



The monument 'De Bijenkorf' will not disappear but will receive a new, more extensive interpretation text. © HV



Editors KW

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'The Latvian Bijenkorf', a monument on Zedelgem village, has been stirring up dust since June. Historians and Jewish associations, among others, believe that Latvian soldiers who fought with Nazi Germany are commemorated with it. Alderman Dehaemers names the column as a symbol for freedom in general and shows understanding.

If you are looking for brivibaplein in Zedelgem, you will no longer find a nameplate. The municipality decided to remove it from the artwork together with the text, to remove the fuse from the powder keg. In September 2018, the municipality, together with prominent Latvian figures, inaugurated this memorial column.

It commemorates the Latvians who were imprisoned at the end of the Second World War in the nearby Vloethemveld POW camp. They were imprisoned there because, some under duress, they fought with the Germans against the Russians.

An article in the magazine Paris Match prompted a fierce discussion in the press about whether a monument is appropriate for them. Those who feel hurt want to spare [alderman of Heritage Jurgen Dehaemers](#) (CD&V-Nieuw) more.

## Freedom in the broadest sense

"The Bijenkorf is a monument that celebrates freedom in a broad sense with Zedelgem history. Apparently there are individuals and associations who nuance that differently, and see that narrowed as a worship of the Latvian soldiers who were imprisoned here. Our plan is to place a new interpretation text at the monument, press communication, and the name change to the original popular place name Peerdenbilk."

Pol Denys, municipal councillor for Vlaams Belang and driving force behind the artwork, voted against the name change in the youngest city council. 'Briviba' is Latvian for 'Freedom'. The artist of De Letse Bijenkorf depicted an ode to freedom in all its aspects, according to Vlaams Belang. Freedom that is now compromised with these changes. Councillor Denys disagrees with historian Lagrou, whose advice the municipality has ind and follows.

## Less loaded

"What a historian tells us must be independent of his preference. The facts of the past must be told correctly. At a workshop in Zedelgem about the future of the monument, only people from the political-ideological circle of the historical advisor of the municipality are invited. That's disturbing."

N-VA Group leader Eddy De Wispelaere prefers to wait for more scientific information about that war past before a proposal is made to the city council. His group abstained from the vote for another square name.

The opposition parties Groen and Vooruit follow the choice for a less loaded street name. According to them, too, universal freedom and 'never again war' remains the original message. In addition, the war history of Vloethemveld must not be hidden away and disguised.

## Better interpretation

"The Latvian fighters were themselves victims, without us being allowed to forget their crimes. With a different name and better historical interpretation, we can give those who experienced the war and their families more peace and respect them," concluded Martine De Meester van Groen.

Vlaams Belang already proposed to move the statue within the Vloethemveld after consultation. "In the end, it belongs there with enough space to historically interpret the Latvian presence."

The city council does not intend to remove the artwork. There will be a more extensive text to avoid possible sensitivities. "We will listen to further advice from academics, so that we can make appropriate decisions for ourselves," alderman Dehaemers concluded. The war history remains sensitive. (HR)