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## The Latvian beehive will be withdrawn!

03/12/2021    No comment    Memory    Latvian hive , SS Latvian , Zedelgem

Following the recommendations of an international panel of experts on the monument erected in 2018 in memory of the Latvian SS fighters detained in this municipality between 1945 and 1946, the municipality of Zedelgem decided to proceed with the removal of this controversial monument.



At the request of the Belgian municipality of Zedelgem, an international panel of fifteen experts specializing in the history of the Second World War and its legacy met on Friday 26 and Saturday 27 November 2021. The municipality indeed asked to this panel to make recommendations on two questions: on the one hand, the recent controversy surrounding the *Latvian Ruche* monument inaugurated on its territory in 2018 and, on the other hand, the development of the former Vloethemveld site where between 1945 and 1946 about 16,000 Latvian SS fighters.

After recalling that " *the text of the commemorative plaque which accompanied the monument from September 2018 to July 2021 did not sufficiently reflect the complex history of the Latvian Legion. Because of its incompleteness, it was insulting to victims of crimes committed by members of the Legion, even though most of them had been committed before they were formally enlisted* "and emphasized the ambiguity of such a symbol in the Belgian context, notably the fact that " *the Latvian soldiers who were subsequently incorporated into the Latvian SS Legion indeed fought alongside the Flemish SS Legion during the siege of Leningrad* ", the panel of experts fear that " *the monument therefore risks becoming a place of (inter) national pilgrimage and a source of inspiration for revisionist accounts on the heritage of the SS* ".

Having also underlined that “ *the removal of the commemorative plaque and the renaming of the Place de la Liberté were certainly important first steps* ”, the panel considers that “ *the removal of the monument is the only option to put an end to the ambiguities that 'he perpetuates'* ”.

The panel “ *recommends the removal of the monument to hide it from public view. In addition, the expert group recommends a reflection phase to explore the possibility of a new assignment of La Ruche Latvia, taking into account its status as a work of art. This approach must involve all stakeholders and be accompanied by the necessary expertise. Great care should be taken when making a decision.*

***The panel considers two options:***

*1. Any new destination must justify its installation in this new context. If we refer to the initial objective of the monument, the complexity of the historical context must imperatively be taken into account.*

*2. Another option could be to redefine the monument as an aesthetic object. It should therefore be installed in an interior space in a context providing critical information on the history of the monument ”.*

In a press release published on December 3, 2021, the municipality of Zeledegem takes note of the conclusions of the panel of historians. After recalling that the municipality “*had never wanted to pay homage to the Nazi regime, nor to excuse certain war crimes or to knowingly injure citizens with the creation of the Latvian hive* ”, she decides that “ *the hive will be removed from its current place and a phase of reflection, in which the experts will continue to support the municipality, will be introduced. During this period, the municipality will take the initiative to consult all parties involved in order to come up with a sustained and thoughtful solution of a permanent location for the Latvian beehive* ”.

It is indeed the culmination of a fight led by different associations and personalities. A civic engagement that brought together men and women from different backgrounds, young and old, Jews and non-Jews, all keen to preserve a memory of the Second World War in accordance with historical reality.

If it is a victory, it should not prevent us from lowering our vigilance because some ambivalences remain in the recommendations of this panel that the municipality has accepted. They relate to the future use of this monument. It should simply be returned to its sender: the Latvian artist having made it. This clearer and more categorical measure has the merit of definitively chlorinating this controversy and allowing the municipality of Zedelgem to begin its work of memory in all serenity.

