



# THE BELGIANS REMEMBER THEM

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## The "Latvian Hive" in Zedelgem: first stage of the struggle for its dismantling BY WILFRED BURIE, PRESIDENT

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### Synthesis of citizen and civic action

At the end of 2020, I discovered to my amazement that a monument dedicated to Latvian soldiers who fought under the banner of the Waffen SS had been erected in 2018 in the Flemish municipality of Zedelgem, near Bruges.

At the initiative of Councilor Vlaams Belang P. Denys, the project was made possible thanks to the financial support of the Museum of the Occupation of Latvia and its president Valters Nollendorfs with the blessing of the Latvian government and the excessive confidence of the municipal administration of Zedelgem.

In view of the facts, I contacted the Deputy André Flahaut, Minister of State to whom I entrust the terms of my discovery. Therefore, he decided to question the Minister of Justice, Vincent Van Quickenborne. Seemingly ignore or ignorant of the situation, the minister will formulate a response by which he completely clears himself of the problem and sends us back to the municipality of Zedelgem.

Informed of the problem, the Belgian press will not broadcast any line relating to this discovery. Only the newspaper "Vers l'Avenir" will publish an article on March 6, 2021. Few days later, various European media outlets such as "Paris-Match", "Regards", "Humanity" and "Le Monde" will publish major articles that will help us significantly to bring the issue of this monument to the public. Other publications will then take over ensuring the proper dissemination of information.

As for the municipality of Zedelgem, at the end of 2021, it takes the initiative to convene a group of experts who will rule on the problem by proposing to remove the monument from where it is erected and to store it out of sight until it is found any destination. In June of this year (2022), "the Latvian Hive" is therefore stored in a communal depot.

### The method of action

From the outset, the method chosen was that of systematic recall of events. Several people and groups joined me in order to feed the debate, among others, the Minister of State André Flahaut, the "Groupe Mémoire-Groep Herinnering", the association for the Memory of the Shoah and people and associations from the Jewish community of Belgium with whom the action was able to be effectively pursued.

Thus, over time, everyone has been able to put the debate back on track at a time when it was in danger of dispersing. By these coherent interventions, the pressure against the municipal authorities of Zedelgem was constantly maintained until it was obliged to opt for the withdrawal of the subject matter of the dispute.

### **Future actions**

This first victory should not make us forget that the case is still pending and topical. Certainly, the results obtained by our discreet but firm action have been unexpected. But Latvia's reactions were not long in coming and the lack of political courage of the Belgian authorities in this regard allowed the Flemish nationalist parties to position themselves for a possible rehabilitation of the monument of shame.

Recent events in Ukraine compel us to maintain acute attention so that amalgams cannot corrupt the debate. Already, we observe that Latvia, in reaction to the temporary dismantling of the Zedelgem monument, has decided to remove the Soviet commemorative elements from its soil. This is a completely different debate, in which our action cannot be part of. Latvians are free to do with their history. But we cannot accept that they dictate their laws and decisions to us in this regard.

Their recent interventions in relation to the Zedelgem monument clearly amount to interference in Belgian internal affairs and this is intolerable.

A few months ago, we reported the political courage that Mrs Annick Vermeulen, Mayor of Zedelgem, had shown in ordering the relocation of the monument. We urge her to continue along this way and to maintain the idea that it is unacceptable that the controversial monument can still be part of the Belgian public domain despite the pressure that will be exerted on her.

A reminder of the events and a warning will be sent to the new Minister of Foreign Affairs in order to put her in front of her responsibilities. Our democratic vigilance will not be relaxed, and the fight begun two years ago will continue so that never again in Belgium, elements recalling the horrors committed by the Nazis and their collaborators can cover our country with shame and indignity and smear the victims of a totalitarian and racist regime.

Wilfred Burie,  
President