

Double Interpretation of History and “The War of the Monuments”: Estonia’s Case I

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“Monument is the permanent structure, building, erections, etc made at the place to mark the memory of a historical event, action, place or person, etc”¹

Abstract

The 2007 April events broke up Estonia’s national groups into two opposing powers. The reason of the split was directly related to differences in the Second World War understandings resulting in dissimilar reactions to the decision to move the monument called the Bronze soldier from its original location to the War cemetery. The government’s intentions were not properly explained to the Estonian Russians, and looked extremely provocative on the eve of the Victory Day (May 9), which Russians used to celebrate by this monument. Estonians celebrate the victory over fascism on May 8. Double standards exposed in the course of these events could have been overcome if the society’s opinion and the program of actions had been better prepared. In this paper we shall examine the preparation stage of the April 2007 events, their succession, and consequences.

Introduction

Monument to the Liberators of Tallinn (in the original: Tallinna vabastajate monument) was unveiled in the Tallinn city center on September 22, 1947, on the third anniversary of the liberation Tallinn from the German occupation. It was the very first Soviet monument in Estonia and it was erected to commemorate the memory of the dead Soviet soldiers, who was buried on the Tõnismäe Square (former Liberator’s Square) on April 14, 1945.

Through the Soviet-era the hole complex—the so called Bronze Soldier, i.e. the Monument, the Eternal fire (lighted in 1964) and the Tõnismäe Square—formed the Second World War memorial; from 1993 to 2007 it was officially called the Monument to the Second World War Victims (in the original: Teises Maailmasõjas hukkunutele).

After Estonia regained its independence in August 1991, the composition of the Estonian nation drastically changed: in one day Russians living in Estonia turned from the predominant majority into one of the ethnic minorities. According to the official data, in 2007 there were about 920.000 Estonians and 345.000 Russians in Estonia, thus 25.6% of the total population of Estonia were Russian.² For the Estonia’s Russian-language people the Bronze Soldier and the Tõnismäe Square was the place to honor war-victims; also Estonia’s Russian used to celebrate there the Victory Day.

¹ Legal-Explanations.com, Legal Definitions, „Monument“, <http://www.legal-explanations.com/definitions/monument.htm>

² Statistikaamet, Rahvastik, <http://pub.stat.ee/px-web.2001/Dialog/Saveshow.asp>

Double Interpretations of the Second World War history

The 2007 April events broke up Estonia's national groups into two opposing powers. The reason of the split was directly related to differences in the Second World War understandings resulting in dissimilar reaction to the decision to move the Bronze Soldier from Tallinn city-centre to the War Cemetery.

Estonians tend to consider September 1944 (the month the Soviet Army and the Soviet Army Estonian Corps came into Estonia) the continuation of the Soviet occupation of their homeland. Russians, however, perceive it as the victory over fascism—in this case, on Estonian land. Thus the Bronze Soldier for most of Russian-speaking minority representatives symbolizes the freedom from fascism and for most Estonians—new soviet occupation and peoples' mass deportations to Siberia.

The government's intention to rebury the Soviet soldiers' remains and remove the monument to the War Cemetery, were not properly explained to Estonian Russian-speaking minority, and looked extremely provocative on the eve of the Victory Day, May 9, which Russians and war veterans (including ethnic Estonians who fought in the Soviet Army Estonian Corps) used to celebrate by this monument. Here is another point of misunderstanding between Estonians and Russians, as Estonians celebrate the victory over fascism on May 8, like most Western countries.

Public opinion

Double standards exposed in the course of these events could have been overcome if the society's opinion and the government's program of actions had been better prepared.

It is noteworthy that initially the government stepped forward with a gracious gesture stating that the monument won't be removed until the Victory day. At the end of March 2007 the prime-minister Andrus Ansip said that by 9th of May the monument will be surrounded by a metal fence in order to avoid any possible provocations.³

More to the point, on the April 25, that is a night before the notorious events happened, the prime-minister said in his interview to the Russian-broadcasting *Radio 4* that both on the 8th and the 9th of May the Bronze Soldier will be standing where it stands.⁴

On the eve of the April events sociologists carried out several surveys examining people's opinion of the monument's future. Initially these studies were conducted among Tallinners, as before 2006 the city council—the formal owner of the monument—was considered the one to decide the monument's fate. These surveys revealed that from the people's viewpoint the Bronze Soldier should stay on the Tõnismäe Hill. More than 49% of the respondents said, that the monument should stay in its original place; about a half of them said the monument should be

³ Karin Rohtla, "Peaminister Ansip lubab: 9. Mail piiratakse pronkssõdur plaguga." *SL Õhtuleht*, March 30, 2007, <http://www.sloleht.ee/index.aspx?id=223340>

⁴ Kristiina Mõttus, „Ansip: kaevetööd Tõnismäel võivad kest kuid“. *Postimees*, PM online, April 25, 2007, <http://www.tarbija24.ee/250407/esileht/siseuudised/tallinn/257147.php>

dedicated to the memory of all dead in the Second World War. Less than 30% of all said, that the Soldier should be removed to a more appropriate place in Tallinn.⁵

The following surveys were done all across the country, thus making the problem of the pan-Estonian importance. And yet all these surveys, for instance, the very last one, which was published on the eve of the Bronze Night (April 26–27), showed that only 37% of the respondents supported the relocation of the monument, while 49% were against the removal and 14% did not have a firm opinion. In the ethnic respect 32% of the interviewed against the removal were Estonians and 86% were Russians.⁶

Before the Bronze Night Estonian newspapers published a number of articles calling out our government to the common sense, and advising not to make quick decisions and think it over, before giving the order to remove the monument. Written by professors, sociologists, journalists and other experts these articles and public letters stated that unless agreed with people, especially the vets' organizations and Russian-language minority representatives this decision will put an end to a 10-year integration process and marks the beginning of a deep social crisis. However all these voices were neglected, and those calling to the common sense were nicknamed "red professors", "communists' sympathizers", etc.

"War of the Monuments"

On July 14, 2002 a monument dedicated "To all Estonian Soldiers, who died in the II War of Independence for their homeland and free Europe in 1940-1945" (in the original: "Kõigile Eesti sõjameestele, kes II vabadussõjas langesid kodumaa ja vaba Euroopa eest 1940-1945") was erected in an Estonian resort, Pärnu. The monument looked like a bas-relief of a soldier in a German military uniform with the Estonian SS Legion's signs and a German machine gun MP-40 pointing to the East (i.e.: to the Russia).

However, on July 23, 2002 under the public's pressure and by the Pärnu City Council's decision the bas-relief and the dedication were removed. This removal made the BBC News headlines just like the crash of the ferry *Estonia*, Estonia's victory on the Eurovision song contest, Prince Charles's visit to Estonia or bootleg vodka deaths in Pärnu. On July 24, BBC issued the news "Estonia removes an SS monument".⁷

Yet two years later, on August 20, 2004 another controversial, i.e. overtly Nazi monument opened up in a little town called Lihula. This provocative monument, quoting the Prime-Minister Juhan Parts, had a plaque saying "To Estonian men who fought in 1940-1945 against Bolshevism and for the restoration of Estonian independence" (in the original: „Eesti meestele, kes sõdisid 1940-1945 bolshevismi vastu ja Eesti iseseisvuse taastamise nimel“). Later the same

⁵ Mari Kamps, „Pooled tallinnlastest toetavad pronkssõduri jätmist Tõnismäele“. *Postimees*, PM online, December 7, 2006, <http://www.postimees.ee/071206/esileht/siseuudised/tallinn/233030.php>

⁶ Kristiina Mõttus, „Eestlased teisaldaks pronkssõduri, venelased mitte.“ *Postimees*, PM online, April 25, 2007, <http://www.postimees.ee/250407/esileht/siseuudised/tallinn/257074.php>

⁷ *BBC News World Edition*. 2002. Estonia removes SS monument, July 24, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/2148732.stm>

year the prime-minister said that the opening of the monument was the “silliest thing of the year”.⁸

The monument was the same Pärnu’s soldier in the SS-uniform bas-relief removed two years earlier. This apparently Nazi war monument which was supposed to commemorate Estonians who fought in the Estonian SS-legion was removed on September 2, by the Estonian Government’s order issued under the EU and the USA pressure.⁹

It is noteworthy that the monument was removed late at night with the help of the police. During the removal the people who were gathered there threw stones at the police and workers removing the monument and crying “Shame! Shame!”. The police was forced to fire tear gas.

In 2005 this controversial monument was returned to its owners and opened on October 15, on the private grounds of the Museum of Fight for Estonia’s Freedom in Lagedi, and stays there up to the present day.

These war monuments erections, removals and re-erections resulted in a series of radical statements in the press, coming from both Estonian and Russian nationalists, and culminated in the Bronze Night, i.e. the Bronze Soldier’s removal.

Nationalist’s provocations

It is important to underline that Estonian nationalists’ provocations started long before April 26. Several times the monument was painted with different colors: yellow and red, blue, black and white. However, these incidents came into fashion just after the Lihula story. Thus, on the eve of May 9, 2005 the Soldier was marked by red paint. Though these events were initiated by nationalists’ forces, their actions were not supported by any political program and had a sporadic character.

One of such events happened on May 21, 2006, when the monument was painted after the manner of the Estonian national tricolor: blue-black-white. While the red paint is associated with the color of the Soviet flag and is comprehensible in the general context, the blue-black-white version of the monument, which for Estonian nationalist symbolizes the Soviet occupation, has no comprehensible meaning whatsoever.

Hundreds of veterans met again by the monument on May 9, 2006. A well-known Estonian nationalist Jüri Böhm also came there waving the national tricolor, and was taken into custody by the police for his own safety. Soon after, on May 20, there was a meeting of Estonian nationalist, who demanded the monuments’ removal; one of them threatened to blow up the monument unless it is not removed. Jüri Liim emphasized that he wanted to do that already in 1990, yet his pity for the windows of the nearby St. Charles church prevented him from doing so. This is yet

⁸ Toomas Sildam, „Parts: Lihula samba süünd on aasta rumalaim tegu“. *Postimees*, December 23, 2004, <http://www.postimees.ee/231204/esileht/153399.php>

⁹ Jaanus Piirsalu and Mirko Ojakivi, „Parts põhjendas Lihula aktsiooni välissurvega“. *Eesti Päevaleht*, September 4, 2004, <http://www.epl.ee/?artikkel=273336>

another proof of the nationalists' inconsistency in relation to their goals: at some point in time they feel pity for church windows, and seventeen years later do not care for it whatsoever.

Due to frequenting upheavals and civil crimes on the Tõnismägi Hill, on May 26, 2006 the Minister of the Interior Kalle Laanet forbade any meetings around the monument. The territory adjusting to the monument was surrounded by the police blue-white band, and the police started to patrol the monument's surroundings. The police patrolled the monument till October 2006.

Due to the mentioned provocations around the Soldier, on August 22, 2006 the Tallinn City Government sponsored a Round Table with representatives of 27 organizations. Two right-wing parties, Pro Patria and Res Publica and Reformist Party boycotted the Round Table. The newly formed government of March 2007 met with the Round Table representatives only on April 26, 2007, when the Minister of the Defense Jaak Aaviksoo stated that everything was ready for the process of exhumation of the soldiers' remains and the work was due to start immediately.¹⁰

On March 25, 2007 the same Estonian nationalist, Jüri Böhm tried to "decorate" the monument with a barbwire wreath bearing the following inscription: "To Estonian Peoples Murderer!" (in the original: „Eesti rahva mõrtsukale!“). He succeeded in doing that only thanks to the Estonian Police Special Forces, which were called to Tõnismägi to involve into the fighting started. Very soon the wreath was taken away by Russian activists (the monuments' defenders). It should be noted that this happened while the newly formed government were already in power. The first attempt to "decorate" the monument with the same barbwire wreath took place on February 23, 2007 the Day of the Motherland's Defender (earlier – the Red Army Day) was unsuccessful. Different kind of provocations from both sides and even on a higher level lasted up to April 26, 2007.

Parliament's actions.

On January 10, 2007 the Estonian Parliament passed the War Graves Protection Act. According to this act, the Government was allowed to remove the monument to a more suitable location and rebury the soldiers' remains beneath it. Another bill called Law on Forbidden Structures was approved on February 15, 2007 with 46 votes for the Law and with 44 votes against it. The majority of people, predominately Russians, thought this law was approved only thanks to the absence of two Russian Members of the Parliament of the Reformist Party: Tatiana Muraviova and Sergei Ivanov (i.e. two likely "contra" votes). As a result the Russian-language press called them traitors.

However, the President of Estonia Toomas Hendrik Ilves vetoed the bill, as it did not comply with the Constitution of Estonia. But the Prime-Minister Andrus Ansip said that through the War

¹⁰ Tallinn, „Tallinna volikogu juures kogunev ümarlaud kuulas 26. Aprillil kaitseminister Jaak Aaviksoo seisukohti Tõnismäe monumendi tuleviku suhtes“, Pronkssõduri ümarlaud, <http://www.tallinn.ee/est/g3747>

Graves Protection Act Government could relocate the monument and reburies the soldiers' remains anyway.¹¹

April 26, 2007

These days, in the twenties of April, 2007 it was seen that Tallinn is full of police forces from all over the country, as policemen started to play a visible part in the cityscape. Early in the morning, April 26 (4:30 AM), a two-meter fence was erected around the Bronze Soldier square again with the Estonian Special Forces' help. Later the afternoon the area around the Soldier was covered by a plastic tent, and the monument disappeared from people's sight.

After that people started to gather around "the Bronze Soldier Square" and the nearby National Library. It is known that afternoon and the night that followed there were more than 5,000 people out there (among them were a lot of Estonians too). The night culminated with street fights and pillages provoked by a mass psychosis and the police's refusal to interfere into it (that is the police's passivity in the course of several hours), and, finally, with the removal of the monument from the Tõnismäe Hill.

All we should, however, make a difference between the events around the monument before the police used force, and after, because the events that followed were not directly related to the meeting, but rather were more of a chain reaction resulting from the clandestine monument's relocation. What was interesting, that the Prime-Minister stated a year before the events he could not imagine the state of affairs, under which the monument could be removed clandestinely. "This is not a kind of decision the legitimate state could afford", stated Prime-Minister Andrus Ansip.¹² At that moment Mr. Ansip hinted at the abovementioned case of the Lihula monument's relocation, yet in April 2007 he did exactly the opposite. The meeting, the suppression of the meeting and the street-fights were merely "justification" of the Prime-Minister's actions.

Conclusion

As it mentioned earlier, surveys showed that the majority of people living in Estonia did not support the idea of the monument's relocation even several days before the notorious Bronze Night (April 26 and 27).

On April 23, 12 professors from Tallinn University, Tartu University, Tallinn Technical University and Helsinki University (Finland) sent their open letter to Estonia's Minister of the Defense Jaak Aaviksoo. They mentioned that the monuments removal may have some risks at the end. They implied the relocation of the monument might solve some problems with the Victory Day, May 9, but would leave a great risk factor from the point of view of Estonia's distant interests in the future (the internal stability; Estonia's reputation for the outside world and so on). They wrote both factors would be damaged unless the government refused from its plans.

¹¹ Kai Kalamees, "President Ilvese veto lõpetas praeguse riigikogu koosseisu jaoks sambasõja", *Eesti Päevaleht*, February 16, 2007, <http://www.epl.ee/artikkel/374514>

¹² Mirjam Mäekivi, „Ansip ei välista pronkssõduri saatuse otsustamist riigikogus“, *Positmees*, PM online, June 29, 2006, <http://www.postimees.ee/290606/esileht/siseudised/207552.php>

Now we can say that Estonia's relationships with Russia has been damaged very seriously in different respects. But what is more important is that our internal stability has been damaged in an enormous way.

In 2008 the Russian-language minority and Estonian veterans, who fought in the Soviet Army, have two places to go where to honor the Red Army soldiers—their relatives, comrades in arms, and killed in action: the Tõnismägi Hill and the War Cemetery. In the middle of 2000s Russian started to identify themselves with the Bronze Soldier, in particular those of the elder generation. In 2008 the monument symbolizes their national consciousness for all Russians living in Estonia from the elderly to little kids. Such self-identification prevents Russians from integrating the Estonian society, and the Prime-Minister was warned by the professors about this consequence in the above-mentioned letter. Another consequence is the change in the language behavior: many Russians fluent in Estonian do not speak Estonian any longer out of protest, nonconformism, or because they feel offended. They feel offended, because at the end of 1980s and at the very beginning of 1990s most of them supported Estonia's independence.

Today two Estonia's communities—Estonian and Russian—live their lives separately: with the symbols of their own, with their own memories about the II World War and the events that followed up to this day.

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The War of the Monuments: Estonian Case II

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Abstract

Not long before the April events 2007¹³, on March 14, 2007, a competition was announced. This competition aimed at creating the Vabadusesõja monument (Liberty War Monument or Monument of the War of Independence) that was meant to symbolize Estonia's victory in the War of Independence (1918-1920) against the Soviet Russia and Germany. Soon after the April events related to the relocation of the so-called Bronze Soldier monument, on August 15, 2007 seven of twelve members of the jury voted for the project of the new monument called „Libertas”. On January 28, 2008 the government of Estonia decided the Liberty Monument was to be erected by November 28, 2008 (the 80-th anniversary of the War of Independence). The very jury staff and its decision resulted in another split (this time within the ethnic majority). However, the ongoing split originated from aesthetic and ethic—not ethnic—differences, protests of architects, sculptors, artists and other professionals, as well as a note of protest from the public. Despite of all even this time there were powers, which did their best to turn the conflict into the ethnical and political one.

Introduction

While in the case with the Monument of Bronze Soldier relocation (April 2007) the War of the Monuments divided the population on the ethnic grounds in general, in the second case the reasons of the split are far more complicated and diverse.

The fact is that Estonia was one of the first Russian provinces (from 1721), which became independent after the War of Independence (1918-1920) with Germany and Soviet Russia. After the Tartu Treaty was signed on March 2, 1920 Estonia started to think about commemorating the dead. During the following twenty years a whole list of monuments opened up on the Estonian land. In the country's capital, Tallinn, next to one of the city's schools appeared one of the most Romantic monuments dedicated to the memory of the teachers and schoolboys killed in the War of Independence. Another monument was built on the territory of the War Cemetery. Both monuments had been damaged during the Soviet times: The first one had been dislocated, and were re-erected only in the 1990-ies, and the second one had been destroyed.

In the 1930s there were plans to construct in the Tallinn city center the biggest monument commemorating this, perhaps, most important event in the history of the Estonian people. Several project competitions, starting from 1931, did not yield satisfactory results, and in 1940, the country was incorporated into the Soviet Union, thus the idea itself was abandoned for a very obvious reason.

Several years after the independence was reestablished, in 1997, the Parliament was discussing the plan to re-erect a more appropriate monument that honors the nation's freedom fighters. In their note to the people the MPs said: “The erection of gigantic monuments reaching the very skies is probably not very close to an Estonian's soul; at the same time the construction expenses will likely be more than modest.”¹⁴ The director of the Estonian Heritage Society Agne Trummal said the same: “It shouldn't be

¹³ See: Aurika Meimre and Irina Belobrovtsseva, “Double Interpretation of History and “The War of the Monuments”: Estonia's Case I.” Presentation at the Oxford Round Table 2008.

¹⁴ Valve Raudnask, „Unustatud omad”, *Elukiri*, no.8 (2007), <http://arhiiv.elukiri.ee/index.php?main=643>

gigantic. The times of 20-30 meters high monuments have gone.”¹⁵ Yet the subsequent competition in 2000, again, yielded no results.

The Present Monument's Project

The results of the very last competition (March 2007) were presented to the public in August 2007, that is several months after the *Bronze Soldier* had been relocated. It is noteworthy that Estonian people of art were surprised in an unpleasant way, as the monument planned was gigantic and the anachronism itself. The monument's project represented a 28 meter high dolomite stela (at present the material is changed in favor of glass) standing on a high base crowned with a cross. There was a circle in the center of the cross with the Estonia's border etching and the inscription: „The War of Independence 1918-1920.”

More to the point, the project demanded a partial destruction of the supporting walls of the Ingermanland bastion listed in the UNESCO world heritage (as the Old Tallinn as whole). This is against the [Regulations of protection of the Estonian Heritage, which has the law status. According to this bill any structures directly adjusting to the monuments to the past must be proportional, and must not obscure the monuments to the past from viewers. It is also forbidden to build any structures that hide the Old Town (the Upper Town, the Lower Town, and the Liberty Square) from spectators' sight.

An Estonian historian of art, Heie Treier made a comparison of monuments and approaches to their construction in Latvia's capital, Riga, the British Kent and Tallinn. In Latvia there is a plan to commemorate the victims of the Soviet occupation. The only thing that makes it similar to Tallinn's monument is the location: One of Riga's central squares. In all the rest the monuments are different. In Estonia the competition was sponsored by the Ministry of the Defense. The competitors were to fulfill 23 articles and 149 subparagraphs. The first prize won the image of a war order. The decision was made by officials, which in itself presupposes the unquestionable subordination. In Latvia the competition was sponsored by the Ministry of Culture, and the monument was defined as culture-centered and nonmilitary. The competition included 14 articles and 40 subparagraphs. The monument in Britain differs radically from the Estonian. Unlike the Estonian case, the competition for the monument construction *The Angel of the South* (Ebbsfleet, Kent) was international, and five world-known artists took part in the competition. The winner became Mark Wallinger, who offered to build in the Ebbsfleet Valley a gigantic white horse, which agrees to the British tradition.¹⁶ This 33 times life size monument will cost 2 million pounds. The estimate cost of the monument in Estonia is 100 million Estonian crowns, that is more than 5 million British pounds. The conclusion of the art historian is full of irony: “Though from the viewpoint of artistic merits the Latvian monument wins, from the viewpoint of costs Brits are left far behind.”¹⁷

In September 2007 the Minister of the Defense, Jaak Aaviksoo, said in an interview that the government while discussing the project submitted to a competition expressed a wish for seeing a monument after the manner of the Liberty Cross order.¹⁸ This means that the fate of the first prize was predestined from the start. Not surprisingly the government's pressure on protesters that followed was coined the “steam-roller policy.”

¹⁵ “Vabadussamba asukoha otsustab Tallinn.” *Maaleht*, January 20, 2005, <http://www.maaleht.ee/?page=&grupp=artikkel&artikkel=1976>

¹⁶ Jonathan Jones, “My kingdom for a horse.” *Guardian*, May 10, 2008.

¹⁷ Heie Treier, “Monumendid ja mõtteviisid: Riia, Kent ja Tallinn.” *Eesti Ekspress*, May 22, 2008, p.9. <http://www.ekspress.ee/2008/05/22/arvamus/2747>

¹⁸ Josef Katz, “Nagrada vsemu narodu,” *Molodjozh Estonii*, August 31, 2007, <http://www.moles.ee/07/Aug/31/2-1.php>

Government's Monument

Initially, the government ignored any critical notes related to the monument's project. More to the point, the government did their best to open the monument by November 28 that is by the 90th anniversary of the War of Independence beginning. Such deafness and the pressure of the government aroused discontent. The people of art, who do care about the capital's cityscape, including its central square, wrote a letter of protest. At first it was signed by the Union of Architects (February 27, 2008), and then (March 3, 2008) by the Academy of Arts. They advised the government to listen to professionals' advises while managing the Estonian state.

Public opinion

Historians, such as Amar Annus, warned the government of the unwanted consequences of erecting an almost 50 meter Liberty Cross copy due to the fact that this order was awarded to the Italian dictator Benito Mussolini and the French marshal Henri Philippe Pétain, who collaborated with the Nazis. Although both of them were awarded the Liberty Cross in 1925, the fact itself may arouse discontent abroad.¹⁹

There was also an open letter in the Internet.²⁰ The preface said: "We, the undersigned, disagree with the erection of the Liberty War monument in the shape of the glass obelisk crowned by the Liberty Cross, because:

1. We consider this choice nonprofessional and unsuccessful. Such a monument does not feet to the central square of a representative European capital neither in its general solution, nor in its motifs (the cross). (The president of the Artists' Union Jaan Eiken regretted the fact that the monument's project was not based on a figurative solution, which is usual for structures of such a kind.) The whole monument's basis is unacceptable as destroying the wholeness of the historical Harju Hill.
2. It is unacceptable that the competition initially aimed at the project of the *Liberty Monument* turned into the competition "The Monument to Honor the Victory in the Liberation War." The city's central square supposes a wider vision of *victory* in both philosophic and visual senses, than the monument dedicated to the victory in a single – albeit a very important war – can offer.
3. During the competition and planning processes opinions of experts in architecture and arts were ignored in the same way, as was neglected the society's opinion and the vision of the Estonian Heritage Society. The choice of the bishop of the Estonian Evangelic Lutheran Church as the committee's president could not provide the worldview objectivity. The decision of the committee was unprofessional, as only 4 out of 12 members are experts in arts and architecture. The committee neglected the demand for the modern style in the artwork's shape listed in the competition's rules; otherwise the current project would have never won the first prize.
4. The cross on the top of the monument is of a controversial meaning. Being an order it symbolizes Estonia's independence and the ideal of freedom. However, when enlarged it reveals just the opposite sense. Due to historical reasons, the cross itself for Estonians cannot symbolize only light and mercy. The cross's similarity to the Nazi Iron Cross is alarming and politically dangerous.
5. No less inappropriate is the undemocratic haste related to the monument's erection and the unprecedented pressure of the government and the methods of problem solutions. ... The monument's cost exceeds 100 million crowns, which hurts peoples' feelings awaiting hard times in the face of the upcoming price raises."

¹⁹ Amar Annus, "Saatuslik vabadussammas,"

<http://www.delfi.ee/news/paevauudised/arvamus/article.php?id=18346817>

²⁰ Avalik pöördumine. www.vabadusesammas.co.ee 25.02.2008

Speaking of other viewpoints it is necessary to single out those related to the idea of why this very monument is inappropriate as the symbol of liberty: 1) Many people expressed a wish to unveil a monument to liberty—not to this particular war: “The freedom should be commemorated by something of a broader significance, a more human and more philosophical monument”²¹ (Martin Ehala, a linguist). Some people—alongside with the rejection of the monument’s aesthetics—noted the overabundance of such a complex on the central square of the city, as several years ago another monument was opened on the Liberty Square in Tallinn (and, as the author of this note highlights, nowadays there are still many people who do not know to *what* the monument is dedicated)²² (journalist Andres Raid); 3) The relationship between memory and history has come to be seen as more problematic and complicated²³ or as it has been put forward by an Estonian writer Kivisildnik in his newspaper column full of irony and playful absurd: „They have a plan to erect ... a barbarian crossmonument inspired by some war order, that nobody had ever been conferred.”²⁴

The monument’s opponents offered:

- To freeze the construction of the monument having such an unsuccessful project and high cost.
- To erect another monument on the Liberty Square, this would have a more general meaning.
- To sponsor a new competition under the guidance of experts in architecture and arts.

More than 8,000 people signed this open letter. The letter was passed to the minister of the defense on the March 7, 2008; yet up to this day people go on signing it.

The reaction of the minister and his followers after they got the letter proofed the thesis about the unprecedented pressure from the government’s side. The leader of a certain coalition party put forward a remarkably Soviet slogan: “Hands off the Liberty Monument!”²⁵ and the pro-government media explained that the open space do demand filling in the gap left from the times of the Soviet occupation.

The minister himself defined the Internet campaign against the monument as harmful and causing the split. He said that the campaign was irresponsible, and the struggle against the monument was a pure agitation.²⁶ On the March 7, 2008 he said “the argument around the monument chiefly concerns the worldview”²⁷, thus terming his opponents the enemies of freedom and the “Estonian idea.” Totally ignoring both the diversity of opinions and social statuses of those who voted against the project in its present shape, and appealing to democracy at the same time, the minister limited the argument to struggles of tastes within artistic circles. “In this worldview argument the one-sided opinion of a group of experts cannot be decisive,” he said.

Some historians (comrades in arms of the prime-minister and the minister of the defense) approached the issue through “the rhetoric of an enemy.” They claimed that “those who struggle against the erection of the monument are enemies of everything national and having a clear message. The clear message always has a moral, and the moral obliges, and obligations are things that socially immature people are really afraid of. Nationalism is even more frightening, as

²¹ Martin Ehala, “Ma soovin vabadussammast, mitte võidusammast.” *Eesti Päevaleht*, February 28, 2008. <http://www.epl.ee/artikkel420505>

²² Andres Raid, “Ristisammast – kellele või millele?” *www.DELFI.ee* May 19, 2008.

²³ See: Robert A. Wilson, „Collective memory, group minds, and the extended mind,” *Cogn Process* (2005), www.arts.ualberta.ca/~raw/collectmen.pdf June 3, 2005.

²⁴ Kivisildnik. „(:) toppige see Tartu rahu endale...” *Eesti Päevaleht*, July 5, 2008. <http://www.epl.ee/artikkel434543>

²⁵ Mart Laar, “Käed eemale Vabadussõja võidusammast!” *Eesti Päevaleht*, February 28, 2008. <http://www.epl.ee/artikkel420505>

²⁶ “Aaviksoo nimetas sambavõitlust azhiotaazhiks,” *Postimees*, February 28, 2008, <http://www.postimees.ee/280208/esileht/siseuudised/314640.php>

²⁷ „Jaak Aaviksoo, vaidlused võidusamba üle on maailmavaatelised.” *Postimees*, March 7, 2008.

one day it can also become obligatory. For instance, a person may be obliged to sacrifice the commodities of his life and the life itself in the name of the Estonian state.”²⁸

Even more concrete was the appeal to the 2008 April events. “The Estonian nation,” these historians said, “was split into two. The current state of affairs excites those who are responsible for the Bronze Night events. After that the author of this statement quotes the words of those participating in the April events, which, however, have never been uttered (he constructed them on his own): “People who dared to remove our monument from the Tõnismägi Hill to the War Cemetery have become unpopular in the eyes of the majority of Estonians. Shouldn’t they leave their positions, should they?”²⁹

Scholars consider such collective memories crucial for the identity of groups such as families, believers or social classes.³⁰ Collective memory has a whole list of applications ranging from accounts of nationalism in history and political science to views of ritualization and commemoration in anthropology and sociology.

So, what has happened? What aims did the government follow when simplifying with the ideas of their opponents—the aesthetic ones, philosophic, ethic, and finally those related to city planning? Why all this complex of ideas was perceived only through the worldview—that is the political—prism? It is not a mere coincidence that the society is pushed to see as equal the opponents of the project and the street marauders of 26th and 27th of April. Such a use of the ideologeme of “an enemy” is aimed at the nation’s mobilization in the face of a threat to its wellbeing. Quoting Lev Gudkov, the director of the Russian Public Opinion Center [VCIOM], “the effectiveness of the ‘rhetoric of an enemy’ means not ‘inventing’ factors of a threat, but actualizing some stereotypes sleeping in the cultural depot, which commonly play just a part in ... mythological mass identity structures.”³¹

Again, like in the case of the Bronze Soldier, the country faced the reluctance of the government, the parliament and the power in the general sense of this word to discuss their plans with people. However, the very idea of the monument, the principles it should embody, and its spatial solution might had been and should had been clearly stated prior to competition.

I regret to say that the circle of people who participate in decision-making in Estonia and play actual roles in politics shrinks from elections to elections. And the rhetoric of an enemy allows to ignore hairy questions, such as why should 17th century walls found during recent archeological works (a common procedure prior to any construction works in the Old Tallinn) be destroyed. Answering the questions of a journalist, the minister of the defense showed his impatient cravings for finishing the monument by November (the government’s deadline) whatever the cost may be. The journalist said: “Archeologists were left aside in an unprecedented way. Long ago Mart Laar (an important person in one of the parties forming the governing coalition, a historian by education) cleaned old buildings’ remains with a brush. The survived remains of the Beggar’s Church are under the glass nowadays. How could it happen that everything that has recently been found at the construction site was proclaimed having no importance?” The minister replied: “I’m not an archeologist. ... Those structures were covered,

²⁸ Lauri Vahtre, „Kes kardab vabadussõda, kes võitu.” *Elu ja Kultuur*. 2008. №1.
http://kultuur.elu.ee/ke491_sambasaaga.htm

²⁹ Lauri Vahtre, „Kes kardab vabadussõda, kes võitu.” *Elu ja Kultuur*. 2008. №1.
http://kultuur.elu.ee/ke491_sambasaaga.htm

³⁰ Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*. Ed., transl. and introduced by L.A. Coser (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

³¹ Lev Gudkov, *Obraz „vraga”* (Moscow: OGI, 2005), 13.

not open. Those structures were inner supporting walls, and their value, I think, is not high enough to preserve them.”³²

It is not a surprise that two articles, which were published within this short period in time had two similar estimates of the minister Jaak Aaviksoo (each based on the comparison of his previous glorious past and the current moment): 1) a person who used to be charismatic rector of Tartu University (one of the oldest universities in Europe) has turned into a faceless demagogue³³; 2) a person who used to be brilliant rector of Tartu University turned into a talentless manager at an unsuccessful construction site.³⁴

This summer we see that the monument will not be finished by November 28. However, this delay is caused by elementary technical reason—not by the government’s decision to find a rational solution in the name of the consensus lost.

Conclusion

It is clear that the War of the Monuments goes on, and the nation is still divided into two camps. As a matter of fact there is a crisis of the public sphere in Estonia. The monument commemorating the greatest victory in the history of the Estonian people has become the reason of a great conflict due to the lack of a dialogue between the government and the people, in other words due to the absence of democracy.

It must be said that all debates around Liberty War Monument in Tallinn are extremely acute and actual because „of their importance to national identity and in part because they represent—through war memorials, public holidays, ceremonies, and other forms of public recognition—a key way in which government policies and actions not only shape our view of a shared past but direct our collective views of a shared future.”³⁵

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³² Isamaa ja Res Publica Liit, „Intervjuu: Kaitseminister Jaak Aaviksoo vabadussamba kohta: "Kollektiivne õnnelikuks tegemine pole ülim eesmärk””. <http://www.irl.ee/et/Meedia/Artiklid/106/>

³³ Marju Lauristin, “Vabadussammas ja (e)demokraatia.” www.vabadusemonument.ee/index.php?id=10392

³⁴ Priit Hybemägi, “Vabadussammas upub saladuste suhu.” *Eesti Ekspress*, June 19, 2008, <http://www.ekspress.ee/2008/06/19/arvamus/3196>

³⁵ Robert A. Wilson, „Collective memory, group minds, and the extended mind,” *Cogn Process* (2005), www.arts.ualberta.ca/~raw/collectmen.pdf

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