. I'm very tight for time. I have three minutes. It's on Wagner specifically.

**Ms. Heidi Hulan:** We have discussed Wagner. I can tell the committee that none of those colleagues have raised with me any intention to list Wagner as a terrorist entity.

**Mr. Garnett Genuis:** Does that include the U.K.?

**Ms. Heidi Hulan:** That includes the U.K.

**Mr. Garnett Genuis:** Okay. That's striking, because it's been widely reported that they are on the verge of that. That's interesting information. Thank you.

I'm also a bit perplexed about your saying, on the one hand, that we have all the tools we need in order to respond, but that, on the other hand, we haven't used the existing tool we have yet, or that the U.S. has a tool we don't have. Is the issue with responding to Wagner that the tool you think would be optimal doesn't exist? If the tool does exist, we should use it. If the tool doesn't exist, you should tell us that. As parliamentarians, we can propose the new tool.

Do we have the tools we need or do we not? If we have the tools we need, why is there a delay?

**Ms. Heidi Hulan:** Mr. Chair, I believe I've answered this question already.

The government has the tools it needs to make terrorist designations. Those terrorist designations result from internal and iterative deliberations.

I'll finish, Mr. Chair, in a second.

The government does not comment publicly on the nature of those ongoing discussions.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

For the final question, we'll go to Mr. Oliphant.

You have three minutes.

**Hon. Robert Oliphant (Don Valley West, Lib.):** Thank you.

I want to thank you for your work on this and also give you time to finish your thoughts on those questions.

I think what our committee is wrestling with is the effectiveness of sanctions, the importance of sanctions, the difference between

sanctions and listings, and the different processes. One is a set of laws we have under sanctions, and another is a Criminal Code listing, designation as a terrorist organization.

I think we all agree at this point that Wagner is an organization whose means and goals are malicious. Canada is looking for ways to stop that.

I want to give you a chance, also, to talk about the difference between our regime and that of other countries, which are long-established. I want you to take the time to help us. I'm not trying to score points here. I'm trying to get answers.

• (1200)

**Ms. Heidi Hulan:** Thank you for the question, Mr. Chair.

I know you're at the beginning of your deliberations on this issue. We will be happy, either in writing or in person, to continue to support the committee in its deliberations. This is a very important file.

With respect to terrorist designations and sanctions, we care about this in two particular respects. One is effect. What kind of effect can you have with sanctions and various designations? From an effect perspective, I would say our existing sanctions provide substantially the same effect as listings as a terrorist entity. It's in effect a dealings ban, which is a very important effect.

Second, from the perspective of accountability and justice, particularly for Ukraine in this context, there is a question about whether they're better served by a designation or by treating Wagner as part of the Russian state apparatus under international law. Here, I would just say that while we can list, one thing to consider is that a listing as a terrorist entity may make it more difficult to associate the actions and activities of Wagner on the ground in Ukraine with the Russian state. If we have difficulty associating the actions of Wagner with the Russian state, it will be more difficult to hold President Putin accountable for those atrocities.

That sounds like a leading statement. It does not indicate the state of any discussions within the Government of Canada, except it is a real consideration for the committee to make note of as you consider your own findings in this area.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Ms. Hulan.

That concludes our first hour dedicated to a study of the Wagner Group.

We're very grateful to Ms. Netley, Mr. Lebleu, Ms. Hulan and Mr. Turner. We're grateful for your time and for your expertise. You have certainly provided us ample context to revisit this study in the coming months. We are very grateful, indeed.

We will now suspend for a few minutes to allow the witnesses to leave and our next witness to appear.

• (1200) \_\_\_\_\_ (Pause) \_\_\_\_\_

• (1210)

**The Chair:** Welcome back, everyone.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on Monday, January 31, 2022, our committee resumes its study of the situation at the Russia-Ukraine border and implications for peace and security.

For that purpose, we are very honoured to have with us a special witness today. From the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania, we are honoured to have with us the vice-minister, Mr. Meilūnas.

As members are fully aware, we have a very special relationship with Lithuania. Lithuania will also be hosting the next NATO summit, but it is a country with which we have had excellent relations, starting from the Soviet occupation of Lithuania. We were one of the few countries that never actually accepted the annexation of Lithuania and, over the past year, we have had ample opportunities to work very closely with each other.

Mr. Meilūnas, we're very grateful that you made the time to appear before the committee. For your opening remarks, you will be provided seven minutes, after which we will open this to questions from the members.

One last thing that I did want to tell you, Mr. Meilūnas, is that you have an extraordinary ambassador here in Ottawa, who is well known to most of the members here, so you will be happy to know that we are quite conversant on many of the issues that both of our countries are grappling with.

That having been said, again, thank you for being with us. You have seven minutes for your opening remarks.

**Mr. Egidijus Meilūnas (Vice-Minister, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania):** Mr. Chairman, members of the committee, dear colleagues, first of all, thank you for your invitation. It's really a great honour for me to be with you today.

Mr. Chairman, thank you for your very kind introduction and remarks regarding our bilateral co-operation.

We Lithuanians value Canada as a great friend of Lithuania. Thank you for your invaluable support for our independence and security. We also value you as a like-minded country with which we have really excellent co-operation in many fields.

We are proud of the Lithuanian community in Canada, which greatly contributes to our co-operation and strengthens our friendship. We highly value your great contribution to the Baltic states, including Lithuania's security. Actually, security and defence are areas we would like to even expand and deepen co-operation with Canada.

Let me also express our appreciation for your strong support and development contribution for Ukraine. Your Prime Minister's visit last Saturday to Kyiv was a great symbol of Canada's unwavering support to Ukraine.

Ladies and gentlemen, in four weeks, we will host the NATO summit in Vilnius. I would like to share some thoughts and views with you on what all allies have to achieve and what should be discussed at the summit.

First of all, the alliance must substantially strengthen deterrence and forward defence in the eastern flank. Last year, in Madrid, the allies very clearly stated, "Russia is the most significant and direct threat to Allies' security and to peace and stability in the Euro-Atlantic area."

The security reality after February 24 last year demanded a fundamental rethinking of NATO's deterrence and defence posture from tripwire strategy to denial for any adversary any opportunity of attack. In order to substantially strengthen NATO's deterrence and forward defences, the allies in Madrid committed to "deploying additional robust in-place combat-ready forces on NATO's eastern flank, to be scaled up from the existing battalion-sized battle groups to brigades, where and when required...."

We are very grateful to all allies, in particular our enhanced forward presence framework and contributing nations, including Canada, who demonstrated a commitment to collective defence by sending additional capabilities to our region. However, the alliance has to do more in order to be ready for any scenario, including a no-notice scenario.

In the foreseeable future, Russia will remain the most significant and direct threat to NATO, to our alliance. Russia is not giving up its aggressive stance towards neighbours and the west. For example, in January, Russia announced that over the next three years, it plans to increase the manpower of its army by 40%, up to 1.5 million, create a new army corps and upgrade seven brigades into motorized infantry divisions.

The Russia-Belarus political and military integration is a *fait accompli*. Belarus is permanently stationing Russian troops and is complicit in its aggression against Ukraine. A recently signed agreement between Russia and Belarus on the deployment of nuclear arms in the territory of Belarus also calls for strengthening of our posture in all domains.

These facts increase further the strategic importance of the so-called Suwałki gap that connects the Baltic states with the rest of NATO and clearly demonstrates the need for functioning forward defences.

Enhanced air and missile defence postures, pre-positioning of stocks, ammunition and equipment and a persistent presence of additional robust in-place combat-ready brigade-size forces would signal a firm readiness to defend every inch of allied territory at all times.

In this regard, I would like to take this opportunity to briefly inform you about our national commitments.

• (1215)

We remain steadfast in continuing with high defence spending, 2.52% of GDP, with increased investments into military infrastructure, armed forces modernization and scaling up the level of national military forces to the level of division.

Second, in Vilnius we have to find a way to anchor Ukraine to the Euro-Atlantic security order. Article 10 of the Washington treaty refers to one main criteria for NATO membership, which is the ability of the state to contribute to the security of the Euro-Atlantic area. Ukraine has already proved that it is capable of fighting against Russia, which is the most significant and direct threat to the Euro-Atlantic community.

Independent, democratic and strong Ukraine, as a full-fledged member of NATO, is vital to our security and stability. Therefore, in Vilnius we have to confirm that Ukraine will become a member of NATO and set a clear pathway for Ukraine's membership in NATO. We also have to expand and deepen existing NATO-Ukraine co-operation and confirm that we will continue to support Ukraine as long and as much as needed.

Very briefly, there are two other important topics on Vilnius. If we want to achieve our strategic goals, we have to agree on adequate defence funding and discuss the defence investment pledge renewal and setting 2% of GDP as a minimum.

Second, there is the NATO AP4 Indo-Pacific co-operation. As Jens Stoltenberg, NATO's Secretary General, stated in Japan in January of this year, "transatlantic and Indo-Pacific security is deeply interconnected". I would even say it's indivisible. At the Vilnius summit, we must strengthen the partnership with our Indo-Pacific partners to increase our resilience and security supply chains and to counter hybrid and cyber threats from the increasingly malign authoritarian countries.

I'll end very briefly on accountability. One of the reasons Russia is behaving so brutally in Ukraine—killing innocent people, including children, and destroying and demolishing cities and villages—and is being so increasingly aggressive towards us is that Russia has never been brought to justice and punished for its terrible crimes against other nations. Their feeling of immunity lets them think they are free to do what they want. We have to change this and bring Russia to justice for its war crimes in Ukraine. In this regard, the ICC will play a crucial role, but we also have to establish a special tribunal for Russia's crimes of aggression.

In this regard, listening to your discussions on the Wagner Group, I would like to inform you about a document that was approved by our Lithuanian Parliament on March 14 of this year, "Resolution on Designating the Private Military Company Wagner as a Terrorist Organisation". I would like to quote two sentences from this document.

First, the Lithuanian Parliament "notes that the Russian Federation's private military company Wagner is a terrorist organisation and that its members and mercenaries pose a threat to state and public security". Second, the Lithuanian Parliament "calls on other states to recognise the Russian Federation's private military company Wagner as a terrorist organisation".

Thank you very much for your kind attention.

• (1220)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Vice-Minister Meilūnas.

We will now open it to questions.

Yes, Mr. Hoback.

**Mr. Randy Hoback (Prince Albert, CPC):** On a point of order, I'm wondering if we could have what he just put on the list brought into that other study, or what we talked about in the first part, the Wagner study.

**The Chair:** Yes. We could do that, but we haven't really gotten started. There's nothing to—

**Mr. Randy Hoback:** We could do that?

**An hon. member:** Agreed.

**Mr. Randy Hoback:** We agree?

**The Chair:** Yes.

**Mr. Randy Hoback:** Okay. I think that would be helpful.

**The Chair:** Absolutely.

**Mr. Randy Hoback:** Thank you, Chair.

**The Chair:** Mr. Hoback, you have four minutes for questions.

**Mr. Randy Hoback:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Vice-Minister, it's great to have you here. I really appreciate your taking the time and effort to show up in person and give us your insight into how the war is affecting your country and the region.

You're right on the border with Belarus. I'm curious; how is your relationship with Belarus? You probably at one time did a lot of trade within the Belarus-Russian corridor. How have you changed those trade patterns? You've sacrificed a lot. I'm kind of curious about what the impact has been.

I get only four minutes, so I'll ask my last question. Where could Canada shore up any weaknesses? Where could we assist you in making sure you have what you require in order to take on refugees, for instance, or indeed people who are leaving and fleeing Russia because they don't want to be drafted? What are you doing in those areas as well?

• (1225)

**Mr. Egidijus Meilūnas:** Thank you very much for your questions.

First of all, in speaking about our economic co-operation with Belarus, some time ago, 10 or 15 years ago, it was quite an important economic partner for Lithuania, but right now we have very limited economic relations, because of mainly two reasons. First, Lithuanian business people's assessment is that Belarus is not a reliable partner; and second, it has an aggressive stance against Lithuania and other neighbouring countries.

Two years ago we also introduced sanctions against the Belarusian regime. We stopped transit, for example, of Belarusian potash fertilizers through Lithuanian seaports. To summarize it now, these economic relations are very limited.

Could you please repeat your second question?

**Mr. Randy Hoback:** Yes. I'm just curious, with the stopping of that relationship with Belarus, how you've been able to find other markets or other suppliers...into your economy.

I guess the second part of that question is regarding how you are handling refugees coming in from Ukraine or defectors coming in from Russia. There are lots of young men who do not believe in this war and do not want to be part of it. Are they coming through Belarus into Lithuania? Are you experiencing any of those types of situations?

**The Chair:** I want to let you know that you only have a minute to answer both of those questions, because then we have to turn to the other members.

**Mr. Egidijus Meilūnas:** Very briefly, we host thousands of Belarusian and Russian opposition leaders in Lithuania, so that is my answer to the second part of your question.

Speaking about diversification and new partners, I would like to give you two statistics from our foreign trade last year. With regard to Lithuanian origin of goods exports, more than 84% were exported to like-minded countries and only 1.2% to such autocratic regimes like Belarus, Russia and China. My answer is strategic diversification and enhanced co-operation with like-minded countries.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We now go to MP Sarai for four minutes.

**Mr. Randeep Sarai (Surrey Centre, Lib.):** Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, Vice-Minister.

Vice-Minister, can you shed some light, given your particular location in the region and your better intelligence with regard to Russia and paramilitary forces in Russia, on the Wagner Group's strength and weakness in the current Ukraine involvement? We've been talking about that. We are publicly seeing the discontent between the defence minister of Russia and the Wagner Group. It would be nice to know, from your perspective, if that is real. Is there a retreat of the Wagner Group from the front lines, or are they just repositioning?

**Mr. Egidijus Meilūnas:** Thank you very much for your question.

It's not an easy task to comment on what is happening right now in Russia. Are those public disagreements real or not? As I men-

tioned in my introductory remarks, the most important thing is what the Russians' real intentions are.

As I mentioned, they already publicly announced their plans to increase and scale up the existing military formations over the next three years. The rhetoric, the behaviour, is becoming more and more aggressive not only against Ukraine and other neighbours, but also against members of the Euro-Atlantic community. That is, in the near future, a key challenge for all of us. How do we tackle this new security situation in our region?

• (1230)

**Mr. Randeep Sarai:** When you say Russia is going to be ramping up over 40% increases, or targeting 40% increases, do you think with the global sanctions and the losses there, or the challenges they are facing in Ukraine, they will physically be able to meet those financially and/or meet those physical bodies?

I guess they'll just forcefully recruit physical bodies, but are they financially capable of increasing their military might by 40%?

**Mr. Egidijus Meilūnas:** That's a very good question. It's to the point.

I fully subscribe to what you said in that sanctions and losses in Ukraine have substantially weakened the Russian armed forces and their capability to continue the aggression. However, we have to be aware that Russia is an autocratic, imperialistic and chauvinistic—I could say, in this way—country, which at this time, unfortunately, hasn't changed its behaviour and its intentions against, as I mentioned, neighbouring countries and NATO.

Yes, sanctions are quite effective, but they're still not enough to fully prevent them from producing missiles.

I believe all like-minded allies have to work harder in this regard to introduce new sanctions preventing their war machine from further attacking Ukraine and us, yes.

Okay. I'll stop.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Vice-Minister.

We next go to Madam Larouche.

You have four minutes.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Andr anne Larouche:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Vice-Minister, thank you for being here.

In addition to sharing a border with Belarus, Lithuania shares a border with Kaliningrad, a Russian exclave. Why did the European Union, which includes Lithuania, decide to apply sanctions to that territory?

I'd like to hear your opinion on the main challenges you're facing in applying sanctions in that region. Additionally, has Russia's military posture in Kaliningrad undergone a notable change since February 24, 2022?

[*English*]

**Mr. Egidijus Meilūnas:** Thank you. Again, that is a very good question.

First, regarding military suggestions, Kaliningrad, despite Russian losses in Ukraine, remains a highly militarized region, which poses a threat to neighbouring countries and the whole Baltic Sea region.

Now speaking about what you probably had in mind, which is transit to Kaliningrad, there is a trilateral agreement from 2004 as part of our membership accession talks in which the European Union, Lithuania and the Russian Federation agreed at that time to allow passengers and goods transit from mainland Russia to Kaliningrad through Lithuanian territory on certain conditions.

When Russia started a war of aggression against Ukraine, many Russian goods were sanctioned according to EU sanctions regimes. In agreement with the European Union, we allow only very limited quantities of goods to be sent via Lithuania's territory to Kaliningrad, mainly because of the humanitarian needs of the people of Kaliningrad.

• (1235)

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Andr anne Larouche:** Thank you very much.

You talked about the goal of investing 2% of GDP in defence. What percentage of GDP does Lithuania invest in defence? Should all NATO countries work to achieve that 2% goal?

[*English*]

**Mr. Egidijus Meil nas:** Thank you for your question.

As I mentioned, Lithuania now spends 2.52% of its GDP for military defence purposes. There are discussions in our country, speaking about the future, of the possibility to increase it maybe up 3%. In addition, as I mentioned, our government approved three years of planned additional money to that 2.52% budget to improve military infrastructure by building new barracks and new polygons for soldiers.

**The Chair:** We now go to Ms. McPherson.

You have four minutes.

**Ms. Heather McPherson:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you very much for being here, Vice-Minister.

I wanted to take a moment to say thank you for having such a wonderful ambassador. He took the time to visit me and my constituency in Edmonton. Edmonton has a significant Lithuanian population. It was lovely to be able to spend some time with him there.

I think all of us are trying to figure out what we can do to support Lithuania, to support Ukraine and to push back against the imperialism that Russia has brought forward. Obviously, we're appalled by the recent attack on the dam and the increasing threats that the Russians seem to be bringing forward with regard to using nuclear weapons.

Can you talk about the increase in those sorts of attacks and threats, and what, as Canadian parliamentarians, we should take from that?

**Mr. Egidijus Meil nas:** As we witness probably every day during Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, their main target is the civilian population of Ukraine and the civilian infrastructure.

Killing innocent people, destroying cities and shelling villages—you mentioned this attack against Nova Kakhovka dam—are a blatant violation of all international conventions and all international agreements. That's why we are strongly supporting this idea of establishing this special international tribunal for Russia's crime of aggression.

Of course, the International Criminal Court will play a crucial role in bringing Russia to justice and punishing it for other war crimes. The crime of genocide needs our additional efforts and attention.

**Ms. Heather McPherson:** I did look at some of the documents that have been brought forward and some of the goals that your country has for the NATO summit. One of them is "to expand and strengthen practical co-operation between NATO and its Indo-Pacific partner countries, including in the areas of technology, cyber defence and resilience to hybrid threats, and the pursuit of the rules-based international order."

We've seen China, perhaps not explicitly but implicitly, supporting Russia during this illegal war.

Do you worry there could be implications with regard to China by having this as one of your stated goals for the Vilnius summit?

• (1240)

**Mr. Egidijus Meil nas:** First of all, we have to very clearly state and send a strong message. We already sent it, but it's to just send it again to China that military support to Russia is the red line. In such a case, be prepared for sanctions or other consequences for China. That is first.

I quoted what the NATO Secretary General said about indivisibility and the links between the Euro-Atlantic area and Indo-Pacific security. We also have to send a very strong message to the PRC, to China, that peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait is also a red line for China.

**Ms. Heather McPherson:** Thank you very much.

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

For the second round, each member gets three minutes.

We first to go MP Epp for three minutes.

**Mr. Dave Epp:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Mr. Vice-Minister, for joining us today.

You mentioned in your opening comments that you had blocked Belarusian potash shipments through your country to port. Thank you. You are providing the impetus for my farm to find Saskatchewan potash and more efficient ways of getting it there. We very much support that.

Picking up on MP McPherson's questions regarding nuclear weapons, Russia has stated, in quotes, they're storing them in Belarus. I suspect that is not a storage issue from a Lithuanian perspective.

**Mr. Egidijus Meilūnas:** First of all, I would like to draw your attention to the fact that Russians are masters in creating false reality and threatening, threatening us, western communities, neighbours. Our assessment is that this Russian-Belarusian agreement on deployment of nuclear weapons in Belarus, first of all, is an attempt to, again, threaten us, threaten Lithuania, threaten the Baltic states and NATO's defence alliance. That is our assessment. Our response should be, as I already mentioned in my introductory remarks, enhancement of NATO's eastern flank and a very clear demonstration of our unity and solidarity.

**Mr. Dave Epp:** You've added your voice to other EU countries in recommending the Wagner Group be listed as a terrorist organization. Do you expect that to come quickly with the EU as a designation? Also, what is the major benefit from having that occur?

**Mr. Egidijus Meilūnas:** Actually, our Parliament called not only on other EU states, but on all states globally, to recognize the Russian Federation's private military company Wagner as a terrorist organization. That is the first point.

The second point, speaking about future next steps, our Parliament also “stresses the need for Lithuania to adopt a Law on the Prevention of Terrorism laying down specific criteria for the approval of a list of terrorist organisations by the Government of the Republic of Lithuania or an institution authorised by it, and for the imposition of statutory sanctioning against persons participating in activities of terrorist organizations included in the list.”

• (1245)

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

We now go to MP Oliphant.

You have three minutes.

**Hon. Robert Oliphant:** Thank you.

Mr. Vice-Minister, can you explain to me what sanctions Lithuania has against the Wagner Group? You've talked about listing, but do you have a regime of sanctions against the Wagner Group and its leader as well?

**Mr. Egidijus Meilūnas:** As I mentioned, now we are working on this law on the prevention of terrorism.

**Hon. Robert Oliphant:** Have you sanctioned the group?

**Mr. Egidijus Meilūnas:** At this time, we have no national legal framework for doing that.

**Hon. Robert Oliphant:** I just wanted to get that on the record.

You're calling on us to list them, but we've already sanctioned them and have strong sanctions against both the leader, the owner, as well as the group. I just wanted to make sure this was clear, that we have different regimes, but we've already acted as strongly as any other country has on the Wagner Group. It doesn't mean we don't consider other actions, but I wanted to do that.

I want to ask about Kaliningrad. I won't get into the naming issue and what Poland wants to call it or what Germany used to call it. What is its strategic significance for Russia and what is its threat to the Baltics?

**Mr. Egidijus Meilūnas:** For Russia, the Kaliningrad region and Kaliningrad port are of strategic importance. Right now it remains

their only port in the Baltic Sea, and with Sweden's and Finland's succession to NATO, some experts say that the Baltic Sea region becomes an internal NATO sea. Russia's aggressive behaviour against us, against the NATO community, poses a fundamental threat to the whole Baltic Sea region and its member states.

**Hon. Robert Oliphant:** I wanted to get that in there, because we haven't really talked about it in our committee before and because it borders you. We have Belarus, and you have Kaliningrad right there.

The last thing would be with respect to Ukraine's NATO membership. I assume you know that Canada was the first country to call for Ukraine's membership in NATO 15 years ago using the open door policy. We have reiterated it several times, recognizing that what we've done in the last 15 years is build capacity through training military, through transparency and anti-corruption measures, building democracy to get them ready.

It's very different from Sweden and Finland in terms of their democracy, military capacity and readiness for fast tracking, but Canada is extremely supportive and has been for 15 years. I just wanted to make sure you knew that we will be—

**The Chair:** Mr. Oliphant, I'm going to have to ask that you dispense with your question, because you're well over the three-minute mark.

**Hon. Robert Oliphant:** It's over, really? That's shocking.

Thanks, Vice-Minister.

**The Chair:** We now go to Madam Larouche.

You have a minute and a half.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Andr anne Larouche:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Vice-Minister, there's a lot of discussion about the money recovered as a result of the sanctions on Russia. Should each country adopt legislation governing the funds recovered through sanctions, or should a central entity, such as the United Nations, take care of redistributing the funds with the specific goal of helping to rebuild Ukraine, which will be an important next step for your region?

[*English*]

**Mr. Egidijus Meilūnas:** I absolutely agree and subscribe to your words in terms of Russia's responsibility and, at the same time, speaking about Ukraine's future reconstruction, in terms of the need to use, first of all, Russia's money, Russia's financial assets. In this regard, many comprehensive discussions are going on with the EU and the G7 among like-minded countries, so I truly believe that it would be great to find a common solution, an international platform to implement this initiative of frozen Russian assets and the possible use of them for Ukraine's reconstruction.



• (1250)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Madam McPherson, you have a minute and a half.

**Ms. Heather McPherson:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

A minute and a half is not very much time, Vice-Minister, so I will just give you an opportunity to speak.

We now know the results of the Turkish election. Erdogan has been declared the winner. What will that mean for Vilnius? What will that mean for Sweden? Could you take a few moments to comment on that?

**Mr. Egidijus Meilūnas:** My comment will be very short. We are looking to welcome Sweden as the 32nd full-fledged member state at the Vilnius NATO summit.

**Ms. Heather McPherson:** Do you anticipate any challenges with that from Turkey?

**Mr. Egidijus Meilūnas:** We still have four weeks before the Vilnius NATO summit, enough time to finalize all the procedures needed to finish with ratification of Sweden's full-fledged membership in NATO.

**Ms. Heather McPherson:** You're quite optimistic that will proceed.

**Mr. Egidijus Meilūnas:** Yes.

**Ms. Heather McPherson:** Wonderful. Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Madam McPherson.

Now we go to Mr. Hoback again for three minutes.

**Mr. Randy Hoback:** Vice-Minister, I agree with you. I look forward to seeing Sweden at the table with everybody else at NATO.

I'm curious. With Sweden and Finland joining NATO, how does that change the functioning of NATO within Lithuania? How does that assist you? What kinds of logistical issues do you face or challenges do you have that we can assist you with?

**Mr. Egidijus Meilūnas:** There's no doubt that, in the Baltic states, Lithuanians, Latvians and Estonians are more than happy to have, right now, Finland as a full-fledged member of NATO. We are also, as I mentioned, optimistic about welcoming Sweden in the very near future. It definitely will increase security and stability in our region.

Traditionally, we have very good relations, very good co-operation, with both Sweden and Finland, so it will give us a chance to even increase and intensify co-operation in the field of defence and security with both new allies.

**Mr. Randy Hoback:** I think it's nothing but positive all the way around for all the countries involved, including a look back here at Canada on our northern shore, which my colleague, Mr. Oliphant, will always say is a border to Russia, as well.

You did talk about your 2.5%, possibly going to 3%, of GDP in your military spending. How has that impacted your foreign aid? Does it maintain the same? I thought you said that you spend 1% of GDP just on Ukrainian aid. Is that true?

**Mr. Egidijus Meilūnas:** Yes, it's even more than 1% totally, including military, humanitarian, economic and financial aid to Ukraine. Since the start of Russia's aggression against Ukraine, we've spent more than one billion euros. That is around 1.4% of Lithuania's GDP.

I would also like to take this opportunity to point out that Lithuanian civic society is very supportive of Ukraine. The Lithuanian people collected and donated more than 60 million euros for the humanitarian needs of Ukrainian people but also for the needs of the Ukrainian army, buying drones or anti-drone systems. That is a great example of strong [*Inaudible—Editor*] support. Also, it's from the Lithuanian people, not only from government institutions.

• (1255)

**Mr. Randy Hoback:** Thank you, sir.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Hoback.

For the final question, we go to MP Sarai.

You have three minutes.

**Mr. Randeep Sarai:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Maybe I'll just carry on from there, Vice-Minister.

You said that the Lithuanian people are still very strong and supportive of the sanctions against the Russians and of the military support—at least by drones and other methods—of Ukraine. Is that, among your Baltic allies, also maintaining...? Is the population holding steadfast in their support for Ukraine and against Russia?

**Mr. Egidijus Meilūnas:** Yes, absolutely. In all three Baltic states—Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia—the will to support Ukraine remains very strong because we know from our historic experience.... It's a many centuries-long experience dealing with Russia. Our position is very clear: Ukrainians are fighting not only for their freedom and independence but also for our freedom and independence.

It's not only our moral obligation to support Ukrainians. If we are looking to our future and thinking about a secure, peaceful future in the Baltic region, in Europe and in the Atlantic community, we have to continue and to enhance our support to Ukraine.

**Mr. Randeep Sarai:** When you see places like Belarus or others of the ex-Soviet Republic, like Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, do you see public opinion shifting there, a feeling that they're boxed out because of their association with Russia versus countries like yours who have allied with the west or with NATO and the European Union? Do you see their public perception or public loyalty switching as well?

**Mr. Egidijus Meilūnas:** Yes, we see some expressions and signs that the approach and, as you mentioned, the loyalty is switching. I believe that Russia is losing the influence it had some decades ago in this region.

**Mr. Randeep Sarai:** Thank you, Vice-Minister.

Thank you, Chair. I think that's all my time.

**The Chair:** Thank you, MP Sarai.

Thank you ever so much, Vice-Minister Meilūnas. It has truly been an honour and a privilege to have you here to share your insights and your expertise on the ongoing situation in Ukraine.

I also know that I speak on behalf of all members of this committee when I thank you for everything you have done for Ukraine and for hosting the NATO summit next month in your beautiful capital of Vilnius. Thank you very much for being with us.

Members, before we leave, I have a couple of housekeeping matters.

The first one is with respect to the Subcommittee on International Human Rights. They have prepared a draft report on the residential school situation in Tibet.

We do have to go through the motions. I just want to make sure that everyone is fully in favour of adopting that draft report:

That the report be entitled: "The Human Rights Situation of Tibetans and the Chinese Residential Boarding School and Preschool System".

That the Chair, clerk and analysts be authorized to make such grammatical and editorial changes as may be necessary without changing the substance of the report.

That, pursuant to Standing Order 109, the committee request that the government table a comprehensive response to the report.

That dissenting or supplementary opinions be in Calibri 12-point font, left aligned, single-spaced, and be submitted electronically, in both official languages, to the clerk of the committee, not later than 5:00 p.m. ET on Wednesday, June 14, 2023.

That's tomorrow, but I don't think there's going to be a dissenting report.

That the Chair present the report to the House.

We need unanimous consent to that.

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** That's excellent.

Now going onto the other report, which has to do with sexual and reproductive health and rights of women globally, as you all know, the report has been finalized. We expect to receive a dissenting opinion today, I believe. It will be included when it is tabled.

I have a couple of things. First of all with respect to a news release, when the report is finally tabled, I just want to ensure that the

members agree that the analysts and the clerk, in consultation with the chair, prepare a news release for a publication on the committee's website and for distribution upon presentation of the report to the House.

Is that agreeable to everyone?

• (1300)

**Mr. Randy Hoback:** [*Inaudible—Editor*] report?

**The Chair:** Probably Thursday, I think.

**Mr. Randy Hoback:** Thursday? Okay.

**The Chair:** That's that.

And last and finally, with respect to scheduling a press conference:

That the clerk of the committee make the necessary arrangements for a press conference to be held on Monday, June 19, 2023, at 4:00 p.m. ET, after the presentation of the committee's report to the House on the study of the sexual and reproductive health and rights of women globally; and that the committee be represented by the Chair and a representative from each party.

Is everyone in agreement?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

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

**Ms. Rachel Bendayan:** I have a point of order.

**Hon. Robert Oliphant:** On Monday...

**The Chair:** Thursday is likely when it's going to be tabled.

**Hon. Robert Oliphant:** The press conference is four days later.

**The Chair:** It will be on the Monday, five days later.

**Ms. Rachel Bendayan:** I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Yes, Ms. Bendayan.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Rachel Bendayan:** I'd just like a clarification. My Conservative colleague asked earlier that the vice-minister who just testified be included as a witness for our study on the Wagner Group. Have I got that right?

[*English*]

**Mr. Randy Hoback:** No. It's just for the report, the document that talked about what they did in Lithuania.

**Ms. Rachel Bendayan:** Thank you for clarifying that.

**The Chair:** Thank you ever so much, everyone.

The meeting stands adjourned.







Published under the authority of the Speaker of  
the House of Commons

### **SPEAKER'S PERMISSION**

---

The proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees are hereby made available to provide greater public access. The parliamentary privilege of the House of Commons to control the publication and broadcast of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees is nonetheless reserved. All copyrights therein are also reserved.

Reproduction of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees, in whole or in part and in any medium, is hereby permitted provided that the reproduction is accurate and is not presented as official. This permission does not extend to reproduction, distribution or use for commercial purpose of financial gain. Reproduction or use outside this permission or without authorization may be treated as copyright infringement in accordance with the Copyright Act. Authorization may be obtained on written application to the Office of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Reproduction in accordance with this permission does not constitute publication under the authority of the House of Commons. The absolute privilege that applies to the proceedings of the House of Commons does not extend to these permitted reproductions. Where a reproduction includes briefs to a committee of the House of Commons, authorization for reproduction may be required from the authors in accordance with the Copyright Act.

Nothing in this permission abrogates or derogates from the privileges, powers, immunities and rights of the House of Commons and its committees. For greater certainty, this permission does not affect the prohibition against impeaching or questioning the proceedings of the House of Commons in courts or otherwise. The House of Commons retains the right and privilege to find users in contempt of Parliament if a reproduction or use is not in accordance with this permission.

---

Also available on the House of Commons website at the following address: <https://www.ourcommons.ca>

Publié en conformité de l'autorité  
du Président de la Chambre des communes

### **PERMISSION DU PRÉSIDENT**

---

Les délibérations de la Chambre des communes et de ses comités sont mises à la disposition du public pour mieux le renseigner. La Chambre conserve néanmoins son privilège parlementaire de contrôler la publication et la diffusion des délibérations et elle possède tous les droits d'auteur sur celles-ci.

Il est permis de reproduire les délibérations de la Chambre et de ses comités, en tout ou en partie, sur n'importe quel support, pourvu que la reproduction soit exacte et qu'elle ne soit pas présentée comme version officielle. Il n'est toutefois pas permis de reproduire, de distribuer ou d'utiliser les délibérations à des fins commerciales visant la réalisation d'un profit financier. Toute reproduction ou utilisation non permise ou non formellement autorisée peut être considérée comme une violation du droit d'auteur aux termes de la Loi sur le droit d'auteur. Une autorisation formelle peut être obtenue sur présentation d'une demande écrite au Bureau du Président de la Chambre des communes.

La reproduction conforme à la présente permission ne constitue pas une publication sous l'autorité de la Chambre. Le privilège absolu qui s'applique aux délibérations de la Chambre ne s'étend pas aux reproductions permises. Lorsqu'une reproduction comprend des mémoires présentés à un comité de la Chambre, il peut être nécessaire d'obtenir de leurs auteurs l'autorisation de les reproduire, conformément à la Loi sur le droit d'auteur.

La présente permission ne porte pas atteinte aux privilèges, pouvoirs, immunités et droits de la Chambre et de ses comités. Il est entendu que cette permission ne touche pas l'interdiction de contester ou de mettre en cause les délibérations de la Chambre devant les tribunaux ou autrement. La Chambre conserve le droit et le privilège de déclarer l'utilisateur coupable d'outrage au Parlement lorsque la reproduction ou l'utilisation n'est pas conforme à la présente permission.

---

Aussi disponible sur le site Web de la Chambre des communes à l'adresse suivante :  
<https://www.noscommunes.ca>