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## **Dismantling of Soviet monuments: “Discomfort with such tendencies”**

*Sarah, Today 21 days ago REPORT*

**Latvia has removed a monument to Soviet soldiers in World War II. How is that to be rated? Three questions for the historian Ulrich Schneider.**

Mr. Schneider, in Riga a memorial to the Red Army in World War II was dismantled. The reason given was that it was a symbol of the Russian occupation of Latvia.

Ulrich Schneider: The monument in its current form was erected on the 40th anniversary of the victory in the “Great Patriotic War” in May 1985. It was and is a symbol of the liberation of the Baltic republics from fascist barbarism and has no connection to the integration of the Baltic States into the USSR after 1945.



*dr Ulrich Schneider is a historian and General Secretary of the International Federation of Resistance Fighters (FIR) – Association of Anti-Fascists*

However, since in today’s historical narrative of the Latvian government the military victory over the German occupiers is not defined as liberation but as the beginning of a

“Russian occupation”, from their point of view such a monument is of course no longer acceptable.

We have been witnessing the rewriting of history and attacks on this monument in Latvia for many years. The broad social remembrance of “Victory Day” was massively hampered by the Latvian administration.

This year she even allowed herself the shame that the numerous flowers and arrangements that were laid there in memory of the liberators were disposed of on the compost site by the city cleaning department the very next day.

This corresponds to the handling of historical memory, which is particularly evident in the redefinition of the Latvian collaborators, who worked in the Latvian SS division, among other things, as “Latvia’s freedom heroes”.

For many years, veterans of the SS units and their political friends have marched through Riga in March on Latvia’s National Day. Protests against this glorification of the SS are suppressed by the state power – in disregard of all democratic rules.

Although even the Simon Wiesenthal Institute in Vienna, together with Latvian anti-fascists, protested against such historical revisionism, the official account denounced the actions as “steered by Russia”.

They did not shy away from overriding civil liberties. For example, in 2018 a delegation of German anti-fascists who wanted to take part in the social protests against the SS march were not only refused entry to Latvia, but participants who had made it into the country were forcibly taken to international buses and under police supervision expedited out of Latvia again.

What was frightening about the process was not only the disregard for European freedoms, but also the complete speechlessness of the Federal Government and the European Commission against such suspension of the rules of the European Union.

At the same time, attempts were made to establish this SS trivializing view of history in other countries as well. The Latvian government ensured that a historical revisionist memorial, the “Latvian Beehive”, was erected in Zedelgem, Belgium, at a site of Allied internment camps, as a trivializing and glorifying memorial to the Latvian SS volunteers who were interned there.

In fact, such tendencies of reinterpretation of history can be observed not only in Latvia.

Ulrich Schneider: As the Belgian example shows, historical revision and redefinition of historical images can be found in various European countries.

Remember the initiative of the “Bild newspaper” – this year, together with the Berlin CDU, the Soviet memorial at the Berlin Tiergarten, the tank that took part in the liberation of Berlin, to be dismantled. However, the realization still prevailed that the protection of such monuments in accordance with international treaties to be guaranteed by the German government.

However, when governments suspend such laws with parliamentary decisions, as in Estonia and Poland, then the floodgates are wide open to “iconoclasm”. In Poland, these attacks on places of remembrance and remembrance are justified with “decommunization”.

This is not only about a new Polish-nationalist view of history, but also about the criminalization of communist symbols, which of course is not limited to the signs, but also targets activists and organizations.

We have similar legal regulations in various Central and Eastern European countries which, under the pretext of “fighting communist totalitarianism”, carry out nationalist historical revisions.

In the process, representatives of these states – supported by the right-wing majority in the European Parliament – also succeeded in involving the European level in their “fight against totalitarianism”.

Years ago, the European Parliament officially declared August 23 to be a “Day of Remembrance” – but in fact no one was interested, even though considerable financial resources flow into institutions for “research on totalitarianism”.

In September 2019, the historical revisionists managed a political coup by adopting such historical misinterpretations and historical revisionist positions as a political resolution under the positive title “Future of European Remembrance”.

The fact that a side note also contains criticism of the reinterpretation of SS collaborators as national “freedom heroes” only served to calm the Socialist and Social Democrat faction, but in no way changed the content of this scandalous resolution.

What are the political reactions?

Ulrich Schneider: At the European level, the political uneasiness in the face of such tendencies to forget history is clearly visible. It is probably the first time that the – unfortunately deceased – President of the European Parliament David Sassoli had his vote for the September 2019 resolution officially changed to “rejection”.

Political forces, and not just veterans’ organizations, across Europe have taken a clear stand against this policy and are mobilizing people against the removal of monuments, as in Prague when the city authorities unveiled a monument in honor of Soviet Marshal Konev, who assisted Soviet troops who commanded the liberation of Auschwitz and Prague.

In Belgium, a broad social alliance succeeded in removing the SS-glorifying monument (the “Latvian beehive”) from public space.

When the Soviet memorials were smeared and desecrated in the spring of 2022 in the context of the conflict over the Ukraine war from the Netherlands to Greece – and also in Berlin’s Treptower Park – there was such widespread protest that the memorial sites were soon restored.

Nevertheless, reinforced by the ideological developments since the beginning of the war, it remains a major challenge against the rewriting of history and the removal of Soviet monuments, which in complete oblivion of history are reinterpreted as “Russian” monuments, sometimes even as “symbols of the Russian occupation”. to develop resistance. The FIR with its member associations in 25 European countries and Israel is committed against it.

(Harold Neuber)

The article is in German

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