

**PUBLIC INQUIRY INTO FOREIGN INTERFERENCE
IN FEDERAL ELECTORAL PROCESSES AND DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS**

**WRITTEN SUBMISSIONS OF THE UKRAINIAN CANADIAN CONGRESS
WITH RESPECT TO THE STAGE 2 HEARINGS**

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Overview

- 1) Russian interference in Canada's democracy, particularly through disinformation and misinformation, impacts members of the Ukrainian Canadian diaspora community differently than any other community. Russia continues its illegal invasion of Ukraine, while also actively trying to sow disinformation and misinformation about the legitimacy of their actions. Russia's disinformation campaign is part of its hybrid war that aims to cause distrust of Ukrainians all over the world to erode support for Ukraine's defence against Russia in the war.

- 2) The Ukrainian Canadian Congress ("UCC") urges the Commissioner to take note of the dangers caused by Russian propaganda, misinformation, and disinformation. These dangers are very real and have an impact on Canada's democracy. The UCC also invites the Commissioner to take note of the unsealed American Indictment¹ as an example of Russian foreign interference into Canada's democratic systems. More specifically, the Indictment revealed that Canadians were actively engaged in a Russian funded disinformation campaign that targeted both US and Canadian audiences, and the government of Canada in particular, because of its vocal support for Ukraine. This is an example where it appears that Canada's federal departments and agencies either failed to detect these actions, or did detect them but failed to notify the public.

¹ Exhibit No RCD0000019: United States v Kostiantyn Kalashnikov and Elena Afanasyeva, Indictment, 24-CR-519.

- 3) The UCC has policy recommendations for the Commissioner's consideration with respect to countering Russia's foreign interference and disinformation campaigns in Canada. These include recommending that the Government expel Russian diplomats from Canada; recommending that the Government ban all Russian state media on all formats; and recommending that the Government establish an educational program to teach children, and all Canadians, critical thinking and media literacy.

Russia is a Threat to Canada's Democratic System

- 4) The testimony at the Inquiry made clear that Russia is a very real threat. This was testified to by witnesses from CSE, CSIS, the Privy Council; and by the Minister of National Defence.

- 5) Ms. Alia Tayyeb, Deputy Chief of SIGINT at CSE testified that:

Russia is an extremely capable actor on a number of different fronts, not -- certainly in terms of cyber capabilities and other forms of intelligence, espionage, and cyber operations capabilities. And we've seen them act, again, in -- we've seen them as a foreign interference actor for many years. We've certainly highlighted in our various publications how active Russia is in interfering with democratic institutions world-wide. We've made a point of saying that this activity is increasing. We've pointed out tactics, particularly the use of state media, use of social media manipulation over the years. This has been something that has been very acute since at least 2015-2016, if not before. And so we've been extremely vocal in highlighting that.²

- 6) Mr. David Vigneault, Director of CSIS, referred to Russia's actions as being "about psychological warfare."³ He testified that "Russian activities took place in Canada, [and] are still taking place in Canada. I think what is important is that it's not just

² Transcript, Ms. Alia Tayyeb, September 26th, 2024, pages 21-22.

³ Transcript, Mr. David Vigneault, September 27th, 2024, page 218.

specifically targeting Canada. If it has an impact in Canada, one of the objectives of Vladimir Putin's regime is to change the international order.”⁴

7) The “CSIS Representative No 1” testified that:

This is quite important as an inane difference from a tactics standpoint. So, as we spoke already about the foreign interference that actually would come from China, pretty much driven into what we describe as the old tactic, despite the fact that we can also speak to current new trends we see, for instance, the formalization of FI from China, which she offers. Russia has never worked within such capability and is not relying on diaspora communities or proxy network to actually support their strategy. Instead, their approach to foreign interference is to discredit, it's to actually put a question on democracy. It's to use disinformation and modern information techniques to discredit democracies and also our mechanism and our institutions.⁵

8) Nathalie Drouin, Deputy Clerk of the Privy Council and National Security and Intelligence Advisor to the Prime Minister, testified that:

Russia is agonistic when they -- there's the political Party in Canada, whether it should be one Party or another, their will is just generally to attack the credibility of our system, of our democracy. That's why we thought that for election periods 43 and 44, Russia had not interfered in our process, election process, but this being said, Russia is very active in its disinformation campaigns, so it's just important to make a distinction between foreign interference in the goal of influencing the result of an election versus just interference in the goal of pushing the narrative and destabilizing, attacking the system as it is. Whoever wins is directing the system.⁶

9) The Honourable William Blair, Minister of National Defence, testified that:

[T]here's also a number of non-kinetic hostile activities that Russia is clearly engaged in, including cyber attacks, even - some criminal and some obviously politically motivated, cyber attacks on our critical infrastructure, our data, our information systems. As I've already alluded to, they're engaged in a number of misinformation and disinformation

⁴ Transcript, Mr. David Vigneault, September 27th, 2024, page 218.

⁵ Transcript, CSSI Representative No 1, October 3rd, 2024, page 108.

⁶ Transcript, Nathalie Drouin, October 9th, 2024, page 130.

activities. I think the motive that is apparent from Russia is to disrupt and cause chaos and social division within the country.⁷

10) Russia is a threat to Canada's democracy. Russia is a hostile foreign state, with the resources and capabilities to engage in many forms of foreign interference. Russia has, and continues, to interfere in Canadian society. This must be recognized, and acknowledged for the danger that it poses.

The Impact of Russia's Illegal Invasion of Ukraine

11) The testimony heard in this Phase of the Inquiry highlighted that Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 was a turning point in many ways.

12) Mr. Garnett Genuis, Member of Parliament, stated that "I think there's also just more recognition since the further invasion of Ukraine of how malicious an actor the Putin regime is."⁸

13) Ms. Alia Tayyeb, Deputy Chief of Signals Intelligence at the Communications Security Establishment, stated that: "A great example [of a publication calling out a specific campaign] was early in the conflict when Russia invaded Ukraine, and we saw Russian disinformation campaigns online to discredit Canadian Armed Forces personnel. We called that out publicly to make people aware that this was going on."⁹

⁷ Transcript, Honourable William Blair, October 11th, 2024, page 85.

⁸ Transcript, Mr. Garnett Genuis, September 17th, 2024, page 52.

⁹ Transcript, Ms. Alia Tayyeb, September 26th, 2024, page 76.

14) Ms. Caroline Xavier, Chief of the Communications Security Establishment, stated that: “We have seen that in particular after the invasion in Ukraine by Russian that those that are allies to Ukraine or those that are parts of -- members of NATO, tend to be those that Russia may -- or Russian activists or hacktivists may be interested in perhaps influencing.”¹⁰

15) Ms. Vanessa Lloyd, Interim Director of the Canadian Security Intelligence Service, stated that: “So you see that the document also talks about the objectives of Russia in terms of countering the narrative, for example, with regards to the Ukraine war, and that is relevant to Canada in terms of our government’s position on that issue, and as well as being the fact that we are partner with others in NATO.”¹¹

16) Mr. Scott Shortliffe, Executive Director of the CRTC, stated that: “In the case of Russia Today, the Government asked us to make a report as to whether Russia Today still met the objectives of the Broadcasting Act. This was after the invasion of Ukraine. The Commission did have a public process. The Government gave us a very tight timeline, two weeks, but we did have a public process, collected quite a bit of public evidence, and the Commission in the end decided that RT should be removed from the list.”¹²

¹⁰ Transcript, Ms. Caroline Xavier, September 26th, 2024, pages 96-97.

¹¹ Transcript, Ms. Vanessa Lloyd, September 27th, 2024, page 14.

¹² Transcript, Mr. Scott Shortliffe, October 1st, 2024, page 116.

17) Mr. Alexandre Lévesque, Assistant Deputy Minister at Global Affairs Canada stated:

“To this day we have about 125 persons and 40 entities which were listed under the *Special Economic Measures Act*, particularly for their involvement in disinformation campaign regarding Ukraine.”¹³

18) Mr. Thomas Owen Ripley, Assistant Deputy Minister at Canadian Heritage, stated:

“It was the first of that nature, and the context obviously was we had the Russian invasion of Ukraine, there were decisions being taken in other jurisdictions as well with respect to RT, and some of its affiliates, in terms of it -- there being concern that it was spreading propaganda, that there was concern that it was spreading abusive comments directed towards Ukrainians. And so as you note, you know, the Minister of Canadian Heritage at the time, and ultimately the government, wanted to make sure that the CRTC was seized with the issue, and so they used one of those powers to ask the CRTC not to determine the outcome of that, but to ask the CRTC to look at the question about whether it was appropriate in light of what was being broadcast on RT and RT France for those channels to remain available on Canadian cable and satellite company packages.”¹⁴

19) Russia’s invasion of Ukraine had global ramifications and continues to do so. The impact of this ongoing war is felt daily by the members of the Ukrainian Canadian community. Russia’s attempts to sway global public opinion on the illegal invasion likewise has an impact on members of this community.

¹³ Transcript, Mr. Alexandre Lévesque, October 4th, 2024, page 192.

¹⁴ Transcript, Mr. Thomas Owen Ripley, October 7th, 2024, page 146.

Russian Disinformation Campaigns

20) Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine saw an increase in Russia's disinformation campaigns. These campaigns focused, among other issues, on attempting to undermine global public support for Ukraine. These disinformation campaigns not only have a significant impact on members of the Ukrainian Canadian community, but also Canadians at large.

21) The Honourable Mélanie Joly, Minister of Foreign Affairs, stated that:

“Disinformation, especially online disinformation, is *a gangrene of our democracy*, and if we don't put an end to it, our society, our social model is at stake.”¹⁵ This sentence highlights the very real danger that disinformation presents.

22) The Honourable Marco Mendicino, Member of Parliament, stated: “Russia is looking for ways to undermine democracy to pursue its own objectives, and these are not just phenomenon which are occurring in Canada. The most egregious example of their aggression would be their illegal invasion into Ukraine, but the connection between that illegal invasion and the foreign interference in Canada is quite clear, in my opinion, that to support its case to go into Ukraine, it spread many falsehoods through the form of disinformation campaigns. There were foreign media proxies that were operating at one time to spread some of the lies around the “de-Nazification” of Ukraine. That kind of disinformation can undermine our democracy if it's allowed to spread unchecked.”¹⁶

¹⁵ Transcript, Honourable Mélanie Joly, October 10th, 2024, page 115.

¹⁶ Transcript, The Honourable Marco Mendicino, October 10th, 2024, page 64.

- 23) The risk of allowing Russia’s disinformation to continue, unchecked, not only impacts Ukrainian Canadians, but “can undermine our democracy.” This is an issue that concerns all Canadians, and one that must be addressed by the Government.
- 24) Russian propaganda with respect to its illegal invasion of Ukraine is having a real effect, as it “has eroded in some areas support for Ukraine”¹⁷ according to the testimony of Mr. Erin O’Toole. He further testified that “when fatigue fits in from war, and there’s propaganda and misinformation, it can impact people and it can impact the public mood and the policy direction more than the election day nominations or things that we’ve seen in other foreign interference.”¹⁸
- 25) Mr. O’Toole underscores the very real impact that Russia’s actions have. It impacts Canadian citizens, public opinion, and policy direction. These impacts are not insignificant, and they are felt by all Canadians and not just those in the political realm. While most of the examples of foreign interference seen in this Inquiry are targeting either Parliamentarians, or leadership race nominees, “Russian misinformation is more chaos generating. They want us just fighting and making democracy look ineffective and challenging some western values and other things.”¹⁹
- 26) The UCC urges the Commissioner to acknowledge the risk that Russia poses, and to urge the Government to respond to this threat with appropriate recommendations.

¹⁷ Transcript, Mr. Erin O’Toole, September 18th, 2024, page 186.

¹⁸ Transcript, Mr. Erin O’Toole, September 18th, 2024, page 186.

¹⁹ Transcript, Mr. Erin O’Toole, September 18th, 2024, page 185.

The Unsealed American Indictment

27) Part of the Commission’s mandate, pursuant to section (a)(i)(C)(II), is to:

examine and assess the capacity of relevant federal departments, agencies, institutional structures and governance processes to permit the Government of Canada to detect, deter and counter any form of foreign interference directly or indirectly targeting Canada’s democratic processes, notably in relation to

(II) the supports and protections in place for members of a diaspora who may be especially vulnerable and may be the first victims of foreign interference in Canada’s democratic processes

28) The Unsealed American Indictment was filed as exhibit with the Commission²⁰ and was referenced by a number of witnesses. The Indictment states:

RT, formally known as “Russia Today,” is a state-controlled media outlet funded and directed by the Government of Russia. After Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022, RT was sanctioned, dropped by distributors, and ultimately forced to cease formal operations in the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, and the European Union. In response, RT created, in the words of its editor-in-chief, an “entire empire of covert projects” designed to shape public opinion in “Western audiences.” One of RT’s “covert projects,” as described herein, is its funding and direction of a Tennessee-based online content creation company (“U.S. Company – 1”).

...

From in or about March 2021 to in or about February 2022, Founder-1 created videos, posted social media content, and wrote articles pursuant to a written contract between Founder-1’s Canadian company (“Canadian Company-1”), and RT’s parent organization, ANO TV-Novosti. This content generally consisted of English-language social commentary. RT directly published some of Founder-1’s paid work, while Founder-1 posted other of Founder-1’s paid work on Founder-1’s personal accounts (without attribution to RT). For example, Founder-1’s invoices reflect that Founder-1 billed ANO TV-Novosti for approximately 217 videos, of which approximately 209 were published on Founder-1’s personal YouTube channels.

...

U.S. Company-1 is a United States corporation established under the laws of Tennessee. Founder-1 has described U.S. Company-1 as the U.S. subsidiary of Founder-1’s Canadian company, Canadian Company-1; as set forth above, from in our above March 2021 to in or about February

²⁰ Exhibit No RCD0000019: United States v Kostiantyn Kalashnikov and Elena Afanasyeva, Indictment, 24-CR-519.

2022, Founder-1 used Canadian Company-1 to produce content for RT pursuant to a written contract.²¹

29) Canadian Company-1 has been identified in the media as Tenet Media. The Indictment was one of the topics of discussion when the Media Ecosystem Observatory (“MEO”) testified on September 25, 2024. Members of the MEO advised the Commission that they are currently monitoring the Tenet Media indictment and indicated that they intended to continue monitoring it. At the time of their testimony, the MEO posted 2 updates on their website. By the time these submissions were filed, they have now posted an additional 3 updates.²² The MEO’s website describes the Canadian involvement in this indictment is:

Tenet Media’s owners, Canadian influencer Lauren Chen and her husband Liam Donovan, allegedly accepted almost \$10 million USD from the Russian-government funded media outlet RT in exchange for promoting Kremlin-approved narratives through Tenet’s network of American and Canadian online personalities.

30) During the MEO’s testimony before the Commission, they made a number of relevant points:

- a. “[T]he cost of distributing content over Twitter, TikTok, certainly YouTube is essentially free. And you don’t have to find the audience; it finds you there. It creates cases where people can have a home studio or some semi-professional setup, can create content, and then can find an audience where previously it was costly to set up a T.V. channel either locally or nationally, obviously, right? It was costly to set up a printing press. So in this case, the dissemination costs come down to close to zero for the producer, and that enables people to be able to produce content and to survive as specialized channels of -- providing specialized channels of information.”²³

²¹ Exhibit No RCD0000019: United States v Kostiantyn Kalashnikov and Elena Afanasyeva, Indictment, 24-CR-519, paras 1, 10(a), and 11.

²² <https://www.cdmrn.ca/russian-funding-canadian-influencers#:~:text=%7C%20Key%20Contacts-,Overview,-Charges%3A%20On>

²³ Transcript, Prof. Peter Loewen, September 25, 2024, pages 17-18.

- b. “[T]he voice those individuals have, and the audience they’ve gained, is clearly of value beyond their commercial ability to monetize it with advertising. And that’s one of the key things that comes out of that Tenet indictment, is that somebody thought that audience of some of those people was worth \$100,000 a week. So that’s a value that far exceeds their market value in their ability to monetize content with display ads, for example, on YouTube. So that is a factor in the ecosystem I think we now have to contend with.”²⁴
 - c. “[I]t’s highly consequential that someone, a Canadian, was taking money from a Russian government-controlled entity to influence Canadian politics. That’s highly consequential in and of itself. If one person had viewed this, it’s consequential, right.”²⁵
 - d. “The reason we open an incident on this indictment and on the events surrounding it is that we consider them enormously consequential and enormously important for understanding -- to -- you know, that Canadians really do need to understand the context in which this occurred and what occurred. That incident, we will be reporting on it in the weeks to come with a debrief and we will sort of have our full analysis of it. Yeah, this stuff does matter and, you know, there’s important questions here. Why did RT do this? What was their interest? Who were they targeting? These sorts of questions, they should be asked and they should be answered as best as possible by us and by others.”²⁶
 - e. “The six Tenet Media influencers all discuss Canada on a regular basis and we are, by virtue of proximity and embeddedness in the North American information ecosystem, the North American English and speaking information ecosystem, we are enormously subject to this sort of effort. Influencers are incredibly important at spreading messages and convincing people.”²⁷
- 31) Tenet Media’s actions in Canada are currently being investigated, and as a result many of the witnesses who testified at the Commission were unable to comment on the Indictment. The fact that Canadian, and foreign, authorities are investigating these claims does not prevent this Commission from taking note of the allegations. The allegations, even without further investigation, are deeply concerning. The allegations suggest that Canadians were receiving significant foreign funding from a

²⁴ Transcript, Prof. Taylor Owen, September 25, 2024, page 18.

²⁵ Transcript, Prof. Peter Loewen, September 25, 2024, page 193.

²⁶ Transcript, Prof. Aengus Bridgman, September 25, 2024, page 194.

²⁷ Transcript, Prof. Aengus Bridgman, September 25, 2024, page 194-195.

hostile state in order to create propaganda social media videos and posts in an attempt to influence Western democracies. This is the exact type of action that this Commission was mandated to investigate.

32) The UCC urges the Commission to identify Russia's funding of Tenet Media, and their influences, as an act of foreign interference.

33) This incident is also relevant when considering the "capacity of relevant federal departments, agencies, institutional structures and governance processes to permit the Government of Canada to detect, deter and counter any form of foreign interference directly or indirectly targeting Canada's democratic processes." Specifically, because Tenet Media, and its Russian funding, came to the public's attention by the unsealing of an American Indictment, it begs the question of whether any federal departments or agencies did detect the existence of Russian-funded propaganda being distributed by Tenet Media prior to the unsealing of the US Indictment?

34) No witness from a Canadian federal department or agency that testified at the Commission was willing, or able, to testify about this Indictment. The Commission was not provided with any information that would assist them in determining whether any Canadian agency or department was aware of this fact – at least, not in the public hearings. It is the UCC's hope that Commission took all reasonable steps to make inquiries of the appropriate Government agencies with respect to their knowledge of Tenet Media's foreign funding in their *in camera* hearings.

35) At least one witness at the Inquiry expressed concern over the fact that Canadians learned about this from an unsealed American Indictment. Mr. Michael Chong testified: “It is concerning to me. I think it’s part of a broader pattern where we learn of intelligence through sources outside of Canada. We learn, you know, for example, this is not the first unsealed indictment where we’ve learned about various things taking place in Canada.”²⁸

36) The fact that the Commission is without this information, at least in their public hearings, does not prevent this Commission from commenting on this matter. Ultimately, either a Canadian department/agency was aware of the Russian sponsored propaganda coming out of Tenet Media, or they weren’t. If they were aware, why was no one informed? If they were not aware, why not? Either way, this incident directly touches on the Canadian Government’s ability to “detect” this type of foreign interference, as well as their ability to “deter” it.

37) The UCC also urges the Commission to consider, as required by section (i)(C)(II) of their mandate, what “supports and protections” were/are in “place for members” of the Ukrainian Canadian diaspora who are “especially vulnerable” to Russian foreign interference. The Government’s failure to detect and/or inform the Canadian public about Russia’s state-sponsored propaganda being distributed in Canada by Canadians through a Canadian company is deeply concerning to the UCC.

²⁸ Transcript, Mr. Michael Chong, September 18, 2024, pages 73-74.

- 38) Russia’s funding of Tenet Media is deeply concerning and should be taken note of by this Commission.
- 39) The unsealed US Indictment has already sparked the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security (SECU) to investigate “Russian Interference and Disinformation Campaigns in Canada.”²⁹ Testimony from this Standing Committee last week suggests the existence of a Russian asset working in Ottawa as a journalist for decades³⁰; testimony that was notably absent from this Commission.
- 40) The UCC also testified before this Commission, and before the Standing committee on Public Safety and National Security (SECU), that in addition to journalists, Russia regularly co-opts academics at Canada’s universities by inviting them to meetings of Putin’s Valdai Discussion Club³¹ (an entity whose Foundation has been sanctioned by Canada).
- 41) The UCC recommends that Canadians who attend meetings of the Valdai Discussion Club be investigated for sanctions violations.

Policy Recommendations

- 42) The UCC has policy recommendations for the Commission’s consideration. These expand on the recommendations made by Alexandra Chyczij during her testimony on the “Panel on Mis- and Disinformation and Ways to Respond.”³² The UCC’s first

²⁹ <https://www.ourcommons.ca/Committees/en/SECU/StudyActivity?studyActivityId=12884001>

³⁰ <https://thehub.ca/2024/10/30/richard-shimooka-canadas-enemies-arent-just-targeting-elected-officials-theyre-trying-to-interfere-with-you-too/>

³¹ <https://valdaiclub.com/about/valdai/>

³² Transcript, Alexandra Chyczij, October 2nd, 2024.

policy recommendation is that Canadian Government expel Russian diplomats from Canada.

43) We heard testimony that expelling diplomats is an available tool in Canada's foreign policy toolbox.³³ Canada has expelled Russian diplomats before. In 2018, following the poisoning of Mr. Sergei Skripal, a former Russian military officer and double agent for the British Intelligence, in the United Kingdom. According to Mr. David Morrison, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Canada expelled four Russian diplomats at that time "in conjunction with allies to show our opposition to the reprehensible act by the Russian Government. So those four people that we expelled obviously were not seriously implicated in what happened in the U.K., but we used that as a diplomatic signal."³⁴

44) Canada is one of very few NATO countries that has not expelled a single Russian diplomat since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022. It is quite difficult to understand how Canada would expel 4 Russian diplomats over the murder of one person in the UK, but following the illegal invasion of Ukraine Canada does not expel a single Russian diplomat. To Ukrainian Canadians watching from abroad as their homeland nears its 3rd anniversary of Russia's full-scale invasion –in which Canada's Parliament unanimously recognized that Russia is committing acts of genocide against Ukrainians Canada's refusal to expel even a single Russian diplomat is a painful disappointment.

³³ Transcript, Mr. Alexandre Lévesque, October 4th, 2024, page 20.

³⁴ Transcript, Mr. David Morrison, October 4th, 2024, page 59.

45) The explanation given by Mr. Alexandre Lévesque on why Canada has not expelled any Russian diplomats was:

This is a deliberate choice, and the choice that the government had made is to maintain a Russian presence in Canada and to maintain a Canadian presence in Russia, because without the presence of these diplomats, you cut off all ability to have communication, and that ability to communicate also gives us a chance to convey informal and formal reprimands. You can't bring a country to account if you don't have official channels of communication, and that is mostly what we've used these channels of communication for.³⁵

This explanation is difficult to understand in light of (1) Canada's willingness to expel four Russian diplomats in 2018, and (2) the fact that almost every other NATO country has expelled Russian diplomats following the invasion of Ukraine. Mr. Lévesque's answer, with all due respect, is not an answer that instills much confidence. Especially when he notes that the choice to not expel any Russian diplomats is "a deliberate choice" by the Canadian government.

46) Mr. Alexandre Lévesque's statement was later contradicted by the testimony of the Honourable Mélanie Joly, who, when asked "Does the necessity of maintaining good relationship, economic relationship or something, impede our response to foreign interference," stated:

I think if there's a false choice between two things. It's maybe my personal opinion but I think we have to do both. The proof is that I was in charge of expelling Chinese diplomats, and at the same time going on a diplomatic trip to China. We expelled Indian diplomats, and at the same time we continued to have diplomatic relations with India. So we have to be able to do both things because those are two ways of defending our interests and of having influence at the international level, especially with our allies who are also engaged diplomatically.³⁶

³⁵ Transcript, Mr. Alexandre Lévesque, October 4th, 2024, page 20.

³⁶ Transcript, Honourable Mélanie Joly, October 10, 2024, page 98-99.

It is difficult to understand how Canada can expel Chinese and Indian diplomats and still maintain a political discourse with these nations, but yet cannot do the same with respect to Russian diplomats.

47) The explanation provided for refusing to expel a single Russian diplomat falls flat, and is not an adequate answer. Canada has the ability to expel diplomats, and has done so before. This is a tool in Canada's foreign affairs toolbox that should be used against Russian to send a message that Russian interference in Canada will not be tolerated. Expulsions would also remove from Canada Russian intelligence officers that operate under the guise of "diplomats" and thus enhance the security of all Canadians.

48) The second policy recommendation is that the Canadian Government ban all Russian state media on all formats. While we heard testimony that following Russia's invasion of Ukraine that the CRTC removed RT (Russia Today) from Canadian airwaves,³⁷ this material remains accessible online. Further, as we saw with Tenet Media, RT is finding other means by which to spread Russian propaganda to western democracies. We heard testimony that:

RT is carrying out a disinformation and propaganda campaign, not just about the situation in Ukraine, but about electoral processes, particularly about Eastern Europe and about Moldova, which is an egregious example which the Minister also commented upon in the past. Unfortunately, the problem with RT is even worse than that. It's not only disinformation and propaganda, they are at a next level. There's interference with some Eastern European elections, but also they've begun to use initiatives in order to fund the war effort, the Russian war effort in Ukraine.³⁸

³⁷ Transcript, Mr. Scott Shortliffe, October 1, 2024, page 116.

³⁸ Transcript, Mr. Philippe Lafortune, October 4, 2024, page 198.

49) RT is a danger to Western democracies. It is a state-run and state-sponsored propaganda machine aimed at spreading disinformation. That on its own is a serious concern and one that the Canadian Government must take a strong stance against. Yet, it is even worse, since RT is using its propaganda machine to further fund the illegal invasion into Ukraine. Members of the Ukrainian Canadian community are hit twice by the dangers of RT – they experience Russia’s propaganda machine in the form of RT, especially when cited by other news agencies, and then again when that very same propaganda machine is funding the continued war in their homeland. In light of this knowledge, it is difficult to understand why the Canadian government has not done more to limit the harm that RT and other Russian state media can cause to Canada and Canadian citizens.

50) Finally, the UCC recommends that the Government establish an educational program to teach children critical thinking and media literacy. This was something that Mr. Thomas Owen Ripley, the Associated Assistant Deputy Minister at the Department of Canadian Heritage, discussed during his testimony:

The example that is frequently cited is Finland as a country that has and is recognized for a very high degree of media and digital literacy in its population. Finland is a country that borders Russia, and, as a result of that, is frequently subject to Russian disinformation circulating in the media and information ecosystem in Finland. And so what we have seen over many years is that Finland has invested in really equipping its population from very early on in the education system as they grow up through the education system and then into adulthood with skills for being able to assess the quality of information. And we’ve seen in recent years, in the context of the pandemic, they’ve made additional investments about really trying to train their citizens to be able to detect when information has been altered, that there is something suspicious about information and having that kind of attitude of curiosity to be able to kind of dig down and

assess for themselves whether the information that they are being presented with is accurate. And so I think Finland in many contexts is recognized as having one of the highest degrees of digital media literacy in that respect internationally.³⁹

51) The Honorable Mélanie Joly stated that “[d]isinformation, especially online disinformation, is a gangrene of our democracy.” It is simply not something that can be ignored. When the members of the Media Ecosystem Observatory (“MEO”) testified, they were asked what an individual Canadian citizen could do to help identify disinformation, to which the MEO testified:

I think the -- if a Canadian was listening to this wondering how can I be a better citizen in the next election, how can I make a more informed decision and how can I understand politics better in my country, I would say spend a lot less time online, read some articles about what’s going on in the election and then go talk to a neighbour about it and ask them what they think and listen to other people more and maybe even ask them why they might disagree with you. But actually get into the business of talking about politics with people, which is not something people do as much as they used to. They might share information on politics, they might like stuff, they might proclaim their views, but there’s a lot less talking and listening.⁴⁰

In addition to the advice that citizens should engage in political discourse with people in-person (as opposed to online), the MEO acknowledged, and recognized, that disinformation is quite difficult for individual citizens to identify.⁴¹

52) Disinformation is a “gangrene of our democracy” and not something that individual Canadian citizens are currently equipped to even identify, let alone tackle. This danger requires Government intervention. The Government must ensure that the

³⁹ Transcript, Mr. Thomas Own Ripley, October 7, 2024, page 101.

⁴⁰ Transcript, Prof. Peter Loewen, September 25, 2024, page 213.

⁴¹ Transcript, September 25, 2024, page 213-215.

Canadian public is educated and informed adequately in order to be able to, at the very least, detect disinformation. This must start from an early age, and be integrated into our education systems. This “gangrene” simply cannot be ignored.

Conclusion

53) The UCC would like to thank the Commission for allowing us to take part in this Inquiry. We hope that these submissions, and the recommendations, assist the Commissioner and Commission counsel in completing their report. The UCC looks forward to reading that report at the end of the year.