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A monument to legionnaires in Zedelgem is looking for a new home

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A monument to Latvian legionnaires in the Belgian town of Zedelgem is looking for a new home

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December 20, 8:31 pm | [In the world](#) | [1 comments](#) | **Authors:** [Ilze Nagla](#) (*Latvian Television correspondent in Brussels*)

The monument to Latvian legionnaires imprisoned in a prisoner-of-war camp in Belgium created by the sculptor Kristaps Gulbis has fallen victim to Belgian internal political struggles and the global movement against monuments dedicated to controversial pages of history.

It has already been reported that the municipality of Zedelgem, a Belgian town, has succumbed to pressure and [decided to relocate the monument](#).

The monument is dedicated to 12,000 Latvian legionnaires who were imprisoned in a prisoner-of-war camp in Zedelgem. This monument will not remain here for a long time - the memorial plaque has already been removed.

The square no longer bears the word of Freedom - it was decided on December 3 by the municipality of Zedelgem. Its representative explains that based on the decision of the commission of historians, in which two historians from Latvia also participated, the monument can no longer be kept.



Monument to Latvian legionnaires in Zedelgem
Photo: Ilze Nagla / Latvian Television

"As a municipality, we have decided to remove the beehive temporarily (hide it from the public eye) until a final decision is made on what should be done with it," said Jürgen Däemer, a spokesman for the municipality of Zedelgem.

The relocation of the stand will take place only after a conversation with the Latvian Ambassador to Belgium, the artist Kristaps Gulbis and the Occupation Museum. The municipality talked to the ambassador last week.

"I think the conversation with the municipality of Zedelgem was very good. I got the feeling that they are very well aware that the situation is very complicated, complicated not only for themselves, but also for the way it is reflected in Latvia," says the Latvian Ambassador to Belgium Andris Razāns.

Why did the monument unveiled three years ago suddenly become so inconvenient for the municipality? The pressure comes from some historians who have [linked the monument to legionnaires in the media to the glorification of Nazism](#) .

Barts Huisentruijs, a journalist for the Belgian newspaper Het Laatste Nieuws, is one of the Flemish journalists who has written on the subject.

"It all started [with the famous article 'Paris Match'](#) , and then it all went a little crazy in this community," says Barts. He says that the locals have not had any claims against the monument.

"The municipality has exaggerated a bit. I think they were worried about all the excitement, the articles about this monument. I don't think it needs to be moved, I don't think people want to move it. "

However, former Zedelgem mayor Patrick Arno, who conceived and actively supported the monument, calls for more tolerance for the current mayor, as the movement against historical monuments is taking place around the world and is particularly active in Belgium, where there are many protesters. against Belgium's colonial past in the Congo. Throughout Belgium, for example, the monuments of King Leopold II have been damaged.

The former mayor believes that turning against the hive is part of this movement. And this pressure has been surrendered by the current mayor of Zedelgem.

"I think she's afraid she doesn't want to fight it. I agree - it's hard to fight because it comes on top like a tsunami from the internet. They say there: Zedelgem is the only city in Europe that has built a monument to its enemies," says Arno.

The fight against the monument has also been promoted by the Belgian Socialist Party, and domestic political disputes are also important.



The monument could be moved to the territory of the former barracks
Photo: Ilze Nagla / Latvian Television

One of the options where a stationary hive could end up after the relocation is the former barracks in Zedelgem, where Latvian legionnaires were imprisoned. It is now a closed area that can only be entered with a guide.

In the future, Zedelgem plans to transform this place into a nature park with historical elements.

CONTEXT:

The monument dedicated to the 12,000 Latvian prisoners of war "Latvia's hive for freedom" [was unveiled](#) in Zedelgem in [2018](#) by the mayor Annika Vermelena, the then Latvian Ambassador to Belgium Ilze Rūse and the Chairman of the Board of the Latvian Occupation Museum Society Valters Nollendorfs. The author of the monument, the sculptor Kristaps Gulbis, has explained that the bees that make it up are peaceful - they do not attack anyone, but defend their hive and freedom.

An error in the article?

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