

Invited Ukrainian soldier who fought for Nazis to Zelenskyy speech; given two standing ovations

Calls for Speaker to resign after 'unforgiveable error'

## **MICKEY DJURIC**

OTTAWA— Some opposition leaders are calling on House of Commons Speaker Anthony Rota to step down after he invited a man who fought for the Nazis to attend a speech by the Ukrainian president, a move Prime Minister Justin Trudeau called “deeply embarrassing” for the nation.

Rota rose in the House of Commons on Monday and apologized to parliamentarians for inviting Yaroslav Hunka to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy’s address to Parliament last Friday and recognizing him as part of his own remarks.

But that wasn’t enough for the New Democrats and Bloc Québécois, who are calling for Rota’s resignation. Both opposition parties said he has lost the confidence of the House.

“It’s an unforgiveable error which puts the entire House in disrepute, and I believe a sacred trust has been broken,” NDP House leader Peter Julian said in the House of Commons after calling for his resignation.

“It’s for that reason, for the good of the institution of the House of Commons, that I say sadly I don’t believe you can continue in this role,” he said, addressing the Speaker.

“Regrettably, I must respectfully ask that you step aside.”

The Tories have so far stopped short of asking Rota to resign. They want Trudeau to take responsibility instead, even though his office did not have access to the Speaker’s invite list.

Rota apologized in the House Monday morning, saying he alone was responsible for inviting and recognizing Yaroslav Hunka, who fought for the First Ukrainian Division during the Second World War.

“I am deeply sorry that I have offended many with my gesture and remarks,” said Rota, who oversaw an impromptu debate Monday in the House of Commons over his actions.

“No one — not even anyone among you, fellow parliamentarians, or from the Ukrainian delegation — was privy to my intention or my remarks prior to their delivery.”

Rota’s recognition of Hunka was met Friday with a standing ovation from MPs — twice.

“The Speaker has acknowledged his mistake and has apologized, but this is something that is deeply embarrassing to the Parliament of Canada, and by extension to all Canadians,” Trudeau told reporters Monday.

Government House leader Karina Gould moved a motion Monday afternoon seeking unanimous consent to have Hunka’s recognition struck from the record.

It was denied. Manitoba Conservative MP Marty Morantz (Charleswood—St. James— Assiniboia— Headingley) said deleting the text would only have one purpose: to forget what happened and wash the record clean.

“It goes without saying those that don’t learn from history are doomed to repeat it,” Morantz said, borrowing a quote from writer and philosopher George Santayana, who is believed to have said it first.

Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre attempted to pass his own motion on Monday, asking the House to condemn the invitation and the prime minister.

It was defeated, too. The Conservatives believe the blame should lay solely with the Prime Minister’s Office, saying the government had a responsibility to vet attendees of such a high-profile event for security reasons.

But Liberals accused the Conservatives of politicizing the issue and spreading false claims, such as that Trudeau personally

met with Hunka during a reception, and that the Prime Minister’s Office vetted the Speaker’s guest list.

In the House, Rota reaffirmed the Prime Minister’s Office’s initial statement that neither the government of Canada nor the Ukrainian delegation had any knowledge the 98-year-old Hunka had been invited to attend an address by Zelenskyy.

During parliamentary addresses, each party including the Prime Minister’s Office receive a number of invitations they can dole out.

Each group submits lists of potential guests to Parliament’s Protocol Office, which co-ordinates the sending of invitations to the address.

A spokesperson for the Speaker said lists are not shared between groups. For example, the names suggested by the Speaker are not shared with political parties or the Prime Minister’s Office and vice versa.

Once guests arrive on Parliament Hill, they must go through a physical security screening.

Hunka’s invitation has drawn international criticism from Russia and Poland, as MPs caution each other not to allow such messages to feed into propoganda against Ukraine.

The Bloc Québécois deputy leader, Alain Thérien, accused Russia of using the debacle to further harm Ukraine amid its ongoing assault on the country.

Trudeau asked Canadian’s to push back against Russian propoganda and disinformation “and continue our steadfast and unequivocal support for Ukraine.”

Zelenskyy was in Ottawa on Friday as part of visits to North America intended to bolster support from western allies for Ukraine’s fight against the Russian invasion.

Russian President Vladimir Putin has painted his enemies in Ukraine as “neo-Nazis.” Zelenskyy himself is Jewish and lost relatives in the Holocaust.

Gould said as a Canadian of Jewish origin and also a descendent of Holocaust survivors, she felt “particularly hurt” by the situation.

“I think in light of the events of recent days, and the decisions that the Speaker has made, he needs to personally reflect about whether or not he can maintain the confidence of the House,” Gould told reporters Monday following Rota’s apology.

Hunka, a 98-year-old, lives in Rota’s constituency and is a veteran of the First Ukrainian Division, which was also known as the Waffen-SS Galicia Division or the SS 14th Waffen Division, a voluntary unit that was under the command of the Nazis.

— The Canadian Press

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