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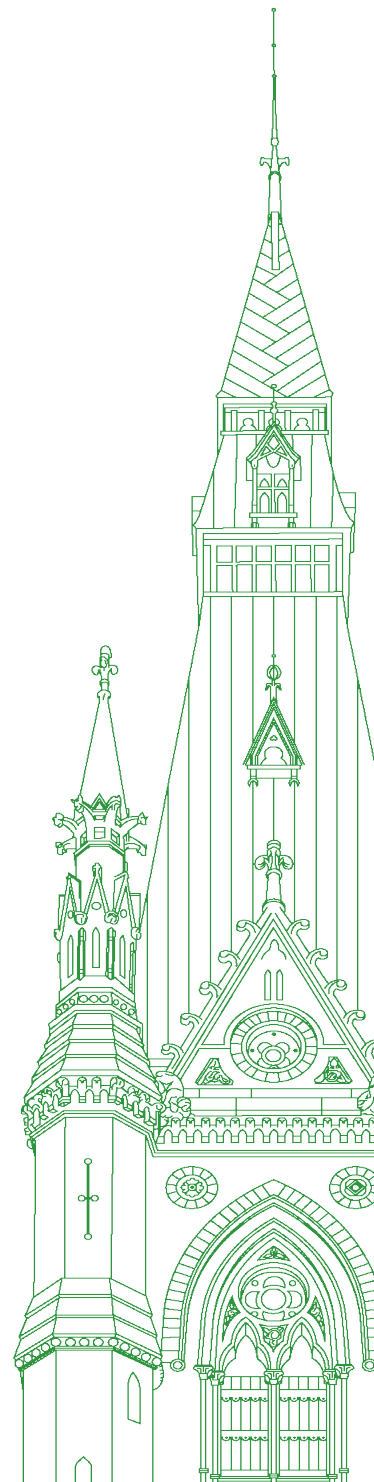
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Chair: The Honourable Hedy Fry



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• (1715)

[English]

The Chair (Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.)): I call this meeting back to order.

Pursuant to the order of reference of Wednesday, February 28, 2024, we are commencing consideration of Bill C-354, an act to amend the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission Act, regarding Quebec's cultural distinctiveness and French-speaking communities.

The sponsor of this bill was Mario Beaulieu. We have Mr. Martin Champoux, who is going to present on his behalf because he is not able to be here.

Mr. Champoux, you have five minutes for your opening statement. I will give you a 30-second cue when you're getting there.

Thank you.

[Translation]

Mr. Martin Champoux (Drummond, BQ): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Ladies and gentlemen, it's an honour for me to speak to the members of the committee today about Bill C-354, which was sponsored in the House of Commons by my colleague the member for La Pointe-de-l'Île, Mario Beaulieu.

As my colleague could not be here today, I'm happy to be able to speak on his behalf about our bill, which is very straightforward.

Subsection 12(1) under the heading "In relation to broadcasting" in the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission Act, states: "The objects and powers of the Commission in relation to broadcasting are as set out in the *Broadcasting Act*".

We propose the addition of a "Consultation" section and a new subsection 12(1.1):

Consultation

(1.1) The Commission shall consult with the Government of Quebec about the cultural distinctiveness of Quebec and with the governments of the other provinces about the French-speaking markets in those provinces before furthering the objects and exercising the powers referred to in subsection (1) in respect of the aspects of the Canadian broadcasting system that concern those matters.

This bill is not really very complicated. It constitutes a response to the express request submitted on February 4, 2023 by Quebec's Minister of Culture and Communications, Mathieu Lacombe, in a letter he had sent to Mr. Pablo Rodriguez, the then Minister of Canadian Heritage.

At the time, the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage had completed its study of Bill C-11, whose purpose was to amend the Broadcasting Act. Following study in the Senate, the bill was referred back to the House to obtain approval for the final amendments proposed by the Senate.

The recommendations in the letter to Mr. Rodriguez included the Quebec minister's demand, or firm suggestion, that Quebec be consulted systematically when the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission, the CRTC, was developing regulations and decisions that could have an impact on Quebec and francophone culture, and on the Quebec broadcasting system.

The Bloc Québécois is convinced that telecommunications and broadcasting are extremely important for the vitality of Quebec's culture. Broadcasting has a direct impact on our language and culture. Bill C-354 is a modest attempt at a minimal response to the expectations and concerns of Quebecers with respect to the culture and management of their broadcasting ecosystem.

Quebec has always developed its own rules for the broadcasting sector and has always striven for more autonomy. I would like to take you back to 1929, when the premier of Quebec at the time was Louis-Alexandre Taschereau, who adopted the first "law respecting broadcasting in this province". That was the actual name of the act. Later, in the 1930s, the federal government followed his lead and adopted a broadcasting act, which led to the establishment of the CRTC as we know it today.

However, over the years, various successive Quebec governments—and they were certainly not all sovereignists—with several federalist Liberal governments among others, working towards more autonomy and more power for the Government of Quebec with respect to broadcasting. In 2008, Christine St-Pierre and Benoît Pelletier, both Liberal ministers in the Quebec government, sent the following letter:

This letter is written to inform the federal government of Quebec's desire to begin talks, as soon as possible, with a view to concluding a Canada-Quebec agreement for the broadcasting and telecommunications sector and an agreement relating to culture.

Considering the distinct culture of Quebec, the only French-speaking state in North America, we feel that concluding such an administrative agreement would make it possible to better reflect the specific characteristics of Quebec content in broadcasting and telecommunications, and would serve as recognition of the importance of protecting and promoting Quebec's specific culture.

CRTC decisions have an impact on francophone and Quebec culture. CRTC decisions have an impact on Quebec broadcasting, and we think that it is important for Quebec to automatically be consulted in advance by the CRTC when it is undertaking work on Quebec and francophone broadcasting and culture.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

• (1720)

[English]

The Chair: All right. I will open this up to questions for the witness.

Are there any questions?

Mr. Noormohamed, go ahead.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed (Vancouver Granville, Lib.): I just have one question for Mr. Champoux, for whom I have a tremendous amount of respect. Is it not problematic to try to legislate a direction—

I'm sorry—aren't they supposed to go first?

Mrs. Rachael Thomas (Lethbridge, CPC): Are we not doing question rounds? We always....

The Chair: I was just going to see whose hands went up.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: I have only one question.

The Chair: It seemed that nobody put their hand up.

Are you going to start? Okay.

We're splitting the time, six minutes, between Rachael Thomas and Joël Godin.

Go ahead.

[Translation]

Mr. Joël Godin (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'm going to share my speaking time with my colleague Ms. Thomas.

Well done, Mr. Champoux, in consideration of the fact that in February 2023, when Bill C-11 was being studied, the Conservative Party, like the Bloc Québécois, had acknowledged the asymmetry of Quebec with respect to the other provinces and territories of Canada. We know something about how the Liberals feel about the situation today. All that's needed is a look at the Standing Committee on Official Languages, of which I am the vice-chair, where we have had to deal with some witnesses in a special way. One MP mentioned that Quebec ought to be bilingual and another said that French was not really on the decline in Quebec. I don't know where the Liberals want to go with this.

Now, Mr. Champoux, I'd like to know the intent behind this bill. There should, of course, be prior consultation in Quebec, to protect the distinctiveness of Quebec, which I often call "the Gaulish village".

Why were the other provinces and territories included in the bill? Your argument is based on representations by the Quebec Minister of Culture and Communications, Mr. Lacombe, and two Liberal

Quebec ministers, who said that it was important. A distinction needs to be made between the two parties, because they are not the same, at least to my knowledge.

I'd like to hear your comments on that.

• (1725)

Mr. Martin Champoux: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you, Mr. Godin, for that excellent question.

I will briefly give you some background.

People are often under the impression that the Bloc Québécois speaks only for Quebec. The Bloc Québécois speaks on behalf of Quebec culture, but also on behalf of French in general. As you pointed out, we in Quebec are like a Gaulish village. We are eight million francophones in an ocean of 360 million to 370 million anglophones. We need to protect this distinctiveness. After all, Quebec, as you said, is like the Gaulish village.

However, beyond this Gaulish village, there are other communities, and they're important too. When we are considering a bill or a measure that might be applied to Quebec, we think about the francophone communities outside of Quebec because we are often in touch with them and discuss these issues.

Adding the other provinces was a way of telling the francophone communities outside of Quebec that we weren't only thinking about Quebec. We know that they too are concerned about regulations and decisions pertaining to French that are issued by the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission, the CRTC, and these communities should also have a say in these matters.

We were just talking about consulting the provinces. I think that might not be obligatory. Some provinces might say that they don't want to be consulted, and that would be the end of it. It's no more complicated than that. I thought it was important to let the francophone communities outside of Quebec know that in introducing this proposed amendment to the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission Act, we were not just thinking about ourselves. We were thinking about all francophones in Canada.

Mr. Joël Godin: Thank you, Mr. Champoux.

Did you consult the communities—

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Godin, you have two minutes and 48 seconds. I don't know if you want to give it over to Mrs. Thomas.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: I think we're good.

The Chair: You'll let him keep going. Okay.

Go ahead.

Mr. Joël Godin: Just tell me when it's the last minute, when I finish my turn, and I'll split my time with Mrs. Thomas.

The Chair: Okay.

[Translation]

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Champoux, I just wanted to ask the following questions.

First, did you consult the official language minority communities outside of Quebec?

Secondly, pursuant to the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission Act, the official language minority communities have already been consulted. I'm wondering about adding another layer of consultations for the provinces and territories. Our discussions with these organizations informed us that it often amounted to an additional hurdle for them. Were there consultations about this? Did you consider the possibility of leaving other provinces and territories in Canada out of these consultations?

Mr. Martin Champoux: That's a good question, and you're absolutely right.

It's a sensitive issue that we only heard about after the fact. We held discussions with representatives from various francophone communities outside of Quebec. This issue was mentioned to us, as well as the fact that the provincial government was not always the best entity for dealing with the CRTC. In fact, these communities should probably continue to be the CRTC's initial contact during consultations.

We would be open to proposed amendments provided that they respond to the concerns of francophone communities. We would very likely be prepared to adapt everything.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Champoux.

Rachael, you have one minute and 25 seconds.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: Thank you, Chair.

At this point, I just wish to move a motion. I'm hoping that it will be rather quick. I'm certainly not wanting to interrupt. I'm wanting to get back to the conversation that is at hand. I gave notice of this motion at our last meeting.

It reads as follows:

Given that,

The CBC receives \$1.4 billion from taxpayers;

The CBC holds the rights to broadcast the NHL playoffs;

The CBC chose not to broadcast the Edmonton Oilers game that sent them to the Stanley Cup finals;

The committee calls on the CBC to commit to broadcasting all Stanley Cup final games and report this finding to the House.

That is my motion, which I wish to move on behalf of Canadians so that they can watch the Stanley Cup.

The Chair: Your motion is on the table, duly presented 48 hours beforehand.

Yes, Mr. Noormohamed, go ahead on the motion.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: Mrs. Thomas will be happy to know that, in fact, the CBC is broadcasting the Oilers' Stanley Cup games. It will indeed, I assume, also broadcast when they win the Stanley Cup, bringing the cup back home to Canada, so I don't think we need to worry too much about that.

I also think it's important to note that, in fact, the rights holder is Rogers, which paid \$5.2 billion for the rights through 2025-26, but thanks to an arrangement that's been reached between Rogers and CBC, we don't even need to worry about this motion or vote for it because the CBC is already broadcasting the NHL Stanley Cup finals in which the Edmonton Oilers, I predict, will win the Stanley Cup.

• (1730)

The Chair: Ms. Ashton, go ahead on this motion.

Thank you.

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill—Keewatinook Aski, NDP): We're happy to support this motion. I think it sends an important message.

I think it's great that agreement has been reached. Having said that, I think the fact that we haven't been able to watch hockey games on the CBC up to now is a problem. I think it's a very strong message to send on behalf of Canadians that, as a committee, we support the CBC showing the playoffs. Frankly, we hope that this sets a precedent for the future, as well as many more Canadian teams, hopefully, winning in the future in addition to the Oilers this time.

The Chair: Michael, is this on the motion?

Mr. Michael Coteau (Don Valley East, Lib.): Yes, it's on the motion.

Maybe we should just add in the motion the piece saying that the final game is going to be broadcast on the CBC.

The Chair: Do you have an amendment? Can you please tell us your amendment?

Mr. Michael Coteau: It is that the final games are going to be broadcast on the CBC.

The Chair: Where do you wish that to go? Can you work that in as part of the language?

Mr. Michael Coteau: It can go anywhere. It doesn't matter.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: No, you have to tell us where.

Mr. Michael Coteau: At the very end, I would just like a little star and it to say that the game will be played on the CBC...or that the finals will be seen on the CBC. How about that?

The Chair: We have an amendment.

For discussion of the amendment, go ahead, Mr. Waugh.

Mr. Kevin Waugh (Saskatoon—Grasswood, CPC): How do we know that?

Ms. Tait stood in this room and talked glowingly about CBC and *Hockey Night in Canada*, yet for game six involving the Edmonton Oilers and the Dallas Stars, they decided to not televise it.

There would have been a riot, Madam Chair, if they had done this with the Toronto Maple Leafs or the Montreal Canadiens. They had no business not showing game six. They claimed they had a commitment earlier. This has never happened in CBC. Then all of a sudden, because it was the Edmonton Oilers, a Western-based team—I might say their six o'clock newscast is disastrous, CBC in Edmonton and Calgary—they saw fittingly not to show game six of Edmonton and Dallas.

I don't have any confidence in the CBC to show any of these games until I actually turn on the TV and see CBC televising them.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Waugh.

Mr. Noormohamed, go ahead on the amendment.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: I find it deeply.... I don't even know what the word is to discuss this.

The Chair: On the amendment, please....

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: While I appreciate Mr. Coteau's amendment, I remain of the view that as politicians we should not be telling the CBC what to broadcast. Mr. Coteau has rightly pointed out through this amendment...to address the misinformation that the CBC is not going to be broadcasting these games, which in fact they are.

I think it leads to a bigger question of whether we are directing the public broadcaster as to what to broadcast and what not to broadcast. I think that's—

The Chair: We're sticking to the amendment right now, not the main motion.

Sébastien, do you have something to say on the amendment?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Yes. I'd like to address a number of factors.

First of all, the traditional format for hockey playoffs is four out of seven. When we talk about the final game, are we referring to the seventh, the fourth or the fifth? I can't say which it's going to be.

Not only that, but there's the matter of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation in the motion. When I was young, I remember watching the Canadiens and even Nordiques games on the CBC. Unfortunately, for over 20 years now, a lot of games are no longer broadcast.

I understand it's because Rogers and TVA Sports paid a lot of money for the rights. That's why the Bloc Québécois will not support the motion.

[*English*]

The Chair: Is there any further discussion on the amendment?

There is no discussion on the amendment.

Mr. Michael Coteau: Can we hear the amendment one more time?

The Chair: Yes. This is what we're discussing. Until we vote on the amendment, we are dealing with the amendment.

Mr. Michael Coteau: I asked if I could hear the amendment one more time before we vote on it.

The Chair: You asked if what...?

Mr. Michael Coteau: Can we hear the amendment before we vote on it?

The Chair: The amendment is very simple. You said that, at the end of the motion, you added that the CBC will be broadcasting the final games.

• (1735)

Mr. Michael Coteau: Okay. That's great.

The Chair: That's the amendment.

Now, before I call the question on the amendment, I just want to make sure that we know we're voting on the amendment, and I just want to add something. This could have been the Canucks, you know, guys, if they hadn't dragged their feet.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Chair: Okay. That's just so you know that. All right, so the west has got to look at this thing.

Is anyone opposed to the amendment? Put your hands up, please.

We have opposition to the amendment.

Now, Niki, what are you doing with that vote? Are you voting for the amendment or against it?

Ms. Niki Ashton: On the amendment, I'm inclined not to support it given that it remains to be seen.

Yes, we won't support it.

The Chair: I think we should call a recorded vote, because people were putting their hands up.

Mr. Michael Coteau: I withdraw the amendment.

Mrs. Rachael Thomas: The motion doesn't say that they are or aren't airing it.

The Chair: Are you now withdrawing the amendment?

Mr. Michael Coteau: I withdraw the amendment before the vote.

(Amendment withdrawn)

The Chair: All right. The amendment has been withdrawn. We don't vote on the amendment.

We're voting on the motion unamended and as is.

Is there any discussion on the motion finally?

Mr. Noormohamed.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: I would like to say one more thing about this. While my voice is going.... I am so pleased to see the Conservative Party standing with the Edmonton Oilers, who expressed today their support for the 2SLGBTQI+ community by declaring it Pride Month and by using pride tape. I hope their caucus takes that signal and support for the Edmonton Oilers and brings it to their policies as well—

The Chair: On a point of order, Mr. Godin.

Mr. Noormohamed, that's not a point of order.

Yes, Monsieur, on the motion?

[Translation]

Mr. Joël Godin: To my knowledge, unanimous consent is needed to withdraw an amendment. You began the vote, so let's finish it and move on afterwards to the initial motion.

[English]

The Chair: Well, the amendment has been withdrawn. There's no amendment on the table at the moment.

We're going to the motion.

An hon. member: This is all on the motion.

[Translation]

Mr. Joël Godin: No, we don't have the right to proceed in that way.

[English]

The Chair: Is there any further discussion? We're voting.

Sébastien.

[Translation]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: The key point for me that's worth noting is that there cannot be interference in the CBC's programming, which has to remain independent of its senior management and, of course, the government. That's why we're going to vote against the motion.

For those who are interested, I would add, as the Bloc Québécois spokesperson for sports, that I'll still be cheering for the Edmonton Oilers in the finals.

Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Now we'll call the vote on the motion unamended.

(Motion negated: nays 6; yeas 5)

The Chair: Having ended that, let's go back to the project. We have five minutes.

Are there any questions on Bill C-354?

On the bill, I have Taleeb Noormohamed.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: I have one question for my friend Mr. Champoux.

I have a lot of concern about government directing independent, arm's-length regulatory agencies to do something. In this case, the duty to consult the Government of Quebec would create unreasonable burden for the CRTC. It gives direction, frankly, from Parliament to the CRTC.

How do you reconcile the independence of the CRTC with specific directions from Parliament?

• (1740)

[Translation]

Mr. Martin Champoux: I am delighted about my colleague Mr. Noormohamed's question. If the Liberals found such a simple-minded question to counter this bill, I feel reassured. It means that there are not many arguments against it and that their position can only be ideological. If I had been a witness who was unfamiliar with this committee, I would never have dared to give that kind of an answer to a colleague.

In response to his question, I would say that it happens all the time. It's the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission Act. The act includes ways in which the CRTC must behave in applying the act, in studies and in its decisions. Asking it to consult Quebec is not telling it what to put in the decision. That is not at all the purpose of this bill.

Its purpose is rather to ensure that when the CRTC receives a new regulation to be introduced, such as a new directive from the government or the House of Commons, and it notices that it would have an impact on broadcasting, it would notify Quebec, the provinces and the francophone communities outside of Quebec that something new is coming. The CRTC could then ask them for their comments. That's it. It's nothing more than that, and it's not binding.

It's not giving Quebec power to influence CRTC decisions, but giving Quebec, and the other provinces that wish to have it, the opportunity to comment upon the final wording of this bill, to report on their expectations or concerns to the CRTC, just as an organization would do in its brief during a future study of the issue.

That would enable Quebec, owing to its cultural distinctiveness and the sensitivity shown repeatedly by successive Quebec governments, to tell the CRTC that it can do something, but that Quebec has some concerns to which it would like to draw the CRTC's attention. It's as simple as that. There's nothing more binding than that. Nothing that gives Quebec any power. It's just a way of doing things more straightforwardly with the Quebec nation, in a better informed and more elegant manner.

[English]

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: I'll end by simply saying, as Mr. Champoux well knows, that the CRTC already consults with the Government of Quebec and other provinces. If that is his concern, he need not worry.

With that, I will give my time back to the chair.

The Chair: Now I have Sébastien for six minutes.

[Translation]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'd like to welcome the witness and thank him for coming.

My first question is: How does the bill affect the current CRTC consultation process?

Mr. Martin Champoux: In fact, it has hardly any impact on the current consultation process. All it really does is demonstrate the CRTC's awareness of Quebec's cultural distinctiveness and its unique broadcasting system, which is different in many respects from broadcasting in the rest of Canada.

As I was saying earlier to our colleague Mr. Noormohamed, all it does is require the CRTC to send a little signal to Quebec to say that it's about to begin conducting a study on broadcasting and that Quebec will no doubt have something to say about it. The CRTC would then ask Quebec to comment on the issue.

It's an effort to avoid what happened with Bill C-11, when Quebec's expectations were only received when the bill had almost got to the royal assent stage. There was, quite rightly, considerable disappointment and frustration.

The Bloc Québécois simply wants to take the initiative to prevent a situation like that from recurring. Bill C-354 therefore has no real impact on the CRTC's consultation process. In fact, I think it would even facilitate it.

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: I do in fact remember that.

Generally speaking, how would Bill C-354 contribute to the protection of Quebec and francophone culture in North America?

Mr. Martin Champoux: Insofar as communities outside of Quebec take advantage.... I want to withdraw what I just said because the francophone communities outside of Quebec are already very active and very proactive in terms of the CRTC's consultation processes. They are being consulted systematically. The only thing it would add to what is already the case, is warning the Quebec government or at least letting it know when something is about to be studied by the CRTC and that consultations on regulatory matters are about to begin. This would enable the Quebec government to make proposals and ask questions, or even let things go if it deems that it's unnecessary for it to comment on an issue.

When all is said and done, it doesn't change much for the CRTC. It simply allows Quebec to react more promptly and effectively when required.

• (1745)

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: Would this proposed consultation obligation apply to all regulations introduced by the CRTC?

Mr. Martin Champoux: It only applies to the rules affecting broadcasting in Quebec. It only concerns those that could have an impact on Quebec and francophone culture.

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: You've partly answered my last two questions, but I want to ask them anyway.

Does this consultation obligation give decision-making power to Quebec and the provincial governments?

Mr. Martin Champoux: No. It only gives them the power to be consulted or notified when a consultation affecting them is about to begin.

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: How would Bill C-354 contribute to official language minority communities?

Mr. Martin Champoux: We spoke about that earlier, but I answered Mr. Godin's question rather briefly because I was running

out of time. There is a level of sensitivity that needs to be taken into consideration in Bill C-354, and in regulatory matters and decisions in general, with respect to francophone communities outside of Quebec, which do not experience the same reality as Quebec francophones.

A consultation process is already in place. What Bill C-354 adds is the systematic consultation of provincial and even territorial governments as well. The idea of consulting territories was in fact previously raised. We know, for example, that there's a very dynamic francophone community in the Yukon. So perhaps the territories would also want to be consulted.

However, at meetings where the bill is to be studied, I would like to see that concerns expressed by members of francophone communities outside of Quebec be heard, because relations with their provincial government can be inconsistent. For a while, they might have a government that appreciates their concerns and their circumstances, and at other times, one that does not. I'm not convinced, for example, that New Brunswick Acadians would trust their current government to defend their interests. So sensitivity needs to be factored in. I am also definitely prepared to amend this portion of the bill about the consultation of provincial governments to ensure that when the definitive version has been reached, francophone communities outside of Quebec, and the groups that represent them, can feel reassured about the legislation we are working towards.

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: Thank you, Mr. Champoux, for your leadership in this matter.

I have just over a minute left. Would you like to add anything?

Mr. Martin Champoux: It's kind of you to offer me just over a minute to add something. It doesn't happen often, so I'm going to take advantage of your offer.

I'd like to go back to Mr. Noormohamed's question, because I sense an ideological opposition to the bill's underlying principle. When you stop and look closely at what Bill C-354 really is, it's clear that it is neither a binding bill, nor one that negatively affects the rights of Quebec's anglophone minority, which is very well served, with its own broadcasting system, and lots of radio stations and news media.

In short, it does not interfere in any way with this community. If it were to do so, I'd be interested in hearing about amendments to correct it, because that's not its purpose at all.

The impression I'm getting, then, is that the arguments against the bill are mainly ideological and coming from a specific faction of this caucus, but I'd like to reassure the members. It's not a separatist matter, but rather an effort to acknowledge the cultural distinctiveness of Quebec and the fact that broadcasting decisions have an impact on Quebec culture. The only objective is for the Quebec government to be consulted, in the form of being told that something is coming and being asked whether it has any comments.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Martin. You're going over.

Niki Ashton, you have six minutes.

[Translation]

Ms. Niki Ashton: Okay, thank you very much.

The relationship between francophone communities and the CRTC has been in place for many years. The CRTC is well aware of the francophone stakeholders who are most likely to come and discuss francophone markets outside of Quebec. This relationship should be encouraged, and it's important to ensure that the CRTC clearly consults francophone communities with respect to francophone markets.

Would you be prepared to back a change in support for francophone communities outside of Quebec with respect to its related markets, while maintaining the aspect of Quebec's distinctiveness with respect to its own francophone market, as stated in the bill?

Mr. Martin Champoux: Thank you very much for your question.

I answered it a little earlier, but I'm happy to answer it more specifically now. The answer is yes, we are going to do whatever is necessary to ensure that francophone communities outside of Quebec can feel that this legislation, once in place, might possibly be a tool for them, and that it is definitely not something that would interfere with a process that is already working very well for them.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Let's look at a specific example.

In our institutions, there is sometimes a disconnect with respect to adaptations in French. A few months ago, there was talk about a Canadian podcast called *ALONE A Love Story*. CBC Podcasts decided to use the services of a studio in Paris because it felt that a Quebec accent wouldn't have as much international potential. Once the news got out about it, they changed their minds and it came back to Canada.

Do you think that if Quebec had been consulted, it would have recommended to the CBC that it should avoid a Quebec accent?

• (1750)

Mr. Martin Champoux: I think that CBC/Radio-Canada made a mistake. The president acknowledged it and apologized. I can't see how Quebec, if consulted by the CRTC, would ever recommend to the CBC that it shouldn't avoid the Quebec accent. In any event, if Quebec had been consulted about something like that I'm sure that they would have said not to avoid the Quebec accent.

And you have to be careful. There's not just one Quebec accent, but all kinds. There are French-Canadian and European accents, but also dozens of regional accents; Gaspé and the Magdalen

Islands are only a couple of examples, and then there's Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean and Abitibi.

I'm sorry about your Abitibi accent, Mr. Lemire. You don't in fact have an accent.

All of which is to say that when Quebec dubbing specialists make productions for foreign markets, they use a version of French described as international French, which is much more neutral. They use a version of French with a much less pronounced accent than French studios use. It would be wrong to think that Quebec productions are made with a Quebec accent and that these productions are less marketable abroad as a result. The fact is that productions made in France are far less neutral than what the Quebec dubbing industry is capable of doing.

To answer your question, it would perhaps be worth doing a better job of publicizing this to ensure that people at the CBC wouldn't hesitate to use Quebec companies to translate their podcasts.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Right. Thank you. We agree.

[English]

I'd like to switch to an English question.

We've heard a number of concerning statements, from both the leader of the official opposition and the Conservatives in this committee, attacking and referring to defunding the CBC. At the same time, we saw a direct line between the Liberals' threatening cuts to the CBC/Radio-Canada and CBC responding with layoffs.

The loss of the CBC/Radio-Canada would be a disaster. It would be a disaster for communities like the ones that I represent, for communities across the country, that depend on the CBC for local news. It would also be a devastating loss for francophones outside of Quebec, who look to Radio-Canada to get good journalism about their reality in their language, not to mention, obviously, the implications in Quebec itself.

The Conservatives have played political games with respect to the future of CBC and, by association, Radio-Canada. We know from the past that Conservatives would not hesitate to cut the CBC and Radio-Canada once in power, as they did before.

How do you see this bill helping empower media in French, including when it comes to protecting Radio-Canada?

[Translation]

Mr. Martin Champoux: It's a bill that asks the CRTC to systematically consult Quebec, and perhaps the provinces or communities, depending on the final form it takes. It's not a bill that necessarily has anything to do with what happens at CBC/Radio-Canada. I wouldn't want to go on at length or in too much detail, even if you know me and are aware of the fact that it's a matter I feel strongly about.

I'll simply say that if the Quebec government were consulted about the status of the CBC, I'm sure it would say that the CBC is an essential vehicle for francophone culture and Quebec culture, and that being the case, cutting back on funding for CBC/Radio-Canada as a public broadcaster would probably be a serious mistake. Nevertheless, I can't speak on behalf of the Quebec government. The CRTC did not consult the Quebec government in a context not unlike what we would have with the adoption of Bill C-354. Quebec would no doubt agree with me in saying that the CBC is a vehicle for culture.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Ashton. I think your time is up.

Go ahead, Mr. Noormohamed.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: Madam Chair, it being 5:54, I would move that we adjourn the meeting.

The Chair: Do I have any objection to that?

Is there unanimous consent?

Mr. Philip Lawrence (Northumberland—Peterborough South, CPC): I have a point of order.

We need to thank the witnesses before we leave.

The Chair: I would like to thank the witness for coming today and presenting to us.

Thank you, Mr. Champoux.

The meeting is adjourned.

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