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## Bulletin of the International Federation of Resistance Fighters (FIR) – Association of Antifascists

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### 70 years FIR – during the Corona pandemic

As 10 years ago, we wanted to celebrate the 70th anniversary of the founding of the International Federation of Resistance Fighters together with our member associations in a dignified and public way. Unfortunately, this was impossible for us by the Corona pandemic.

It became clear already in spring that a public event with international guests at the beginning of July would be impossible. However, we had not expected that September, as an alternative date would also present us with huge problems.

Therefore, this year, our joint remembrance had to shift to the virtual level and to the media. Fortunately, our member federations did various initiatives, which referred to the FIR anniversary. As helpful material, we had sent all member federations a digital presentation to the 70th foundation anniversary, which summarized - annotated in several languages - on the basis pictures and documents the seven common decades.

Beginning with the peace congress in Vienna, on which the foundation of the “Fédération Internationale des Résistants” (FIR) took place on July 3, 1951, the main tasks and political messages were clarified with pictures. The FIR supported the persecuted of the Nazi regime in their social and medical concerns and stood up for the memory of the fight of the partisans and illegal resistance groups in all countries. Against the resurgence of neo-fascist groups, the FIR documented the reality of fascist crimes. In the fifties and sixties, it organized congresses on medical, political and historical topics. The historical commission compiled a first overview of the European resistance movement.

On the example of conferences and initiatives, the work of the FIR for peace and disarmament, understanding and co-operation of the different political systems was traced. Important thereby were the “World Meeting of Former Veterans for Disarmament” 1979 in Rome and the appointment of the FIR by the United Nations as “Ambassador of Peace”.

Against the open appearance of fascist tradition federations such as HIAG (“auxiliary association of former members of the Waffen-SS”) and neo-fascist groups, the FIR organized mass demonstrations and other activities in the 1980s in Strasbourg and Cologne.

The presentation also went into the reorganization of the FIR since the XIII regular congress in Berlin 2004, when the organization opened itself for young anti-fascists. Since then, the association bears the name: International Federation of Resistance Fighters (FIR) - Federation of Anti-Fascists. Together with social partners the FIR organized in the past years international conferences, commemorative events on the liberation days and large youth meetings “Train des Mille” (“Train of the Thousand”) in the memorials Buchenwald and Auschwitz.

With pride, we can emphasize that the FIR is present in the political arguments of the present with clear statements, actions and as fellow combatants in political alliances. Together with the members of today’s generations, it fights against neo-fascism, anti-Semitism, racism, intolerance and terrorism and their social roots. A sign of recognition of our work are also various greetings we have received from heads of state and government of various European countries. We have printed two of them on the following page.

This was also visible by the media response to our anniversary. Three daily and weekly newspapers in Germany alone reported extensively on the founding anniversary. In other countries, too, there were reports in the magazines of our member associations and beyond. In Serbia, SUBNOR commemorated the founding date at a ceremony in early July in the presence of FIR President Vilmos Hanti. Further representative events are planned after the summer break. The members of the FIR governing body will try to honor such events with their participation.

## Greeting words of the President of the Czech Republic, Milos Zeman

Prague, the 5th of May 2021

When I received the request to send a message for the 70th anniversary of the creation of the International Federation of Resistance Fighters - Association of Antifascists, I did not hesitate for a moment.

I am pleased to be able to contribute to the celebration of this noble organization, which, since its foundation in 1951, has been helping us remember one of the darkest periods of mankind. Our country had also been invaded by the inhuman, brutal, violent Nazi regime, which pushed us into slavery, a regime, which was defeated, alongside with the military victory, as a result of the help provided by the resistance fighters and partisans. The member federations operating both within the European Union and outside of it have been carefully preserving the memory of the heroes. These efforts have also successfully involved the young generations. This is particularly necessary now, as history often becomes the servant of politics and as those rewriting history try to conceal or distort the facts.

I wish that we never experience again the horrors that our predecessors had to live through during World War II.

Moreover, I am pleased to be able, through this letter, to express, on behalf of the Czech Republic, my gratitude to you who, through your activities, have been contributing to the achievement of these objectives.

By recalling the facts - be they tragic - your organization is protecting peace and freedom and is a source of inspiration for us. All this is proof that even in these troubled times of post-modern relativisation, there are ideas worth fighting for.

Once again, I congratulate you on the occasion of this anniversary and wish you good health, a lot of strength and energy!

With respect  
Milos Zeman

## Greeting letter in the name of the Spanish President of Government

Estimado Sr. Hanti:

En nombre del Presidente del Gobierno, le agradezco su amable carta del 13 de abril por la que le invita a compartir un mensaje de vídeo o un escrito con unas palabras exponiendo su visión de la situación actual a nivel global, detallando los desafíos que todos juntos tendremos que afrontar y evaluando el recorrido de la humanidad desde el fin de la II Guerra Mundial, ahora que se conmemora el 76 aniversario del fin de la misma.

Como reconoce en su carta, la *Fédération Internationale des Résistants (FIR)* que usted preside, junto al resto de organizaciones que la integran, hace una gran labor desde su nacimiento hace 70 años, logrando evitar que movimientos como el antisemitismo, la xenofobia y el nacionalismo vuelvan a tener cabida en las sociedades de todo el mundo.

Como bien sabe, el Gobierno de España está firmemente comprometido con la defensa de valores como la dignidad humana, la libertad, la tolerancia y el respeto de los derechos humanos, pilares fundamentales de las sociedades plurales y abiertas.

Por todo ello, tengo el placer de comunicarle que el Presidente del Gobierno estará encantado de compartir ese vídeo con ustedes.

Reciba un cordial saludo,



## The commemoration of the 80th anniversary of the invasion of the Soviet Union.

This commemoration day once again showed the conflicts in the current international relations. In view of the tense relationship between Germany and Russia, the German government declared that no official commemorative events were planned, neither in Germany nor in cooperation with the Russian Federation and the other states of the former Soviet Union. Only Federal President Frank-Walter Steinmeier - as the highest representative of the FRG - made clear what should have been remembered. He visited the Sandbostel memorial site and commemorated there the millions of Soviet prisoners of war and forced laborers who were deported to the German Reich, mistreated, exploited and murdered in the STALAGs and forced labor camps. He later opened the exhibition "Dimensions of a Crime" about Soviet prisoners of war in World War II at the German-Russian memorial in Berlin-Karlshorst. (see p. 12)

In the European Parliament, the commemoration of the 80th anniversary even became the starting point for intensified anti-Russian posturing. Instead of resuming political dialogue, the Baltic republics and Poland in particular blocked any talks with Russia. Instead, they pushed the pretensions of Josef Borell with his "triple strategy".

The anti-fascist and peace forces in many European countries, however, were different. On initiative of ANPI an international video conference of FIR, ANPI and Russian veteran federation took place on 22 June. The parliamentary group of the LEFT in the German Bundestag organized a virtual commemoration on June 21 with contributions from Soviet war veterans, Duma deputies and the ambassador of the Russian Federation.

The social public commemorated the date in a variety of ways at memorial sites and with public actions, for example at the Soviet Memorial in Berlin-Treptow and with a cultural-political event lasting several hours on Bebelplatz in Berlin. Commemorative events are known from about fifty locations throughout Germany. Some of these were smaller wreath-laying ceremonies of honor at Soviet cemeteries, but for the most part - despite all the Corona restrictions - they were public events with several hundred participants, including a gratifyingly large number of young people. In Cologne on June 19, several hundred peace activists demonstrated for historical remembrance and disarmament under the slogan: "Common security instead of confrontation - disarmament and détente now!" Speakers included the Federal Chairman of the Naturefriends, the Secretary General of the FIR, the Chairman of the Cologne trade union and representatives of the peace movement.

In Lower Saxony, anti-fascists organized a commemoration at the memorial for forced laborers in Braunschweig on June 22, and a historical-political event at the trade union center the following day. At the end of the action weeks, the VVN-BdA held a well-attended conference "Out of the Shadow of Memory. Tracing the 80th anniversary of the German invasion of the Soviet Union" in Hanover.

Ulrich Schneider

### Poland: Polish Nazi victims and their descendants wrote to German Federal President Frank-Walter Steinmeier

After the German Bundestag had already approved a memorial for the German occupation and the Polish victims of the occupation with a large majority in October 2020, Polish associations of persecuted turned to the German President with an open letter in the summer of 2021. They expressed their irritation that survivors of Nazi persecution, former prisoners of German concentration camps and Nazi prisons, as well as combatants of the Anti-Nazi resistance movements, were not invited to participate in the establishment of the memorials.

The senders of the letter were Stanislaw Zalewski, chairman of the Polish "Association of Former Political Prisoners of Nazi Prisons and Concentration Camps", Marian Kalwary, from the "Association of Jewish Combatants and Victims of the Second World War", Roman Kwiatkowski, president of the Association of Roma in Poland, and Kamil Majchrzak for the Polish delegation in the International Committee Buchenwald-Dora and Commandos. The Polish victims' associations emphasized the role of the few surviving contemporary witnesses and their descendants right now:

"The participation of descendants in this process is indispensable, because at the moment when the memory of the Shoah becomes a history of the Shoah, they can correct the narratives about the extermination from their diverse memory perspectives and counteract the increasing trivialization and falsification of historical reality."



22 GIUGNO 2021 - CONVEGNO

Ore 15 - Diretta sulla pagina [www.facebook.com/anpinaz](http://www.facebook.com/anpinaz)

#### Coordinatore

FABRIZIO DE SANCTIS, Segreteria nazionale ANPI

#### Saluti

VILMOS HANTI, Presidente F.I.R. - Federazione Internazionale dei Resistenti  
Col. Gen. V. M. AZAROV, Primo Vicepresidente della LLC Unione Russa dei Veterani

#### Relazioni

ERIC GOBETTI, storico  
"Il 1941 alla vigilia dell'invasione dell'URSS"  
ULRICH SHNEIDER, Segretario Generale F.I.R., storico  
"La Germania invade l'URSS"  
Generale di Brigata FULVIO POLI, Capo Ufficio Promozione, Pubblica e Storia dello Stato Maggiore dell'Esercito  
"Le operazioni delle unità italiane in Unione Sovietica nel 1941"  
Prof.ssa TATIANA ZONOVA, Università Statale di Mosca per le Relazioni Internazionali  
"Il contributo dei partigiani sovietici alla Liberazione dell'Italia dal nazifascismo"

#### Conclusioni

GIANFRANCO PAGLIARULO, Presidente nazionale ANPI

[www.anpi.it](http://www.anpi.it)

## FIR memorials - a documentation

On the occasion of the 70th anniversary of the FIR there is a documentation of more than 100 pages about more than 40 memorial places, on which the organization logo of the FIR can be seen. Such memorial places are on the area of the former GDR, most in the today's regions of the Brandenburg, Saxony and Thuringia. In Berlin, where there are numerous memorials of resistance and persecution, no memorial stone is known on which the symbol of the FIR has been used. Until the early 1990s, there were many more such memorials. Some were cleared away or redesigned in the course of the political change. One memorial stone even fell victim to a flood disaster.

In the course of the research for the documentation, which was funded by the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation, it became apparent that there was little information on many memorials about how they came to be and how society dealt with them.

The completion of the documentation was not the end of the research. Thus, we received new information and pictures about the memorial in Burg (Saxony-Anhalt), where the newly designed cemetery of honor for 369 Soviet citizens from the early 1970s in the former Westfriedhof prominently displays the FIR symbol. The memorial first commemorated the Soviet soldiers who fell in the region during the fighting in the spring of 1945 or died as forced laborers or prisoners of war. Those who died after 1945 are also buried here. In the cemetery, there is a memorial in the form of a wall, on which the names of the deceased are written in Cyrillic letters as well as the dates of their lives.

In the central place, there is a Soviet tank as a symbol of victory. In the course of the preparation of the Regional Garden Show in Burg (near Magdeburg) 2018, the site was renovated and included in the garden show area. During the redevelopment, the number of people commemorated with memorial plaques was also increased. Thus, 539 Soviet deceased and 13 unknown Soviet citizens are now commemorated by name.



### **International Meeting in Serbia Commemorating the beginning of Yugoslavian resistance fight and 70 years of FIR**

Our Serbian member federation SUBNOR organized an important memorial ceremony in Belgrade on the occasion of the 80th anniversary of Tito's appeal which launched the resistance movement in Yugoslavia. Representatives of antifascist organizations from all the countries of former Yugoslavia, plus Portugal and Hungary attended the event.

On July 4, a wreath-laying ceremony took place at the memorial for resistance fighters, where the prime minister took the floor and where SUBNOR's president and FIR president Vilmos Hanti presented medals for former fighters coming from all of Yugoslavia. In the evening, a cultural theatrical performance was organized where the prime minister again made a statement, followed by SUBNOR's president. On the stage, the president handed over memorial medals to three persons, namely the prime minister, the minister in charge of veterans and FIR's president.

On July 5, during a FIR meeting with international guests, remembering FIR's 70th anniversary, Vilmos Hanti proposed a minute of silence in honor of those activists and leaders of the organization who, during these last 70 years, have done so much for FIR and who cannot be anymore amongst us.



On July 6, the delegates had the opportunity to be acquainted with the activities of SUBNOR's local section in the city of Versac /in the Banat region of the country/ and met with the president of the local assembly. On July 7, in Fruska Gora /Vojvodina/ they took part in the commemoration with speeches, music and dance, organized by the provincial authorities, where, among others, the governor of the Vojvodina province also spoke and with whom Vilmos Hanti also had a political conversation.



## **The generation of contemporary witnesses leaves us Roman Kent (1925-2021) and Bertrand Herz (1930-2021)**

With sadness, we have to report again the death of people who were important to us. People who were not only active for many years as witnesses of fascist persecution and anti-fascist resistance, but also worked in the last decades for the preservation of memory and the political legacy of the survivors in the structures of their respective international camp committees.

On May 21, 2021, after a short serious illness, the president of the International Auschwitz Committee, Holocaust survivor Roman Kent, passed away at the age of 96. Kent was born in Lodz in 1925. At the end of 1939, after the invasion of Poland by the fascist Wehrmacht, his family was deported to the ghetto. Together with his brother, Kent survived further Nazi concentration camps until U.S. soldiers on a death march from Flossenbürg to Dachau freed him at the age of 16. Together with his brother, he emigrated to the United States in 1946, where he has lived until today. For many years, he has been active as president of the IAK. His speech at a ceremony marking the 70th anniversary of the liberation of the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp in January 2015 is still vividly remembered.

One day earlier, on May 20, 2021, the Honorary President of the International Committee Buchenwald, Dora and Commandos Bertrand Herz died in Paris in the age of 91. Born in April 1930, he was deported to Buchenwald concentration camp with his father in 1944. He was imprisoned as French political prisoner and later had to work in armaments production in the Niederorschel sub camp of Buchenwald. On April 10, 1945, he returned to the CC Buchenwald, where he witnessed the self-liberation of the prisoners on April 11, 1945. For many years, he worked as Secretary General of the Association Française Buchenwald-Dora et Kommandos, and from April 2001 as President of the IKBD, of which he was Honorary President in recent years. The FIR and its member organizations will keep an honorable memory of both comrades.

### **Esther Bejarano (1924 - 2021)**

**Survivor of the extermination camp Auschwitz and member of the honorary presidency of the FIR**

On July 10, 2021, we received the sad news that Esther Bejarano, survivor of the Auschwitz death camp and active for decades in the anti-fascist movement in Hamburg, honorary chairwoman of the German VVN-BdA passed away at the age of 96 after a short serious illness. We are affected and saddened.

In its obituary, the VVN-BdA describes Esther Bejarano as a woman of great determination and almost unbelievable élan, whom many of us were able to experience on the big stage until recently. She last sat on a small stage in Hamburg's Gängeviertel on May 8 and told of her liberation on May 3, 1945 by soldiers of the Red Army and the U.S. Army, who arrived shortly after each other in the small town of Lübsz. Esther had found shelter there with some friends from the Ravensbrück concentration camp after escaping the death march together.

Unforgotten is her May 8 petition, which was supported by over 150,000 people. "May 8 must become a holiday! A day to celebrate the liberation of humanity from the Nazi regime. This is overdue for seven decades. Moreover, perhaps helps to finally understand that May 8, 1945 was the day of liberation, the defeat of the Nazi regime. May 8 would then be an opportunity to reflect on the great hopes of humanity: on freedom, equality, brotherhood - and sisterhood."

The FIR Congress in Reggio Emilia appointed her as a member of the honorary presidency with the following reason: "We appreciate your decades of active work in the ranks of the VVN-BdA, as a tireless contemporary witness and as an anti-fascist artist. Especially your intensive work with the younger generations and your involvement in the political disputes of the present are exemplary for all of us." Now the tireless "contemporary witness" against forgetting historical fascism and trivializing neo-fascism, admonisher and fighter for human rights, peace and a solidary society has passed away.



## The forum of antifascist and resistance associations was born in Rome

In the premises of the Nuovo Cinema Aquila in Rome, at June 2, 2021, the Forum of Anti-Fascist and Resistance Associations came to life, which brings together ANPI, AICVAS, ANED, ANEI, ANFIM, ANPIC, ANPPIA, ANRP, FIAP, FIVL. A historic initiative driven by the need for a great unity to revive the values of anti-fascism and, therefore, for the full implementation of the Constitution. He has coordinated the jobs Luca Aniasi, of the national Direction Fiap. "From this day - said Dario Venegoni, national president Aned (National Association of former deported to Nazi camps) - is a great call, especially to young people, to unity for democracy, for anti-fascism, for the Constitution. Against racism and discrimination. All the associations that adhere to the Forum meet together to give life to concrete actions". Anna Maria Cristina Olini (Vice President of the National Association of Christian Partisans) added: "There is a need for a strong recovery of conscience, solidarity between peoples. Moreover, we must demand the application of the Scelba and Mancino laws. The apologia of fascism is the opposite of democracy. We must be vigilant and solicit the commitment of the Institutions. We must work with and for young people" The historian Isabella Insolubile, in her lecture, recalled the origins of the Republic: "It was born in the prisons, in the places of confinement, in the streets where anti-fascists were beaten to death with blows and castor oil. The Italian Republic was born in Spain, among the volunteers of the international brigades, who understood before others how important it was to commit themselves in Europe, in any part of Europe, so that Italy would be free. The Republic was born among the exiles in France, forced to leave everything and often not safe even then. It was born in the prison camps of different colors - yellow for Jews, brown for Roma, red for politicians, purple for Jehovah's Witnesses, black for asocials, pink for homosexuals - in this obsession to divide everything strictly, in that world that was then nothing but black and white. Black, above all. When we say that the Republic was born from the Resistance, we must remember that the Resistance was first of all a meeting between different political and cultural souls, between antifascisms of different generations and maturations - that antifascism that we historians define as "historical", and the "existential" one, born under the bombs and in the grip of hunger, or at the front". After the intervention of Serena Colonna, Secretary General of ANPPIA, the conclusions of Gianfranco Pagliarulo, National President of ANPI: "Today this forum, anti-fascists and resistance fighters united under the beautiful and common flag of the Republic and the Constitution, launches an appeal to all mayors, institutions: a major national campaign to name streets, squares, gardens, parks, schools, to their names, because we know that no one and no one has been, is and will be forgotten. You see, there is a strict anti-fascist duty of the institutions: where this duty is not respected - just a wrong appointment - it opens a bleeding wound in the body of democracy. Today there are several wounds, and the Constitution is the cure". National leaders of Arci, CGIL and CISL attended the initiative.

### Against neofascist provocation in Dongo and Giulino - declaration of ANPI

Everyone should know that the Resistance and the reconstruction of the country's dignity, destroyed by dictatorship and war, have allowed Italians to choose the Constitution of the Republic in full autonomy and sovereignty. Ours was the only aggressor state to be able to do so: the Constitutions of Germany and Japan were written instead by the Allies who occupied those countries, precisely because they had been defeated. In Italy, we redeemed ourselves and became masters of our future. This republican value must be the common basis for all.

The second question concerns the Italian state. The demonstrations were authorized because the Constitution protects freedom of opinion. But commemorating the death of fascist leaders is not the manifestation of an opinion: it is an explicit apology of fascism, which is a crime for the Constitution and in our laws. It cannot therefore be tolerated but, on the contrary, it must be prevented and repressed. In the coming days this will be explicitly requested from the Ministry of the Interior. And it is fitting to remember that on April 25<sup>th</sup> the Prime Minister, for the first time in living memory, declared that in honouring the memory of those who fought for freedom we must also remember that not all of us Italians were "good people".



## Prayols June 5, 2021, Monument National des Guérilleros

This monument was erected in 1982 by the Amicale des Anciens Guérilleros Espagnols en France - Forces Françaises de l'Intérieur, thanks to a public grant. This June 5, 2021 was the 40th edition of the official celebration that AAGEF-FFI organizes every year (in principle every first Saturday of June) in collaboration with the state authorities. About 80 people attended the event, representing different associations and institutions. As every year, the city of Paris sent a wreath in memory of the Spanish guerrillas: thank you, Paris!

Thank you to all who contributed to the success of this tribute! Long live the resistance.

On June 5, 2021, at the foot of the monument, right: portrait of Pascual GIMENO. Left: Portrait of Jesus RIOS, first commander-in-chief (in 1942-1943) of the Spanish guerrillas in France ("XIV Cuerpo de Guerrilleros Españoles en Francia"). Very seriously wounded in a militia attack in Gudas (Ariège) on May 24, 1944, he died at the hands of the Germans in Foix on May 27 and was buried there. Shortly after the liberation was officially recognized: Died for France.



### From Spain: The end of the Second World War and the 5<sup>th</sup> of May

There is no doubt of the satisfaction that the end of the war meant for our exiles but, at the same time, of the dissatisfaction and impotence on having verified that their struggle initiated in 1936, as the first European combatants against fascism, did not have repercussions in their country, to which they could not return as free men.

A considerable part of those fighters, around 10,000 men and women, ended up deported to the Nazi camps, either by their capture by the Wehrmacht from the ranks of the French army or by their participation in the Resistance, in which they were the largest foreign group, with 10,000 fighters who also paid with firing squads and torture in the prisons of France. But apart from the deportees, there were also other Spanish victims of Nazi-fascism: those who suffered the unspeakable in the French disciplinary camps in North Africa, until they could join the ranks of General Leclerc; the 40,000 to 50,000 Republican exiles handed over by the Vichy regime to the Nazi regime as slave labor for the Todt organization; the 50,000 forced to work in Germany recruited by the Compulsory Labor Service (STO); others, at least 19 Spanish refugees, killed by the criminal actions of the German army, as was the case of those massacred in Oradour-sur-Glane; and those interned in the punishment camps in the south of France, such as Vernet; not to mention the dozens of Jews arrested in Spain and extradited to France.

Most of the survivors and resistant fighters were forced to rebuild their lives in France, far from the homeland for which they had fought, and those murdered by the Nazi machine were left without mourning and without a name. Only a small number dared to return to Spain, forced to anonymity and refuge in the family or friendly environment, without lack of harassment and imprisonment to some of them, paying in this way their contribution to the defeat of Nazi-fascism. Moreover, it was not until 1962 that a group of ex-deportees, widows and

relatives decided to create an association to protect and defend their moral and material rights. Once again, the claws of the Dictatorship fell on them, with prohibitions and persecutions, to the point that it was not until 1978 that the Amical de Mauthausen and other camps was not legalized.

From the work of those pioneers until today, descendants and friends in solidarity are determined to keep their memory alive and to give meaning to the oaths pronounced in the camps themselves after their liberation: the struggle for freedom and social justice. In this sense, in recent decades we have not ceased to defend the values for which they fought and to claim their public and institutional recognition. It would be long to list all the initiatives, the achievements and also the obstacles to that end, but we consider a decisive step the agreement of April 26, 2019 by the current government to establish May 5 as “Day of homage to the Spanish deported and deceased in concentration camps and to all Spanish victims of Nazism”, the date of the liberation of Mauthausen, emblematic camp of the Republican deportation.

In 2019, there was the participation, on May 4 and 5, of an official government delegation with the former Minister of Justice, Ms. Delgado, the former Undersecretary of Justice, Ms. Latorre and the current Secretary of State for Democratic Memory, Fernando Martinez, in the international acts of liberation of Gusen and Mauthausen. In addition, since last year, there have been numerous events held in different populations, and on dates close to May 5 tributes have been consolidated throughout the country, with the involvement of institutions and associations, which remember the residents of their localities and give account of their trajectory for the sake of freedom.

Rosa Toran. Amical of Mauthausen and other camps and of all the victims of Nazism in Spain.

### **Coordinating Commission of the Collectives of Historical Memory and Victims of the Franco Regime.**

The Spanish State must comply with the international treaties and agreements ratified by Spain, as well as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Therefore, more than 100 organizations that currently make up the State Meeting of Collectives of Historical Memory and Victims of Francoism call for the support of a petition to obtain a law that puts an end to the impunity of the Franco regime and guarantees truth, justice and reparation to all victims of the Francoist dictatorship and transition. This should help to close the wounds that are still open after so many years.

The initiatives call on the democratic citizenry and all types of civil institutions committed to human rights to support their just demands for a law that puts an end to silence, forgetting and impunity over so many crimes committed by this genocidal dictatorship. On behalf of the victims of Franco's regime, they demand that the Spanish state give them treatment similar to that given to other groups of victims of political violence in Spain, such as the victims of terrorism.

The Spanish government has the opportunity and the duty to put an end to the scourge of impunity of the Franco regime and the situation of injustice and legal helplessness in which the victims of the dictatorship find themselves to this day, by presenting a law of democratic memory that lays the foundations for guaranteeing the right to truth, justice and reparation for all victims of the Franco regime and the transition.

<http://www.encuentroporlamemoria.org/>

#### **Support the political work of the International Federation of Resistance (FIR) - Association of Antifascist!**

The political work of international anti-fascist organization requires large resources. Since civil society organizations do not have national or institutional grants, the organization depends on contributions and donations.

**Bank-account: Postbank Berlin IBAN DE 04 1001 0010 0543 0541 07, Owner: FIR**  
Donations from foreign countries only with IBAN DE 04 1001 0010 0543 0541 07 and  
**SWIFT-BIC: PBNKDEF**

## **The monument for ‘Freedom’ in Zedelgem, a freedom with a bitter taste ...**

Abdon Bardiaux, Resistance fighter and survivor of the ‘fort of Breendonk’ in Belgium, said ‘Democracy is a daily struggle’. Today, the fight is for the monument De Letse Bijenkorf (‘The Latvian Beehive’) in Zedelgem, a municipality in West Flanders. The monument was inaugurated in 2018 and has provoked a lot of reactions in remembrance circles, but very little in the political circles.

For several years, the municipality of Zedelgem has chosen to highlight its historical heritage, in particular the site of Vloethemveld where at the end of 1944, camps were built by the British Forces and maintained until September 1946. In these camps were 12,000 Latvians, which led the municipality to maintain links with Latvia. The development of this site or the recognition of the descendants of former prisoners of war is obviously not criticised here. The problem lies in the paradox that this monument reveals: the promotion of freedom as much as the honouring of Latvian SS legionnaires, detained by the British after the Second World War.

12,000 bees in the hive, representing 12,000 legionnaires. Pol Denys, the architect of the project and a Vlaams Belang local councillor in Zedelgem, expected a controversy, which did not prevent him from maintaining the project. However, who are the Latvian legionnaires to whom this monument pays partial homage?

In January 43, this legion was composed of two divisions: the 15th SS division (Lettische Nr.1) and the 19th SS division (Lettische Nr.2). It suffered heavy losses against the Red Army while the soviet troops reached Latvia in the end of 1944. At the end of the conflict, some men of this division fled to the West and surrendered to the Allies. Some of them were maintained in the camp of Zedelgem, where they feared to be hand over to the USSR. When the camp was closed, these prisoners obtained the status of Displaced Persons and emigrated to Western countries, notably to the United States and Australia, where their anti-communist views were echoed at the beginning of the Cold War.

Even if these soldiers used the excuse of “finding themselves between two totalitarianisms”, it would be naive to think that they were all acting for a noble ideal or out of submission to authority. Some were volunteers, known for their brutality and their anti-Semitic and anti-communist fanaticism, followers of Nazi ideology. In its name, this legion committed war crimes against the civilian population and the Jewish community, or during clashes with the Red Army. A well-known example is the Sonderkommando led by Sturmbannführer Victor Arājs. According to reports and testimonies from both the Western Allies and the Soviet Union, or a declassified report from the CIA, he was responsible for the death of 50,000 Jews in Latvia and 50,000 more in Belarus, particularly in the Minsk region. Even more disturbing is the tribute paid at the inauguration ceremony to SS-Standartenführer Vilis Janums, a collaborator and holder of the highest German honours during the Second World War, alongside great Nazi criminals. How can this monument be tolerated in a democratic country? How can one defend the fight of men in favour of the Nazi regime? How did these legionnaires become both heroes and victims of war?

The political world has a duty to speak out. This monument and what it conveys on our soil is unacceptable, yet only André Flahaut, Minister of State and former Minister of Defence, has spoken out. In the meantime, due to this deplorable inaction of our leaders, ‘Forward’, the site of the American Jewish community (which lists the monuments honouring former Nazis) gives us this sad honour with the mentioned monument: Belgium, the only country in Western Europe to be on this list.

Jill Lampaert (Ami -entends-tu)

### **FIR and antifascist associations active against this monument**

Since the end of 2020, a public debate is developing in Belgium around this monument. Veterans and anti-fascist organizations such as “Amis - entend-tu”, “The Belgians Remember them”, “Group mémoire” and the Jewish community in Belgium condemned this scandalous commemorative practice. Even in the Belgian Parliament, MPs spoke out against this memorial in early June 2021. French-language newspapers in particular criticized the forgetting of history. The memorial has also been critically reported in other European countries (including Germany, France, and Italy) and in various anti-fascist newspapers.

In an interview for the newspaper Paris Match, the FIR positioned itself against this rehabilitation of Nazi collaborators. It demanded that the monument be removed because, first, it honored a group of military personnel who were not to be honored. Second, she said, the monument in its aesthetic/iconographic form is a complete trivialization of the criminal organization of the SS and its members. The only thing that could usefully be done at this site would be to add an educational plaque about the crimes of the SS volunteers. The FIR newsletter on the subject was widely shared in electronic media.

The FIR and its member associations are confident that it will succeed in Belgium to end such form of Nazi glorification and SS rehabilitation.

## **“Train of 1000” (Auschwitz May 2022) – save the date**

We inform all interested member federations and other antifascist structures that from May 5 to May 10, 2022 the international youth project “Train of 1000”, as we did in May 2012 and May 2015, is going to the Memorial Auschwitz

FIR is acting as co-organizer together with the “Mémoire d’Auschwitz” ASBL and the “War Heritage” Institute in Belgium. FIR will co-organize the international network of the project, including the program of activities. Based on the decision of the leading body, FIR will seek, select and provide young students (school groups) from various European countries other than Belgium and France in which FIR and its national member federations are active. Further information will follow in the next time.

## **Russia: Veterans Council “Companions” organizes Rally of Memory**

The route of the rally “Road of Memory” went along the sites of the bloody battles of the Great Patriotic War. Its goal was to participate in the commemorative events of June 22, 2021, the “Day of Remembrance and Mourning” in Belarus at the memorial site “Hero’s Fortress Brest”.

The solemn opening of the rally started at the memorial site “Heroes of Panfilov” in the village of Nelidovo, Volokolamsky district, Moscow region. This rally was organized by “Soratniki”, a public organization of veterans of the Military-Political Headquarters of the Russian Armed Forces, with the active support of the Russian Veterans Association and the public organization of veterans of the Primorye region “Contingent”. Representatives of the Volokolamsk Military Commissariat, the veterans’ community, family members, young soldiers, schoolchildren, the honorary citizens’ company and the Moscow City Military Commissariat took part.

The first deputy chairman of the Council of the veterans’ organization “Companions” opened the ceremonial launch. Speakers recalled that it was precisely on this line, near Dubosekovo Passage, that the legendary 28 Panfilov soldiers heroically and at the risk of their lives stopped German tanks approaching the capital.

At the end of the event, Colonel D. Osipov received a metal capsule filled with earth from the mass grave of the Panfilov heroes, which was to be transferred to the Brest Fortress Defense Museum of the Republic of Belarus on June 22 at 04:00.

To the sounds of the military orchestra, members of the veterans’ organization and the public laid a wreath and flowers at the monument “45-mm anti-tank gun”. On the first stage, participants also laid flowers at the monument at the gravesite of political patrol leader V.G. Klochkov. Vasily Klochkov was a political commander who, by his own example and fiery words, was able to spur the soldiers to heroic deeds, to instill in them the thought: “There is no retreat, Moscow is behind us!” These words became a motto in battles for many commanders and fighters thanks to the newspaper “Red Star”.



## **PEAEA-DSE: No wind turbines on Gyaros prison island.**

The Panhellenic Association of National Resistance and Democratic Army Fighters of Greece (PEAEA-DSE) calls on the government not to allow the implementation of a decision by the Energy Regulatory Authority granting permission to a private group of investors to build an 80-meter-high wind turbine on the island of Gyaros. Gyaros is located in the Cyclades. It is an arid island, barren, without a harbor and with strong winds that hit it all year round. On Gyaros, since ancient times, never more than thirty inhabitants have lived voluntarily. It was used only as a place of detention. Thus, it was declared the grave of the living, the devil’s island and the island of death, because of the miserable prison conditions, the unspeakable tortures and deaths of imprisoned anti-fascist fighters.

The attempt by influential investors to use Gyaros for the installation of wind turbines is causing great outrage. At the same time, the island was designated as a historical site and its buildings could be preserved. The decision of the Energy Regulatory Authority and the corresponding approval of the Regional Administration of the South Aegean contradict a government decision that designated the entire island as a site of historical memory and prohibited any business activity on it.

## “Dimension of a Crime”

Under this title, a joint exhibition of the German-Russian Museum, the Flossenbürg Concentration Camp Memorial, the Lower Saxony Memorials Foundation, the German Historical Institute in Moscow and the German War Graves Commission on Soviet prisoners of war in World War II was shown at the German-Russian Museum in Berlin-Karlshorst on the 80th anniversary of the invasion of the Soviet Union.

The exhibition and the present catalog deal as central themes: Breach of law, destitution, starvation, segregation, labor deployment, survival, end of the war, return and remembrance. It becomes visible that the war of extermination was not only practiced in the invaded territories, but also against the soviet prisoners of war. The murder of political commissars - shot in CC Sachsenhausen, CC Dachau-Hebertshausen and CC Buchenwald - and the selection of those unable to work was one consequence. In the course of the war, the value of the labor of the prisoners of war outweighed the will to exterminate them. Employed first in mining, work in agriculture and areas of war production followed. Here there were forms of resistance (e.g. sabotage). Unfortunately, this is only shortly reflected in the catalog.

The three chapters End of War, Return and Remembrance recall the difficult treatment of surviving POWs in the Soviet Union after 1945. They were sometimes regarded as “traitors” and sent to Soviet labor camps, with over 80% of former POWs either returning to serve in the ranks of the Soviet armed forces, participating in reconstruction work in labor battalions, or being released home for reasons of age and health. In fact, it is only since the 1980s that the social treatment of former prisoners of war in the Soviet Union has developed more positively.

A separate chapter contains twelve biographical sketches, prisoners from various Soviet republics, women and men who were imprisoned or murdered in different camps. The most controversial figure here is Ukrainian Ivan M. Demjanjuk, who served as a “trawniki” (an auxiliary) in the Sobibor death camp and the CC Flossenbürg. As recently as 2011, he was sentenced to five years in prison for accessory to murder.

The chapter “Camp Locations and Victim Numbers” presents a challenge. From Scandinavia to Austria, in Germany, Poland and all occupied territories of the Soviet Union, there were several thousand camps and detention sites with Soviet prisoners of war. Despite the fascist bureaucracy, many numbers still rely on estimates to this day.

As a supplement to these victim figures, the exhibition shows nearly two dozen memorial sites dealing with the fate of Soviet prisoners of war. The final element of this is a photo of the dedication of a memorial to the dead of Dulag 100 (transit camp) in Porchov (Russia), which was inaugurated in 2016. Against the background of today's historical-political disputes, it is not certain whether the memorials shown in Ukraine and the Baltic republics will continue to exist in the shown dignified form.

In a digression, the ambivalence of existing historical images as a source of historical research and mediation is explained. It is important to note in the image analysis that these photos generally document the perpetrator's perspective.

The catalog contains in-depth essays on the labor deployment of Soviet prisoners of war in the territory of the Reich 1941-1945, on their transfer to concentration camps, and on the memory of the fate of Soviet prisoners of war in Germany and the Soviet Union, or today Russia.

Ulrich Schneider

### **Bibliography:**

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The International Federation of Resistant fighters (FIR) has been designated by the Secretary-General of the United Nations as a «Peace Messenger». The Federation is accepted as NGO at the UNESCO, Paris, at the UN standing committee of disarmament, Geneva and the European council, Strasbourg.

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