

Canada – United Kingdom
Interparliamentary Association



Association interparlementaire
Canada – Royaume-Uni

Report of the Canada-United Kingdom Inter-Parliamentary Association

Bilateral Visit to the United Kingdom

**London, England
Cardiff, Wales
Edinburgh, Scotland**

From November 13 to 17, 2023

Report

The Canada-United Kingdom Inter-Parliamentary Association (RUUK) appointed a delegation of seven parliamentarians to participate in bilateral meetings in London, England; Cardiff, Wales; and Edinburgh, Scotland from 13 to 17 November 2023. The delegation was composed of Mr. James Maloney, MP and head of the delegation; Hon. Tony Dean, Senator; Hon. Leo Housakos, Senator; Ms. Patricia Lattanzio, MP; Mr. John Barlow, MP; Mr. Michael Barrett, MP; and Ms. Julie Vignola, MP. The delegation was supported by Ms. Jessica Kulka, Association Secretary for the Canada–European Union Inter-Parliamentary Association, and Mr. Ryan van den Berg, RUUK Advisor.

In addition to strengthening the working relationship between parliamentarians in Canada and the United Kingdom (U.K.), this mission had four principal objectives:

- To engage with parliamentarians on questions of security, intelligence sharing, and foreign interference;
- To advance discussions of sector-specific issues related to the Canada–United Kingdom free trade agreement under negotiation;
- To learn about issues related to devolution; and
- To share best practices for parliamentary matters.

This visit allowed RUUK members the opportunity to build on the strong relationships they have with parliamentarians and other interlocutors in the U.K., as well as forge new ties with key stakeholders. The delegates have since been in contact with parliamentarians across the U.K. with whom they met during their mission. They intend to continue the discussions they had with their counterparts, especially those concerning the scrutiny of the upcoming Canada–U.K. free trade agreement.

VISIT TO LONDON, ENGLAND

A. Monday, November 13, 2023 – London

On 13 November 2023, members began their mission at the Canadian High Commission to the United Kingdom before continuing to Westminster. The focus of these meetings was on the two objectives concerning matters “reserved” to the U.K., namely security and trade¹.

1. Briefing from Canadian High Commission staff (Canada House)

At the Canadian High Commission, located at Canada House, the delegates were briefed by the local leadership team. They met with Robert Fry, Deputy High Commissioner; Celeste Kinsey, Minister-Counsellor (Political and Public Affairs); BGen Dwayne Parsons, Canadian Defence Liaison Staff; Andrew Smith, Minister-Counsellor (Commercial &

¹ Pursuant to its devolution settlements with Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, the United Kingdom Parliament retains exclusive authority to legislate on certain matters, called “reserved matters.” Those matters that are not reserved are considered devolved.

Economic); Marc-André Desmarais, Second Secretary (Political Affairs); Katerina Burgess, Political Councillor; and Giles Boden-Wilson, Visits Coordinator.

During this briefing, the members received updates about the political situation in Westminster, as well as an overview of key issues relating to the High Commission's work. Notable topics discussed included Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's cabinet reshuffle and His Majesty King Charles III's first speech from the throne as monarch, which was delivered the week prior to the delegation's arrival. Staff also explained that the U.K.'s Integrated Review Refresh of the country's international policy had underlined a whole-of-government approach with a regional focus.

Throughout the discussions, the High Commission staff emphasized the depth of the bilateral relationship between Canada and the U.K., noting that the two countries share membership of more multilateral institutions than any other two nations. They highlighted commitments to shared priorities such as empowering women and girls, recognizing the importance of healthcare and immigration, and combating climate change. Staff also described the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the Five Eyes as partnerships in which Canada and the U.K. have been able to demonstrate especially close cooperation. For instance, both countries have provided among the highest level of financial support to Ukraine following Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022.

In this context, the staff discussed the importance of intelligence sharing and described each country's efforts to share expertise on countering disinformation and foreign interference. During this discussion, some members expressed concern that the U.K. had raised the national terrorism threat level for Canada to "very likely" and inquired about the process for making – and informing the Canadian Government about – such a determination.

In terms of trade, staff explained that Canada and the U.K. are among one another's most important partners for two-way trade and direct investment. Negotiators had recently completed their seventh round of negotiations toward a bilateral free trade agreement, with both access to Canada's supply-managed dairy sector and non-tariff trade barriers for Canadian beef and pork reportedly remain sticking points. Staff described Canada's negotiating position on these points and provided context about how Brexit was influencing the U.K.'s trade agenda.

2. Briefing on Devolution, Levelling Up and Political Trends (Canada House)

Association members then heard presentations from Akash Paun, Programme Director for Devolution at the Institute for Government, and Gideon Skinner, Head of Politics, Public Affairs, U.K. Ipsos Political Correspondent, on the related themes of devolution, levelling up and political trends. [Levelling up](#) refers to the U.K.'s plans to "spread opportunity more equally across the U.K." Mr. Paun described the asymmetrical devolution of powers across the U.K. and commented on the support for these arrangements in different regions and among various populations. In response to members' questions, he compared the U.K.'s devolution model to Canada's constitutional division of powers in a federal system, including as regards provisions for funding, decision-making and policy implementation.

Mr. Skinner used polling data to provide an overview of political trends in the U.K., particularly in regard to the state of the nation, levelling up and devolution, and the state of political play. He underlined that people in the U.K. had largely been unhappy with the current government due principally to concerns about the economy and the cost of living – including the perception that the levelling up scheme was not working as intended – as well as concerns about the National Health Service and immigration. He also discussed projections for electoral outcomes in Westminster in the next general election and public perceptions of key issues, such as Scottish independence. He noted that political polarization was an emerging challenge, suggesting that deliberative fora were an effective means to address it.

3. Westminster Palace

Upon their arrival at Westminster, Lord Purvis of Tweed provided members with a tour, where they had the opportunity to view the Speaker's Parade. Later, they watched debates of the House of Commons from the gallery. Jon Davies, CEO of the U.K. Branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, facilitated two roundtable sessions with U.K. Members of Parliament (MPs) on trade and on security, intelligence sharing and foreign interference.

4. Roundtable on Trade (Westminster)

The roundtable on trade began with an opening statement from the Rt. Hon. Liam Byrne, MP, Chair of the House of Commons Business and Trade Select Committee. That committee was newly formed in April 2023 to replace the International Trade committee, which was dissolved to reflect the U.K. government's reorganization. Mr. Byrne's remarks focused on three points:

- the importance of ensuring adequate parliamentary scrutiny of trade legislation, which in his view was minimal in the U.K.;
- the importance of securing a robust bilateral trade agreement with Canada; and
- the U.K.'s future trade prospects, including the need for friend-shoring, de-risking and de-coupling.

Mr. Byrne noted that the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement on Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), to which the U.K. had recently acceded but has not yet ratified, would provide an opportunity to put parliamentary scrutiny mechanisms to the test. He also commented on the relationship between economic growth, trade protectionism, and domestic de-risking in the context of new geopolitical relationships with countries such as China. In this context, he agreed with Ms. Vignola that trade could provide a useful mechanism to counter Chinese influence in African countries while supporting fair economic growth and improving democracies' access to valuable resources such as critical minerals.

On behalf of the delegation, Mr. Maloney stated that Canada is "ready, willing and able" to commit to a deal with the U.K. Many Canadian delegates emphasized that, as extremely close allies, in the current geopolitical context, Canada and the U.K.'s mutual economic security should take precedence over a win-lose style trade deal. Mr. Barlow,

echoed by other members, suggested that the U.K.'s non-tariff trade barriers on beef and pork worked against this spirit of economic partnership. Mr. Byrne responded that this perspective could inform ratification debates in the House of Commons of the United Kingdom, and Mr. Jon Davies pointed out that these types of frank discussions between legislators of friendly countries highlight the value of parliamentary diplomacy.

5. Roundtable on Security, Intelligence Sharing and Foreign Interference (Westminster)

U.K. MPs Antony Higginbotham, James Gray and Claudia Webbe took part in the roundtable session on security, intelligence sharing and foreign interference. Mr. Higginbotham opened the session by underlining the importance of continuing long-term support for Ukraine, noting that the conflict highlights the necessity of a robust domestic defence industry. He nevertheless added that it is important for parliamentarians to improve the scrutiny of their governments' response to conflicts such as Russia's war in Ukraine to ensure that any support provided is in the best interests of both recipients and the countries offering it. Parliamentarians from both countries noted that support for Ukraine remained strong, but that voters' appetites to provide further aid could depend on their perception of their own financial security.

Participants also noted that the conflict in Gaza was raising broader questions about Middle East security policy. Some noted that the conflict had revealed deep divisions domestically. Moreover, Mr. Gray pointed out that the increased media attention on the conflict had strengthened pacifist and anti-military sentiment in general, which, he said, could further reduce support for aid to Ukraine. For her part, Ms. Webbe observed that governments tend to provide more support to people affected by conflict in certain countries, depending on their foreign policy priorities.

In addition, parliamentarians from both sides spoke to the renewed importance of Arctic security due to melting polar ice, Russia's militarization of the north, and the green transition. While Mr. Gray stated that the U.K. is the last remaining democracy with Arctic warfare experience, Mr. Barrett pointed out that Canada provides the optimal training environment for Arctic conditions. Participants also discussed the role of NATO in the Arctic and the importance of technological advancements for Arctic warfare, including under-ice capability and hypersonic missile defence.

In response to Ms. Lattanzio's question about how U.K. foreign policy addresses the link between foreign interference and local populations' economic security, the roundtable ended with a discussion of "grey zone" defence. The grey zone refers to coercive but non-military activities such as cyberthreats and foreign interference in the economy and elections. Canadian delegates made clear that no amount of foreign interference should be tolerated in elections. They added that intelligence-sharing and deeper cooperation in the grey-zone defence space through partnerships such as the Five Eyes could help protect against cyberattacks and transnational oppression.

VISIT TO CARDIFF, WALES

A. Tuesday, November 14, 2023 – Cardiff

On 14 November 2023, members began their mission to Wales with a short visit to the Pierhead and a tour of the Welsh Senedd, facilitated by Al Davies, International Relations Manager at the Senedd. The remainder of their time was spent in meetings with Members of the Senedd (MSs) and officials. In addition to the formal meetings described below, the delegates enjoyed an official lunch hosted by Deputy Speaker David Rees, with MSs from various parties present. They also had the opportunity to observe Plenary (Question Period) and Questions to the First Minister of Wales.

1. Gender Equality Presentation by Canadian Parliamentarians (Senedd)

At the request of the new [Senedd Women's Caucus](#), formed in Spring 2023, Canadian delegates prepared a presentation on gender equality and the status of women in the Canadian Parliament. Senedd Women's Caucus Chair Joyce Watson MS, as well as members Delyth Jewell MS, Carolyn Thomas MS, and Senedd Secretary to the Women's Caucus Elin Sutton, attended the presentation and shared their perspectives in response.

Mr. Maloney introduced the Canadian presenters and described efforts undertaken by his mother, Senator Marian Maloney, to help establish the Judy LaMarsh Fund to help women candidates for the Liberal Party run in Canadian federal elections.

Ms. Lattanzio began the presentation by describing barriers to women running for office before providing figures on women's representation in the House of Commons (30.5%). She then described efforts undertaken by the Government of Canada to improve women's equality, including a gender-balanced Cabinet, funding for women's health research, which is often understudied, efforts to address period poverty, support for women in business, \$10/day childcare, the feminist international assistance policy, and appointment of the Minister of Gender Equality and Youth. She also provided an overview of the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women and its recent work.

Ms. Vignola continued by describing her experience of overcoming personal and systemic barriers to run for office. She also related the story of her grandmother's victory in securing access to adult education for divorced women and mothers. She explained that there is a double standard for mothers who run for office and urged acceptance rather than judgement for women parliamentarians with children. She also explained that, despite family-friendly infrastructure in Canada's parliament such as daycare and changing tables, there remained barriers to daycare access and overt sexism toward women legislators.

Members of the Senedd Women's Caucus responded with their own experiences. Ms. Jewell explained that women had once held over 50% of Senedd seats but that share had since fallen back, underscoring that women's representation cannot be taken for granted. She and Ms. Watson explained the Welsh government's planned legislation to require that half of Senedd party list candidates be women. They noted that it remained to be determined whether this was a devolved competence and described the benefits and drawbacks of legislating gender quotas for candidates. On one hand, they explained, women might feel that they are – or be perceived as – “token” representatives, and many feel that such an approach favours an artificially engineered equality of outcome over equality of opportunity. On the other hand, there is evidence of voter bias against women who hold the same qualifications as men, Welsh parties have shown patterns of selecting

women to run for more difficult seats, and other countries have already implemented gender quotas with success.

2. Security at the Senedd

James Attridge, Senior Security Manager of the Senedd Security Department, provided an overview of security at the Senedd. He emphasized that there is a need for balance between security and access to parliament. He also believed the Welsh devolution proposals, which could increase in the number of MSs in the Senedd, would likely increase the risk level. This increase would require expanding existing protection measures to cover new MSs. He added that the attack on Canada's Parliament in 2014, along with terrorist attacks in the U.K. in the following years, have led to an overall awareness that security measures need to increase.

Mr. Attridge described the measures taken by the Senedd to protect MSs, their staff and in some cases their families, which included a growing focus on their protection outside the Senedd and in the community. He described measures ranging from training for office staff to physical security to incident reporting to media threat monitoring. He explained how the Senedd prefers to work with protestors to manage the space and encourage rule-following, but he noted that security staff have the legal and physical capacity to remove protestors if necessary.

Senedd security teams work with various security and policing partners in Cardiff and the U.K., while also sharing expertise with other legislatures. In addition, Mr. Attridge explained that the security team had successfully increased its staff diversity in terms of experience and background by implementing flexible working arrangements, among other measures.

3. Evolution of Devolution

Siwan Davies, Director of Senedd Business, met with delegates to explain the devolution framework in Wales as well proposed changes to that framework, and describe the Senedd's business operations. She explained that powers devolved to Wales in 1999 had initially been limited: the initial devolution framework provided for a body corporate, the National Assembly for Wales, which did not have the power to make primary legislation (i.e., statutes) and which was wholly subordinate to Westminster. Today, the Senedd has primary law-making powers, limited tax-raising powers, and more devolved powers. The Senedd is not based on the Westminster model, but instead was informed by values such as sustainability, equality of opportunity, and bilingualism. It has also embraced modern technologies such as electronic participation from its inception.

Ms. Davies explained the Welsh government has tabled a reform proposal that includes increasing the size of the Senedd from 60 to 90 members and electing all members from a closed-list proportional representation system (as opposed to the current arrangement, which blends proportional representation with single-member plurality). The proposed changes are in part related to the greater number of powers devolved to the Scottish Parliament, which also has more members. In addition, many MSs, especially those from smaller parties, must sit on multiple committees, which limits their time available to scrutinize legislation.

Ms. Davies also described how funding levels to the Senedd staff would not necessarily increase alongside the expansion of the legislature, so discussions about future service levels to MSs were ongoing. Currently, 570 staff support 60 MSs. Fortunately, she explained, there is a built-in culture of reform among Senedd staff since the institution has experienced constant change since its establishment. In response to members' questions, Ms. Davies provided an overview of the structure of the constituency representation of MSs in Wales and MPs in Westminster; support for devolution and independence among the general population and political parties; the changing devolution of Welsh taxation powers; remuneration for MSs; and the top political issues for Welsh people, which she characterized as the cost of living and the economy, health and social care, and education.

B. Wednesday, November 15, 2023 – Cardiff, Edinburgh

The delegates had the opportunity to visit the St. Fagans National Museum of History, an open-air museum that chronicles Welsh history. They then travelled to Edinburgh.

VISIT TO EDINBURGH, SCOTLAND

A. Thursday, November 16, 2023 – Edinburgh (Scottish Parliament)

During their first day in Edinburgh, the delegation visited the Scottish Parliament (Holyrood), where they attended First Minister's Questions and met with members of the Scottish Parliament (MSPs). They also toured the legislature and attended a working lunch hosted by Claire Baker, Convener of the Economy and Fair Work Committee, where members had the opportunity to discuss the Scottish government's National Strategy for Economic Transformation and its plans for a just transition. Robert Fry, Deputy High Commissioner at the Canadian High Commission to the U.K., was present for the meetings in Edinburgh.

1. Snapshot of Parliament

Steven Bell, International Relations Officer at the Scottish Parliament, provided an overview of the Scottish parliamentary system. He emphasized that "proportionality reigns" in this system and dictates factors such as the number of opposition days allotted in the calendar to the number of conveners (chairs) each party can assign to committees. He also noted that the Scottish Parliament only very rarely sits past 5:00 PM, which members consider to be both a strength and a weakness. While this schedule limits the amount of time allotted for business, it is also more family friendly. Mr. Bell also described General Questions and First Minister's Questions, where party proportionality determines the number of questions and the Presiding Officer is able to select much of the content.

2. Meeting on Security Arrangements at the Scottish Parliament

RUUK members received a briefing on security from two Holyrood personnel: Becky Thomson, Head of Security, and Bob Mason, Information Security Analyst. They explained the various measures they take to protect MSPs; like Senedd security, Holyrood security teams protect MSPs' staff and families, whether on the grounds of the

Scottish Parliament, or in their homes and communities. These measures include but are not limited to education and training, physical security, and social media threat monitoring.

In response to a question from Senator Housakos, Ms. Thomson explained that security teams report to the Clerk/Chief Executive, who ultimately reports to the Speaker. The teams also coordinate with police and counterterrorism units in Scotland and the U.K. Although parliamentary security has the authority to decide on the Scottish Parliament's response to threats or emergencies, in practice they make joint decisions with police based on police advice. For certain issues, such as counterterrorism, Holyrood is a link in a U.K.-wide strategy involving units in London and in Scotland.

The security personnel also told the delegates about the changing threat level to Scottish Parliament and the evolution in responses to those threats. However, they stressed that the overall security risk level remains low. They explained how they mitigate internal threats and how they revised their security approaches in response to the murder of two U.K. MPs. The nature of demonstrations and protests was also changing, they explained, and it is necessary to strike a balance between democratic openness and security both on the outside grounds and in areas such as the public gallery. Nevertheless, in contrast to Westminster, MSPs rejected the need for armed security personnel.

3. Meetings with Advisors to the Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee

Iain McIver and Sarah McKay, researchers at the Scottish Parliament Information Centre and Advisors to the Scottish Parliament Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee, met with the delegates to discuss Scotland's post-Brexit landscape. The committee has since September 2022 published two reports on how devolution is changing following the U.K.'s exit from the EU. The researchers provided an overview of that work and offered thoughts on U.K.–Scotland relations in this context.

They explained that, when the U.K. was an EU member, the EU had jurisdiction over various matters that would otherwise have been reserved to Westminster. As such, Brexit had resulted in Westminster taking a more active role in these spaces. Since Brexit, they asserted, Westminster has also been increasingly taking unilateral action on powers that devolved administrations understand fall within their jurisdiction. Although the Sewell Convention holds that Westminster will “not normally” legislate on devolved matters, it is doing so despite explicit non-consent from devolved legislatures.

The researchers provided the example of the [U.K. Internal Market Act 2020](#), which many Scots – including the Scottish government – believe weakens Scotland's ability to legislate on devolved areas. In response to members' questions, they explained how Westminster and the U.K.'s devolved administration were grappling with the constitutional structure, including through the court system, to determine how to move forward.

4. Meeting with the Head of Business of Scotland's Futures Forum

Rob Littlejohn, Head of Business of Scotland's Futures Forum, the Scottish Parliament's think-tank, met with delegates to describe the organization's operations. He explained that the think-tank was established by Parliament to encourage long-term, strategic

thinking. Although it is wholly owned by the Scottish Parliament, its governance structure, including external partnerships, allows it to have a focus beyond parliamentary issues alone. However, the organization makes efforts to make these issues relevant to parliamentarians. Mr. Littlejohn provided examples of some of the think-tank's work, including discussions on topics such as taxation, land use, and artificial intelligence. He noted that some MSPs had recognized the Scotland's Futures Forum as responsible for reframing political debates and helping achieve more consensus, using the example of its work on drug use.

5. Meeting with Alison Johnstone, Presiding Officer of the Scottish Parliament

Association members had the opportunity to meet with Alison Johnstone, Presiding Officer of the Scottish Parliament, and Mark Brough, Principal Private Secretary. They had a lively exchange comparing the dynamics of Question Period in the Canadian Parliament with those of First Minister's Questions and General Questions in the Scottish Parliament. In particular, they highlighted how scrutiny could be affected by considerations of decorum, formality, the frequency the First Minister is present in the chamber, and the time allocated for each question. The Presiding Officer recalled her May 2023 visit to the Canadian Parliament and commented that she found the 35-second question and answer period for the House of Commons to be a lesson in the value of brevity. Members also learned about the selection process for questions, especially those chosen by the Presiding Officer and those chosen by ballot. They concluded by discussing the need for effective media scrutiny, noting that there was heavy overlap in the questions of greatest importance to Canadians and Scots alike.

B. Friday, November 17, 2023 – Edinburgh

During the final day of the visit, delegates met with academics and with a minister of the Scottish government.

1. Discussion on AI, Accountability and Democracy (Edinburgh College of Art)

The delegation met with professors Ewa Luger and Shannon Vallor, co-directors of the Bridging Responsible Artificial Intelligence Divides (BRAID) programme to discuss AI, accountability and democracy. The professors provided an overview of the programme and shared early results of particular interest to policymakers. Key conclusions drawn by BRAID researchers included:

- AI systems intended for use in public policy should be designed with the experts who will be using it;
- It is vital to assess the impact of AI tools at all stages to avoid the de-skilling of human experts;
- AI security has been framed through a lens that fails to consider “human resilience, literacies, digital rights, protection from misinformation and disenfranchisement... [the absences of] which are antecedents of insecurity”; and
- the use of AI in journalism can lead to inaccuracy and fabrication, issues with source transparency, plagiarism, bias and downstream harms, the

undermining of editorial values, quality degradation, and breaching of audience expectations.

The professors emphasized that, for all the current and potential benefits of AI, it can also amplify threats to democracy such as “truth decay” and “infosphere pollution” – roughly, the mis- and dis-information in the public sphere and the ensuing lack of trust in the systems and mechanisms underpinning deliberative democracy. In their view, governments have failed to govern AI, which has resulted in powerful actors such as technology companies that are largely unaccountable to the public. They emphasized that issue of truth decay is a political and social problem rather than a technological one. In their view, the proper (dis)incentives need to exist for technology companies, as well as political parties and media, to ensure the dissemination of true information and promote critical media literacy.

Nevertheless, the professors identified various opportunities for policymakers to act against this trend, the simplest of which involved imposing “guardrails” on how AI is developed. In response to a question from Mr. Barrett, they clarified that governments have a range of tools at their disposal, which range from public education to enforcement to the establishment of arms-length regulatory bodies. The professors also underscored the difficulty regulators face in keeping up with the pace of technological advancement. As such, the regulatory tools themselves will likely need to evolve to keep pace with technological changes. Moreover, they argued, policymakers should focus on regulating the systems underpinning AI production (e.g., monopolization) instead of the product alone, which would also help them get ahead of the next wave of advancement. They agreed that governments should seek expert advice and work with AI companies to regulate but cautioned that AI companies – which are responsive mainly to shareholders – have thus far been able to leverage their power to achieve favourable outcomes.

The professors explained that AI companies would likely welcome a regulatory environment that treats responsibility as a floor rather than a ceiling because this would ensure a level playing field. In response to Senator Dean’s point that there would likely be delinquent international actors when attempting to standardize rules, the professors pointed out that even authoritarian states such as China have incentives to standardize and regulate certain aspects of AI. In the security context, the professors explained that AI can be used to enhance human capacity (e.g., to identify which signals human users need to examine) but should not be allowed to replace human critical thinking.

2. Meeting with Angus Robertson, Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture, Scottish Government (St. Andrew’s House)

RUUK’s bilateral mission concluded with a meeting with Angus Robertson, Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture with the Scottish government. Minister Robertson emphasized the value of the relationships between Scotland and Canada, which include historical person-to-person ties that remain vibrant and active today. He shared examples of shared bilateral ties and cultural practices from his recent visit to Nova Scotia.

Minutes before the meeting with RUUK members, Minister Robertson had announced the Scottish government’s [vision paper](#) for an “an independent Scotland in the EU.” Thus, the

focus of the meeting was largely on Scotland's post-Brexit relationship with the U.K. and the Scottish government's rationale for independence. Minister Robertson explained that the U.K.–Scotland relationship had always been imbalanced because 80% of the U.K. population lives in England. As a result, he explained that many Scots believe that Scotland has been treated as a region rather than a nation or a country. Many in England, he said, have a poor understanding of Scottish issues and treat the country mainly as a curiosity. This phenomenon was exacerbated with Brexit, which a majority of Scots had voted to reject.

Minister Robertson explained that support for independence is due largely to the draw of applying to re-join the EU and due to Scottish policy preferences that differed from those of the U.K. He pointed to factors such as Scotland's need for immigration (in contrast to how the U.K. was treating the "small boats" issue²); the unpopularity in Scotland of the U.K.'s nuclear ambitions; the lack of appropriate Arctic policy; and the U.K.'s blocking of renewable energy initiatives popular in Scotland, including hydrogen. In addition, he argued the U.K. has since Brexit been increasingly ignoring the Sewell Convention, according to which it is "not normally" supposed to legislate on matters devolved to Scotland and other devolved administrations. Moreover, he stated that the U.K. has been poorly governed and suggested that Scotland, like many of its neighbours, would be richer as an independent country. He explained that, in his view, independence was a matter of self-determination and to block this would be anti-democratic.

For most people in England, Minister Robertson explained, having Scotland in the union was a matter of the heart that centres on the U.K.'s "sense of self." He noted that Scotland had held a referendum in 2014 that had rejected independence, but he made the case that it is now time for another referendum. He explained that Brexit had "changed everything," and that there is high support for Scottish independence. He compared Scotland's situation to Quebec to say that Scotland does not even have the legal right to hold a referendum without the U.K.'s consent. However, he asserted, no party at Westminster would support independence, and even their calls to reform devolution structures were too weak, in the minister's opinion.

Respectfully submitted,

James Maloney, MP

Chair, Canada-United Kingdom Inter-Parliamentary Association

Travel Costs

² See Peter William Walsh and Mihnea V. Cuiubus, "[People crossing the English Channel in small boats](#)," *The Migration Observatory at the University of Oxford*, 21 July 2023.

ASSOCIATION	Canada-United Kingdom Inter-Parliamentary Association
ACTIVITY	Bilateral Visit to the United Kingdom
DESTINATION	London, England, Cardiff, Wales and Edinburgh, Scotland
DATES	From November 13 to 17, 2023
DELEGATION	
SENATE	Hon. Tony Dean Hon. Leo Housakos
HOUSE OF COMMONS	John Barlow Michael Barrett Daniel Blaikie Patricia Lattanzio Julie Vignola James Maloney
STAFF	Jessica Kulka Ryan van den Berg
TRANSPORTATION	\$ 29,556.75
ACCOMMODATION	\$ 18,122.77
HOSPITALITY	\$ 229.07
PER DIEMS	\$ 7,818.87
OFFICIAL GIFTS	\$ 0.00
MISCELLANEOUS	\$ 5,132.97
TOTAL	\$ 60,860.43