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Chair

Mr. Steven Blaney

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•(0905)

[Translation]

The Chair (Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC)): Good morning and welcome to this 38th meeting of the Standing Committee on Official Languages. Today is Tuesday, June 10. On the agenda, we have committee business, namely the consideration of two motions, followed by consideration of our draft report.

I'd like to inform you of the result of the request that had been made by members of the committee concerning the appearance of representatives of the Privy Council Office. A resolution to that effect had been adopted earlier. An invitation was sent to the Clerk of the Privy Council indicating that we wished to have him appear as part of our study of the language skills of exempted managers. Mr. Kevin Lynch informed us that he has a very heavy schedule and that the President of the Public Service Commission could come in his place. According to him and members of the Privy Council, she would be in a position to answer questions from members of this committee.

Mr. Rodriguez.

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez (Honoré-Mercier, Lib.): Mr. Chairman, I never heard a heavy schedule being used as an excuse. Anybody can claim to have a heavy schedule. There are ministers who are probably just as busy, or even more so. So that excuse seems to me a bit weak. I would repeat our invitation. We all have a heavy schedule; as you certainly must have, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. D'Amours.

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

At other times, we even told certain witnesses that we were prepared to adapt to their schedule to facilitate things. If it's too complicated for him to appear during the committee's sitting hours, namely on a Tuesday or a Thursday, we could be flexible in order to allow him to appear. I think we'll be as flexible as need be so that people can come and appear before us as witnesses.

The Chair: Mr. Nadeau.

Mr. Richard Nadeau (Gatineau, BQ): That Ms. Barrados appear is one thing, but it's not Ms. Barrados that we want to meet, although we always appreciate seeing her when that's on the schedule. We want to meet with the Privy Council; we're not talking about the same things. I reiterate the request and I agree that we should attempt to find a time that suits everyone.

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: I'd like to salute all our Conservative colleagues. Good morning.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Chair: Thank you. I'll take that as a personal remark, Mr. Rodriguez.

The other point I'd like to inform you about is that, as you will recall, we also sent an invitation to Ministers Verner and Emerson to appear jointly in order to discuss the Olympic Games. We got the same response. In June, this will be difficult given the small number of meetings we have left before the summer adjournment. However, both ministers would like to appear before the committee in September.

Since some members of the committee have just joined us, let me repeat that with regard to the study on the language skills of exempted managers, we had called upon Mr. Lynch to appear. He has stated that he would prefer that we call upon a member of the Public Service Commission. I'd like to know the position of the two other political parties on this matter so that we can close that discussion.

In conclusion, it's been proposed that we repeat the invitation to the Clerk of the Privy Council in the framework of our study on exempted managers and indicate that we would be flexible with regard to scheduling. That's what's been proposed.

Mr. Godin.

•(0910)

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): I agree that the invitation be directed to Mr. Lynch. That's my position.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Rodriguez.

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: A point of information, please, Mr. Chairman. What's been planned for the next two or three meetings?

The Chair: I'll tell you quite candidly that we only have consideration of the draft report at this point.

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: That's all. Next week, we don't run the risk of... That's fine.

The Chair: Are there any other questions or comments? If not, we will do what members of the committee have proposed. We will repeat our invitation to the clerk of the Privy Council to appear in the framework of our study on the language skills of exempted managers, and express that we are willing to be flexible in terms of scheduling. Thank you.

Now we could go on to the first motion which is being moved by Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours.

Mr. D'Amours.

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

As I have indicated during the last meeting of the Standing Committee on Official Languages, I'm moving a motion which is quite clear, generally speaking. Given everything that's going on right now among television broadcasters, we note that some of them are not in a position to offer French language services in all regions of the country. We also know that some television networks are also in a precarious financial situation. Therefore, I believe it would be appropriate to invite the consortium that will be presenting the Olympics on television to come and explain their plan of action clearly, mainly with regard to minority communities throughout the country. We'd like to know what their plan B is. I have asked this question in the past, mainly, in the event that TQS's situation is even more precarious in 2010 than it is today, what is the consortium's plan B to offer more? Right now, we see that there are players missing and even more to be missing in the future. I think it's important for them to come and present, explain and clarify their future plan in the event that there are additional problems.

The Chair: Thank you.

Are there any questions or comments on the motion?

Mr. Godin.

Mr. Yvon Godin: I agree with this proposal, but I think that we should go even further. I'd like to propose an amendment to this motion and add that Radio-Canada should be invited afterwards. Otherwise, if we wait until we've met with this group, and once we've heard what they have to say, we could... I think we should meet them before we meet the two ministers, because they don't seem in any hurry to come here. Similarly, perhaps we should meet CTV, which obtained the contract, and then decide whether we should meet Radio-Canada/CBC before meeting the ministers. That would close the loop. We would have met with people from the media and we could ask the ministers what they're going to do if the Games are not broadcast in certain regions of the country, and ask them what the government's responsibility is in this regard. That's why I support Mr. D'Amours's motion. We would thus have a complete portrait of everything that happened. We've already met the IOC, we're meeting with the broadcasters' group and then we could meet with the ministers so that they can explain what they're going to do.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Godin.

Mr. Lemieux.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, CPC): I think that Mr. D'Amours' motion is certainly a good one, because we received the VANOC which clearly explained not being in charge of the contract. The IOC is completely in charge of the contract. I

would like to invite the key stakeholders and focus on the issue which is to find out what they are going to do. They got the contract. What will they do to make sure that the broadcasting really extends to francophones everywhere in Canada?

I do not want to adopt this amendment, because the CBC and Radio-Canada have nothing to do with it, they did not get the contract, and that will be their alibi. Mr. Godin put many questions to VANOC and to someone else—I do not remember exactly who it was—but they explained that this was not their contract and that they could not do anything because the contract was concluded by the IOC. Consequently, if the committee meets the people from the CBC to put some pressure on them, they will want to know what it is that we do not understand. They did not get the contract, therefore they have no responsibility for broadcasting the Olympic Games in French. Therefore, in my opinion, we would do better to focus on the crucial issue, by asking the companies that got the contract what they will do to make sure that the Games will be properly broadcast for francophones everywhere in Canada. The CBC is not involved, as its representatives will tell us.

Therefore, I support the motion but I oppose the amendment.

• (0915)

Mr. Yvon Godin: I thought about tabling an amendment, but I have not yet done so officially.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Excuse me, Mr. Godin.

The Chair: Mr. Godin, this helps me understand what you mean. You are raising this as a point of discussion at this point in time.

We will continue in the same order with Mr. Petit, Mr. Rodriguez and Mr. D'Amours.

Mr. Daniel Petit (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. D'Amours tabled a good motion. We should congratulate them from time to time, because they do a good job. However, there is a potential problem. TQS is now before Quebec's Superior Court to define whether it will offer news services, etc. I agree that we should invite representatives from TQS, but we should know what the Superior Court's decision will be, when the station will be redefined. If we had received representatives from TQS in a much stabler period of time, we could have simply ask them questions about how they intend to broadcast the 2010 Olympic Games, etc. However, if the Superior Court rejects TQS's requests, the network will no longer exist. The questioning would have to be haphazard, if not non-existent, because we will not have anything more to do with TQS.

I would support Mr. Godin's favourable amendment, although it has not yet been tabled, because Mr. Godin is an expert in official languages. Once we have the Superior Court's decision, if TQS no longer exists, it would be interesting to invite Radio-Canada. It might be the only company that can replace TQS at a moment's notice, because it is not an easy thing to do. Perhaps we should play with what Mr. Godin said and make it an amendment. However, I would not separate the issues. First, I would make sure that we find out the date on which the TQS decision will be handed down. If the Remstar group cannot keep TQS, under the Bankruptcy Act, there will be a legal void. We will be in a bad situation. Then, we should also have an opportunity to ask them questions and see whether Mr. Godin's proposal could be considered, thus allowing Radio-Canada to intervene. This is an excellent proposal, but we should find the right timing and not go against court decisions. If we did this, it would be an infringement of the legislative branch on the legal branch. However, our system does not allow this kind of infringement.

This is a problem that could well arise. I would not want to hold a meeting for nothing. Mr. D'Amours's time is precious as is mine. I would like things to go smoothly.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Petit.

Mr. Rodriguez.

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: Mr. Chairman, I often hear people say that we cannot discuss an issue because it is before the courts. That is certainly not the case here.

Let's take a step back, Mr. Chairman. A call for tenders was issued and a consortium won. The Standing Committee on Official Languages asked a number of questions. CBC/Radio-Canada lost and is not in the picture; it refused outright. When the CTV, TQS and RDS networks won the call for tenders, they asked Radio-Canada to cover certain regions. But the corporation refused saying that if it did not obtain the entire contract, the undertaking would not be profitable and it was not at all interested.

We met with Radio-Canada and I met with the president of RDS at the time, and that is the end of it. A consortium won the bid and we must deal with that consortium, regardless of the decision that would be brought down. We will see what follow-up is required. We must ask questions and we cannot wait to see what is going to happen. We have no control over the legal process, and we do not know how long that will take.

Let's call the members of the consortium before the committee. Mr. Lemieux is right. It does not deal with the negotiations or anything else, but it is a matter of determining how the consortium will deliver services in French in all regions of the country.

• (0920)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. D'Amours.

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: Mr. Chairman, let's not get caught up in details. The consortium has decided to sign agreements with television stations. The consortium was my plan B. If something were to happen to TQS, for example, what would the consortium's plan B be? Once it has appeared before our committee to share with us its intentions, the consortium will also have to tell us what its

plan B is. A consortium of that size is surely aware of its plan B, in the event of a crisis.

That way, we would have guarantees. If ever they did not respect their promises, we would have good arguments. Let's not worry about what the Superior Court will decide. The consortium must tell us what it intends to do. Then it will have to keep its promises.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. D'Amours.

Mr. Nadeau.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: The bulk of the topic has been covered, Mr. Chairman. A contract was in fact awarded. The situation TQS ends up in is not what we want to talk about, regardless of whether it is before the Quebec Superior Court or the CRTC. The consortium includes a number of television stations. A contract was signed. As for us, we want to ensure that the broadcast in French will cover 100% of the country, so that all French-speaking citizens, in Quebec, in Acadia or elsewhere, have access to it in their own language.

The issue of Radio-Canada/CBC is different. I think we should judge the outcome of the meeting that we will have, the discussions that we will have. If we decide that we are not satisfied with plan B, we may want to know where the evaluation is at as regards the news, the way the news will be reported at CBC, since there will be coverage, I assume. That is another important aspect, but the main issue is the Olympic Games as such, and the broadcasting of the Games by the consortium. I do not think we need to concern ourselves with the situation at TQS, which is a separate issue.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: You have the last word, Mr. Lebel.

Mr. Denis Lebel (Roberval—Lac-Saint-Jean, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I agree with Mr. Lemieux and Mr. Rodriguez. I would just like to add a short comment. We must ensure that both official languages are available in the country for all Canadians who want to have access to the Olympic Games. I understand that Mr. Nadeau is talking about the French fact, but as the Committee on Official Languages, that is our duty. If anglophones in Quebec also want access to the Olympic Games, they must be able to have access to them. That is our role.

Mr. Nadeau just said that our role was to ensure that francophones have access to the broadcasts. That is accurate, so I agree. It is all up to the consortium, and it is the consortium that will have to hold negotiations to meet the objective we all agree on.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lebel.

Mr. Godin.

Mr. Yvon Godin: We do have guarantees that CTV will transmit the broadcast by cable, satellite, and there will be transmissions by antenna. So that covers all of Canada. That is perhaps why Mr. Nadeau raised the issue, as we are always inclined to talk about francophones, but in this case, the Olympic Games are already completely covered. The issue is whether or not francophones will have access to broadcasts in French. There would appear to be some 40 000 homes that are not covered by CTV and the group that was selected.

● (0925)

The Chair: If committee members are ready, we could vote on the motion.

(Motion agreed to unanimously)

The Chair: We will now suspend the meeting for a few moments to go in camera and to give Mr. Nadeau some time to present his motion on a topic that will be dealt with in camera.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

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_____ (Pause) _____

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● (0930)

The Chair: The meeting is once again public.

Mr. Nadeau, could you please read your motion?

Mr. Richard Nadeau: With pleasure, Mr. Chairman.

That the Standing Committee on Official Languages write to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, the Status of Women and Official Languages and Minister for La Francophonie, Josée Verner, to inquire as to how her department intends to use the \$30 million announced in the March 2007 budget to help official language minority communities.

The Chair: Thank you.

Are there any questions or comments on the motion?

Mr. Lemieux.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: I don't have a problem with the motion, but I would like to ask some questions on the process that was followed.

The subcommittee discusses many things, but it cannot make decisions for the committee. Proposals from meetings of the subcommittee must be presented to members of our committee, who accept or reject them. Each member must have an opportunity to discuss a report from the subcommittee. If we adopt it, we can continue our work, and the clerk can do his work. I missed a few meetings, and I would like to know if the committee discussed this initiative from the subcommittee.

The Chair: This is the first time the motion has been discussed in the presence of all committee members, Mr. Lemieux.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: But I don't know how the idea came about within the subcommittee. Was it seen as a motion, or simply an idea? An initiative cannot be undertaken directly without prior approval of the full committee.

Normally, when the subcommittee holds a meeting and prepares a report, motions or key information are presented to members of the committee, who then have an opportunity to adopt or reject the report. As I said, I don't have a problem with the motion, but I would like to ensure that the required process is followed and that the subcommittee is not making decisions without the full committee being aware of them.

The Chair: Your point is well taken. The clerk will validate the process, to ensure decisions of the committee are ratified by all committee members. That seems logical to me, in principle.

Are there any questions or comments on the motion or the procedures? I have Mr. Nadeau and Mr. Godin on my list.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: The list of fundamentals can be verified. And the motion was publicly tabled in the proper manner in today's committee meeting. Things are crystal clear, in my opinion. So all that remains to be done is to vote for or against the proposal. The proposal was explained in an in-camera meeting and has now been made public.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Godin.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Various issues like this one can be discussed by the steering committee. The motion in question was discussed. I agree with Mr. Lemieux when he says that the full committee needs to reach a decision. And that is exactly what we are going to do. Mr. Nadeau did not come here and say that a decision was reached regarding his motion and that it was now time to move it. The majority of members of this committee will need to make a decision. I think that the rules have been followed to the letter here.

Quite often in the past we've seen steering committees where parties move motions in public while others do so in camera. In this particular case, we're prepared to do so in public. A decision will be reached and everyone will have an opportunity to express a preference. Nothing has been done behind the committee's back and the steering committee has not made any decision. We are going to agree to, or defeat, a motion.

● (0935)

The Chair: Thank you.

The clerk has just informed me that the subcommittee is only empowered to do what the standing committee authorizes it to do.

The subcommittee, which was struck by the standing committee is the steering committee. The steering committee deals with planning and the direction the standing committee may wish to take, but these decisions have to be approved by the standing committee.

Mr. Lemieux.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

We will certainly vote on the motion. Having said that, I would like to point out that the proper procedure has not been followed. In fact, Mr. Nadeau indicated that we wanted to send a letter, but that it was not sent. We expected the letter to be sent, but the full committee didn't reach a decision on that.

Now, there is a motion and we're going to vote on this motion, that is not a problem. However, I would like to be sure that the correct procedure is being followed. I would also like to point out that it was not followed in this case because there was a decision to send the letter without the committee's knowledge.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Lemieux.

Are we ready to vote on the motion?

[Motion carried unanimously.]

The Chair: Thank you. We really have an excellent committee, the best on the Hill.

I'll give you the floor, Mr. Nadeau, but first we will suspend the meeting, so we can get back to the report.

The Chair: The meeting is suspended so that we can continue our consideration of the report.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: That's right, we'll move in camera. Good.

[The meeting continues in camera.]

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