

Roland BINET

De Panne, August 23, 2021

**Presidency of the Commission
Mrs U. von der Leyen
Rue de la Loi 200
1049 Brussels**

Madam President of the Commission,

Dear Mrs von der Leyen,

**Subject: Latvia's apology of the Latvian SS Waffen
Monument in honour of Waffen SS Latvian in Zedelgem/Belgium**

I have always admired the German Federal Republic for the way in which, after the war, it was able to recognize the faults committed under the Third Reich, and was able, through appropriate teaching, to visit concentration camps by German students, by a prosecution of war criminals and by a policy of «Wiedergutmachung» and aid to Israel, by the important research on Nazism by German historians, to help restore the new democratic Germany to its rightful place among nations.

When I visited Latvia for the first time, the very first thing that struck me during my visits to the War Museum and the Occupation Museum was the apology of the Latvian Waffen SS with photos on the walls of the museums and books for sale at the reception. In 2009, I wrote an outraged article on this subject which appeared in Belgian «La Libre Belgique» both in paper version and in internet version (copy in appendix). Then, in 2012, I decided to go to the annual Legionaries march of March 16th, and this shameless spectacle of a crowd admiring the valiant Latvian Waffen SS stunned me. The same year, the EU had expressed reservations against Latvia to allow the organization of such an apology of men who had fought for and under the uniform of Hitler's elite troops. However, Latvia continued this unworthy practice in the EU, and this year the march did not take place because of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Now it seems that this attitude towards the Latvian Waffen SS has taken a new turn with the export of this mindset of benevolence by financing the erection of a monument «to freedom» in memory of the 12,000 Latvian prisoners of war who were detained in Belgium in a camp in Zedelgem {the Occupation Museum of Riga/Latvia finances 50% of the construction of this monument called «Hive», «Bijenkorf» in Dutch}. This monument was inaugurated on 23 September 2018 in Zedelgem (West Flanders) in the presence of the College of Burgomaster and Aldermen of Zedelgem, the Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Museum of the Occupation and, also, representatives of DAUGAVAS VANAGI, a Nazi veterans' aid organization, organizer of the March 16th annual march in Riga in honour of the Legionaries. The official discourse was that this hive symbolized the hope of freedom of the Latvian prisoners of war whose country had once again been forcibly engulfed in the Soviet zone of influence. On a square that had been renamed "Briviba" {liberty in Latvian}, a plaque was affixed next to this monument stating, *"This Latvian hive on Briviba Square links the history of Latvia and Zedelgem. It symbolizes freedom in all its aspects... Young Latvians were recruited into the German armed forces to fight the Soviet army..."* This, of course, is a reductive vision of how the

divisions of the Latvian Waffen SS were organized, their participation in a war of extermination on the Eastern Front – a historical fact recognized by all great Anglo- Saxon, French, German historians – and the participation of some of these Latvian Waffen SS in the extermination of the Jews of and in Latvia, prior to their enlistment or recruitment into the Latvian Legion {read on ‘The Extermination of the Jews of Latvia 1941-1945’, published by the Shamir Society of Riga, under the direction of Rabbi Menahem Barkahan, with the help of an European institution}.

Because in today’s Latvian ideology – an ideology of absolute defense of the ‘purity of Latvian intention’ found in the works of the Latvian-American historian Ezergailis {cf. for example, his pamphlet "NAZI SOVIET DISINFORMATION ABOUT THE HOLOCAUST IN NAZI-OCCUPIED LATVIA", a book financed by the Museum of the Occupation and whose copy editor is Mr. Nollendorfs, who gave the keynote speech for the Riga Occupation Museum in Zedelgem in September 2018} - any critic calling the Latvian Legionaries Nazis, collaborators or simply ‘Waffen SS’ cannot come from either Jews or Jewish organizations or from Russian organizations or under the control of Moscow, I quote to begin with the majority of articles published in Belgium in French and in Dutch in non-Jewish media. Jews and not under the control of Moscow and who have strongly criticized the erection of this Latvian monument in Zedelgem, assimilating it to Nazi Germany.

- ‘L’Avenir, March 6, 2021 {*A Monument in Honour of Nazi Soldiers in Flanders*} and a complementary article on July 4,
- ‘Le Vif’, April 18, 2021 {*North Wind of Pierre Havaux: Waffen SS in Honour*}
- ‘La Libre Belgique’, April 27, 2021 {*Why this monument to the glory of the Waffen SS in Zedelgem*}, with a reaction from the municipality of Zedelgem {*Zedelgem defends itself to honour the Latvian ‘pro-Nazi’ Legion*}
- ‘Paris Match Belgique’, 20 May 2021 {*Latvian Waffen-SS celebrated in Flanders*} with a complementary article on 9 July and additional information from the author – Michel Bouffieux – on his personal website
- ‘Apache’ website, May 31, 2021 {*Grote imagoschade voor Zedelgem door Monument*}
- ‘Het Nieuwsblad, 25 June 2021 {*Plots kwam het besef: dit is een ‘nazimonument’*}
- ‘De Standaard’, 26 June 2021 {*Hoe Zedelgem met zijn bijenkorfe een doos van Pandora opende*}; 5 July 2021, {Lev Golinkin published an opinion entitled ‘*Een onverdedigbare poging om nazicollaborateurs wit te wassen*’}; there was again on the Standaard website, a series of other articles published on their website between July 5 and 9, 2021.

Many Jewish sites in Belgium, Israel and abroad have also spoken out against the presence of this Nazi monument on Belgian soil, including: ‘European Jewish Congress’ {9 March 2021}, ‘The Jewish Secular Community Centre’ {19 April 2021}, ‘Times of Israel’ {21 April 2021}, ‘Brabosh.com’ {25 June 2021} ‘The Secular Action Centre’ {28 June 2021}, ‘Jewish Telegraphic Agency’ {11 August 2021}. There are also some interventions by representatives of the Nation, both French-speaking and Dutch-speaking to question the validity of the presence of a monument associated with Nazi Germany in Belgium.

But, on the Latvian side, there is a well-oiled propaganda machine denying all criticism of Nazism, collaboration, or assimilation to the Waffen SS. It is enough to see that the website of the Latvian Legion still publishes on its website, against the Jews, against certain renowned historians including Efraim Zuroff of the Wiesenthal Center in Jerusalem, and against the Russians, or against

anyone assimilating them to the Waffen SS, while in international law it is clear that the Waffen SS was condemned as a whole for war crimes and crimes against humanity in the Nuremberg trials of 1945/1946 {<https://www.latvianlegion.org/index.php?en/coverage/level-093-2021golinkin.ssi>}.

Despite official speeches at the unveiling of the monument and the text on the commemorative plaque, singing “freedom,” when you dig a little deeper and read information found on the internet as ‘Camp 2227’ {‘Laika Griezōs: diary of prisoners of war kept at the time with updated content’}, we can find out what is one of the avowed goals of the erection of this monument in Zedelgem: “*There is also an initiative to recognize the Flemish soldiers who also fought communism on the Eastern front... Together, these will be a lasting memorial to both Flemish and Latvian soldiers who died at the Eastern Front.*” (copy of attached document). We see that the intention of the erection of this monument in Zedelgem has nothing to do with freedom but wishes to be a memorial to the Flemish and Latvian soldiers who fought communism on the Eastern Front and died there.

But there is worse. While it was thought that the erection and inauguration of this monument in Zedelgem was a semi-private initiative {although the Occupation Museum is partly subsidized by the Latvian state}, on July 15 in Riga, during the farewell visit of the Ambassador of Belgium Hugo Brauwers, the Undersecretary of State of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Atis Lots indicated «*The Under Secretary of State also mentioned the developments in relation to a monument «Latvian Beehive for Freedom» in the town of Zedelgem in Belgium. Atis Lots noted **that an erroneous interpretation of those historical events has appeared in the Belgian media, and he called on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Belgium to engage with the Zedelgem municipality in the resolution of the problem.***” {text of official communiqué attached}. Now Latvia is officially defending the erection and presence on Belgian soil of a monument which all the articles, comments and opinions published in the Belgian and foreign press qualify as Nazi, monument to Nazi collaborators or monument to Waffen SS.

Therefore, I would like to ask you, Madam President of the Commission, dear Mrs von der Leyen, to institute an investigation against Latvia – within the framework of the powers of the European Commission to respect the fundamental values of the Union - in defence of Nazism, Nazi collaboration and the Waffen SS, both in Latvia in its museums such as that of the Occupation and War, and in its annual parades on March 16th in Riga, and, for Nazi propaganda abroad and more particularly following the erection of a monument dedicated to the Latvian Waffen SS in the municipality of Zedelgem in West Flanders/Belgium.

I thank you in advance for your attention to my letter and my complaints against Latvia, and ask you to accept, Madam President of the Commission, dear Mrs von der Leyen, the expression of my most distinguished consideration.