

## The Foreign Ministers and representatives from the Occupation Museum of Latvia discuss issues concerning research into history of Latvia

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On 26 May 2022, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Edgars Rinkēvičs, welcomed representatives from the Museum of the Occupation of Latvia and the Occupation Museum Association to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for a discussion on topics concerning research into the history of Latvia.

The Foreign Minister congratulated the management of the Museum of the Occupation of Latvia on the upcoming inauguration of the renovated museum's premises located at No 1 Latvian Riflemen Square, Riga.

The parties exchanged views about the need for raising public awareness, both in Latvia and on an international scale, of the issues of Latvia's history in the 20th and 21st centuries.

In view of the long-lasting slander campaigns waged against the democratic nations in Europe, including Latvia, and the complicated history of those countries being misused by undemocratic and aggressive regimes to benefit their geopolitical agendas, Edgars Rinkēvičs underlined the need for setting up a new historical research and communication programme, for instance, one addressing historical memory.

The meeting also addresses the further fate of a monument, "The Latvian Beehive for Freedom", in the Belgian city of Zedelgem. The monument reminds Belgian society of the tragic outcomes of World War II – of more than 12 thousand Latvian POWs imprisoned in a camp near Zedelgem from 1945 to 1946 – while paying tribute to the soldiers.

The Foreign Minister informed the visitors of the involvement of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Embassy of Latvia in the Kingdom of Belgium in resolving the issue. For instance, on 10 December 2021, in response to a call for the monument to be dismantled, the Latvian Foreign Minister sent a letter to the Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Foreign Affairs, European Affairs and Foreign Trade and the Federal Cultural Institutions of the Kingdom of Belgium, Sophie Wilmès, in which he expressed concerns about developments in Zedelgem in relation to the Latvian Beehive for Freedom monument and requested the Belgian Minister to pay an increased attention to the issue.

Although the monument, unveiled in 2018, was created with private donations to the Occupation Museum Association, Latvia regards as unacceptable the efforts to relocate the monument without the consent of the Museum of the Occupation of Latvia.

The Latvian Minister of Foreign Affairs and the staff of the Museum of the Occupation of Latvia were in agreement that the monument to Latvian prisoners of war in the municipality of Zedelgem was a monument to Latvian soldiers and patriots of Latvia, who, while being kept in a POW camp in the Belgian territory, did not lose their hope in the restoration of an independent Latvian state.

The matter of relocating the monument can be further addressed in the talks with the municipality of Zedelgem only in the case the new location of the monument would be mutually acceptable to both the sides.

Taking part in the conversation were Solvita Vība, Director of the Museum of the Occupation of Latvia, Gints Apals, Head of the Public History Department, and Dzintra Bungš un Valters Nollendorfs, who represented the Occupation Museum Association.

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