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## “History cannot be finished!”

### Dismantling and Demolishing Soviet Monuments in Latvia since 2022

Since Russia launched a full-scale war in Ukraine on 24 February 2022, a number of actions have taken place in Latvia that have affected the heritage of the Soviet era, in particular monuments. The Latvian government, in cooperation with several local organisations, has implemented a new law regarding the dismantling and demolition of Soviet-era monuments: a total of 70 monuments across Latvia have been affected by this so far. The most publicly discussed and politically charged case has been the notorious Victory Monument (officially the Monument to the Liberators of Soviet Latvia and Riga from the German Fascist Invaders, erected in 1985; fig. 1), which was located in Victory Park in Pārdaugava, not far from the Riga city centre. It was torn down in August 2022.

Almost anyone can understand why the Soviet legacy has come to the government’s attention since last year. The war in Ukraine has opened an old wound: the trauma in the post-Soviet space caused by the long Soviet occupation. However, there has been no consensus on the dismantling of Soviet monuments over the past year and a half: the views of local society differ significantly from the views of academic circles or of the international media. There are also questions as to how it was possible to dispose of so many monuments in such a short time. This article seeks to explore how this process has been carried out and who have been involved in its implementation. Who were the main decision makers? In what context were particular views formed, either by politicians, art experts or the society at large? What opinions exist about the Soviet legacy, its evaluation and preservation for future generations?

This article is based on an analysis of information available in the public media – mainly news portals – and the published laws. In addition, I have sought comments from the responsible officials of the institutions involved in the monument dismantling process. Building on the claim by the sculptor Aivars Gulbis

that “History cannot be finished”<sup>1</sup>, I will focus on the most visible cases of Soviet monuments, including examples from both those dismantled and those that remain intact (or are still under discussion), as well as the controversies surrounding them.

#### **Ambiguous Decisions and Double-edged Views: A New Law**

In the early 1990s, as soon as the independence of the three Baltic states was restored, a massive process of removing monuments honouring Lenin and Stalin began. “Among the works were both those of little and sufficient artistic value by Latvian artists”, says the Latvian art historian Rihards Pētersons, an expert on Soviet heritage: “Lenin’s image was unambiguously interpreted as a message imposed by a totalitarian power and even without public polls it could be said that at least two-thirds of the public perceived the removal as acceptable”<sup>2</sup>.

Yet, after the 1990s there were no significant removals of Soviet monuments in Latvia until recently. This was not only because of the issue losing topicality. Indeed, there was an agreement<sup>3</sup> between Latvia and Russia, signed in 1994, which required the preservation of Soviet memorial structures and burial sites. The war in Ukraine, however, led to the suspension of this agreement by Latvia, especially because local politicians actively sought to find ways to demolish the Victory Monument in Riga.

A new law, “On the Prohibition of the Display and Dismantling of Objects Commemorating the Soviet and Nazi Regimes in the Territory of the Republic of Latvia”,<sup>4</sup> came into force on 23 June 2022, and was drafted by the Saeima, the parliament of Latvia, particularly by its Education, Culture and Science Committee. According to the law, it is now prohibited to display monuments, memorial signs, plaques, architectural, artistic or other objects related to these issues that were put up in the territory of Latvia after

1940. This refers not only to public buildings and open spaces, but also the indoor premises of "a public person", except for accredited museums. The institutions involved in the decision making process were the Ministry of Culture of Latvia, the State Inspection for Heritage Protection, as well as non-profit organisations – the Artists' Union of Latvia and the Museum of the Occupation of Latvia. On 27 and 28 June 2022 a working group<sup>5</sup>, representing the aforementioned organisations, evaluated 162 objects throughout Latvia<sup>6</sup>. The list of objects was compiled by the State Inspection for Heritage Protection. The working group came to the conclusion that 70 of the monuments (including the Victory Monument) must be dismantled or destroyed<sup>7</sup> (fig. 2, 3).

The Museum of the Occupation in Riga has the role of conserving parts of those dismantled monuments considered worthy of preservation. Interestingly, this museum – a private enterprise – is given such an important role in the decision making, especially from the point of questions how to preserve the dismantled parts, where they will be placed, as well as how accessible they will be to the public from now on. The head of the Artists' Union of Latvia, Igors Dobičins, points out, that many suggestions by the Artists' Union, especially those related to the artistic value and conservation of the monuments (including the Victory Monument) were quickly disregarded by politicians and the representatives of the Museum of the Occupation of Latvia<sup>8</sup>. The director of the museum, Solvita Vība, has expressed harsh opinions on the Victory Monument publicly, stating that it has no value and that it should not be preserved<sup>9</sup>. It reveals that even among art and culture professionals quite contradictory views on the artistic value of the monuments can be detected.

A more thorough analysis should be carried out on how the the decision process has exactly taken place, but it is evident that important decisions have been enforced with the help of the nationalist discourse, which has been on the rise in Latvia in the last years. The Ministry of Culture was led for a while by the right-wing party, the National Alliance (Nacionālā Apvienība), which has played a huge role in forming public opinion in relation to Soviet heritage. However, the demolition of the Victory Monument was overseen

by the Riga Council, which at that time was ruled by a more centrist political party, represented by Mayor Mārtiņš Staķis. It is precisely the political context that explains the fast pace of the demolitions<sup>10</sup>.



Fig. 1: A view of the Victory Monument. Photo: Arnis Balčus, from the series *Victory Park*, 2008–2016.

### ***Okupeklis* or Sacred Site? Demolishing the Victory Monument in Riga**

The Victory Monument was a memorial complex, erected in 1985 in the capital of Latvia, commemorating the Red Army soldiers who recaptured Riga and the rest of Latvia at the end of World War II. The narrative was naturally in the service of Soviet ideology, i.e. the Red Army as responsible for stopping fascism and bringing peace to Europe. Therefore the site was a place where, for many years, Victory Day celebrations took place on 9 May (fig. 4, 5).

The complex consisted of a 79-meter-tall obelisk, crowned with five-pointed stars, symbolising in this context the five years of war. The obelisk was accompanied by two groups of sculptures: Homeland the Mother, and three soldiers called the Soldier Liberators. The monument was created and designed by a Latvian team of artists: the sculptors Aivars Gulbis,



Fig. 2: The dismantling of the Monument to the Defenders of Liepāja, 2022. Photo: Aigars Prūsis (courtesy of Liepājas valstspilsētas pašvaldība).

Ļevs Bukovskis and Leonīds Kristovskis, the architects Ermens Bāliņš, Edvīns Vecumnieks and Viktors Zilgalvis, and the constructor Gunārs Beitiņš, as well as the Russian-Latvian artist Aleksandrs Bugajevs<sup>11</sup> (fig. 6).

The destruction of the Victory Monument between 22–25 August 2022 can be seen as a cathartic and certainly symbolic act, both for those people who had experienced the suppression of the Soviet regime, and for the younger generation who want to look to the future without fear of colonisation and occupation. The event was watched live by thousands of people, on site and on TV (fig. 7–9).

Yet, there was also a fairly large minority group, mostly Russian-speaking people, who shed tears over the demolition of this monument: those who either still embraced the nostalgia of the Soviet times, among them World War II veterans, and/or those openly supporting Putin and contemporary Russia.

The monument had been the subject of a long-standing controversy in modern Latvian society even before 2022 concerning the historical memory of World War II and the legacy of Soviet rule. In the mid-1980s, when it was erected, and when the National Awakening movement was forming in Latvia, many ethnic Latvians regarded it as a sign of Soviet re-occupation. With the start of the war in Ukraine, the monument again became a reminder of the pain inflicted by the Soviet regime. The obelisk was sometimes referred to in Latvian as the Finger of Moscow or *okupekļis* (a combination of the Latvian words for occupation and monument), and juxtaposed to the



Fig. 3: The dismantling of the Monument to the Defenders of Liepāja, 2022. Photo: Aigars Prūsis (courtesy of Liepājas valstspilsētas pašvaldība).

interwar Freedom Monument<sup>12</sup>, which stands on the same urban axis: a line that the Stalinist city planners wanted to implement in Riga from the Victory Monument, across the Stone Bridge (Akmens tilts, opened in 1957), through the old city, cutting it in half, and continuing all the way to the Jugla neighbourhood via Brīvības street.

There had even been several attempts to demolish the Victory Monument before, including a bombing by the Latvian ultranationalist group Pērkoņkrusts in 1997 (during which two people died). Yet, until 2022, discussions about its removal were largely ignored, mainly due to the aforementioned agreement between Latvia and Russia regarding the preservation of memorial structures. Also, the political context was relevant: for almost ten years, the Social Democratic Party, *Saskaņa*, was the leading party in the Riga Council. It stood up for the rights of the local Russian-speaking community, yet it was a highly corrupt party with ties to Putin's Russia; thus there was no interest in developing any other narrative regarding the Victory ensemble or in implementing changes in the territory that surrounded it.

During the discussions leading to the demolition of the monument, some people from the art and culture field pointed out that the piece itself was a complicated structure with certain parts that had high artistic value, and therefore it should not be destroyed. It was proposed that, ideally, it should be moved to another place as a whole, deconstructing its meaning or adding a contemporary layer to it. Among many views by art professionals in the public space, the opinions





Fig. 4: A view of the field of flowers at the Victory Monument at a 9 May celebration. Photo: Arnis Balčus, from the series *Victory Park*, 2008–2016.



Fig. 5: A view of fireworks taking place at the Victory Monument at a 9 May celebration. Photo: Arnis Balčus, from the series *Victory Park*, 2008–2016.



Fig. 6: A view of the Victory Monument in Riga, 2022. Photo: Jānis Škapars (TVNET GRUPA).

offered by the curator Inga Šteimane, the artist Gļebs Panteļejevs and the art historian Ilze Martinsone stood out as more critically engaged<sup>13</sup>. Yet, the opinions of a few art experts were ignored by the political parties (which is less surprising) and also by museums, especially the Museum of the Occupation of Latvia.

What constituted this artistic value? Previous interpretations of the work perfectly highlight the ambivalence of Soviet heritage. The artistic value was specifically noted in the figure of the woman in the Victory Monument, *Homeland the Mother* (fig. 10, 11), sculpted by Aivars Gulbis, who is a renowned sculptor in Latvia. His work is considered to have had a modern touch during the Soviet times. Alongside the Soviet ideology, his *Homeland the Mother* had a rather different angle of interpretation from the local perspective: its imagery resembled the Nike of Samothrace. As the Latvian art historian Ruta Čaupova has pointed out in regards to the latest discussion about the Victory Monument:

*"The sculptural form of the Motherland is a professionally convincing, creatively executed work of art. It is made with the aim of affirming self-confidence, Latvian identity and an independent attitude. To reinforce the evidence of an independent approach, the sculptor intended to place a brightly polished figure of a child in the raised hand of the Mother, which would contrast strikingly with the expressive textures of the bronze surfaces of the sculptures. [...] Moreover, this work by Aivars Gulbis is significant in the overall development of Latvian sculpture because, in comparison with the highly compact, sometimes rather unwieldy form of expression that dominated our stone sculpture, it marked a significant shift towards more spatially active, plastic solutions"<sup>14</sup>.*

Čaupova mentions that the idea of the sculpture of a child in the Mother's hand (fig. 12) was never fully realised, because the then representative of the Ministry of Culture rejected this idea. Instead, the woman was depicted with her hand raised, as if in greeting, which was thought to better suit the ideological message. This conflict between the artist's ideas and the authorities had a great resonance in the society at that time. The mood and the ambiguous message of



Fig. 7: The demolition of the Victory Monument, 2022. Courtesy of F64 Photo Agency.



Fig. 8: The demolition of the Victory Monument, 2022. Courtesy of F64 Photo Agency.



Fig. 9: A meme from Facebook, 2022.

the monument, as well as the process of its creation, are depicted in the film *The Stone of Sisyphus* (1985), directed by the acclaimed director Juris Podnieks. This film to a certain extent revealed the "revolt" of creative people against the oppressive Soviet ideology<sup>15</sup> (fig. 13, 14). When reflecting on the monument in 2021, the sculptor Gulbis stated:

*"I thought little of the ideological side at that time. For me, this was an interesting task. Every design competition of that scale is a creative challenge for an artist; the competition, the experience of demonstrating your skill, plus the collaboration with an architect, the environment: it is all very exciting. [...] Monumental sculpting is always linked to power, the political power in a country. Every fifty or hundred years the political situation changes here, and with the change of regimes, the monuments of the past are knocked down or blown up"<sup>16</sup>.*

The above-mentioned opinions and views have remained in the shadows of the "monument wars": they have received almost no attention in the public sphere. The ambivalent nature of many Soviet monuments – the fact that they can have different, sometimes completely contradictory meanings, or that their ideological messages might have completely changed over time – has generally been ignored in the discussions that have been initiated in the politics-dominated context of the past year.

### Monuments as "Scapegoats"

In addition to the 70 monuments<sup>17</sup> that fell under the law of dismantling, the Riga Council of Monuments (Rīgas Pieminekļu padome) and Centre for Public Memory (Publiskās atmiņas centrs) have suggested removing or relocating six other monuments that are devoted to known individuals who had openly supported the Soviet regime. Among them are, for example, monuments to writers: Russian authors, such as Alexander Pushkin, and Latvian writers, such as Andrejs Upīts and Anna Sakse.

The case of the Andrejs Upīts (1870–1977) monument (author Alberts Terpilovskis, architect Gunārs Asaris, opened in 1987) in Riga deserves particular attention in these discussions, perfectly demonstrating the ambiguous approach that is characteristic of the confusion around the "monument situation" right now, while also presenting a creative intervention that would completely reinterpret the monument (fig. 15). Ivars Drulle, a Latvian artist who is also a member of the Riga Council, points out that the Upīts monument contains both "bad" and "good" sides<sup>18</sup>. What does Drulle mean?



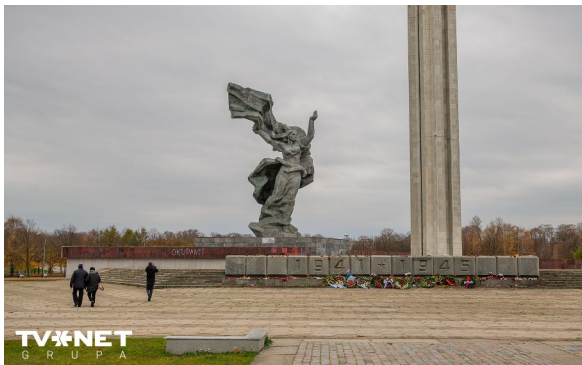


Fig. 10: A view of the Victory Monument's sculpture Homeland the Mother, 2022. Photo: Mārtiņš Otto (TVNET GRUPA).



Fig. 11: The demolition of the Victory Monument's sculpture Homeland the Mother, 2022. Photo: Jānis Škapars (TVNET GRUPA).

Upīts was a popular writer, critic and literary theorist, who was not only a left wing supporter while Latvia was a free country in the interwar era, but also a later advocate of communism, serving as a public figure under the Soviet regime<sup>19</sup>. Indeed, Upīts was part of the delegation who asked the Soviets to incorporate Latvia in the Soviet Union on 30 July 1940, a decision that was, of course, harshly condemned by many Latvians<sup>20</sup>. This was the prime reason his monument has been considered for removal with particular vigour in 2023.

The discussions between art professionals and politically affiliated individuals have been particularly heated on the matter of the Upīts monument, because his literary heritage was also important to the Latvian community, and not only in relation to Soviet culture. How to evaluate monuments when there are obvious conflicting meanings? Drulle has come up with a contemporary solution to reinterpret the monument (fig. 16):

*"I propose sawing it in half, symbolically separating the good from the bad. It would form a kind of monument for reconciliation between irreconcilable parties, and at the same time a new context would emerge. The Andrejs Upīts monument would become a contemporary work of art and a sign of different visions. I very much hope that this could be a symbol and a way to resolve our disputes over the removing of monuments."<sup>21</sup>*

Drulle even suggests moving the monument to the square that faces the Latvian Academy of Sciences, a Stalinist skyscraper in Riga. During the 1940s–1990s, the building also used to house the Latvian SSR Institute of Languages and Literature (renamed the Latvian Language Institute of the University of Latvia), which was established by Upīts and named after him<sup>22</sup> (fig. 17).

An important note regarding the discussions around the "wars on monuments" since the 1990s is that little attention has been paid to the authors of these works in the public space – the artists, sculptors and architects involved – or the original context of creating these monuments, including the hardships the authors experienced in the production process and other similar issues. No discussions about the authorship issues of the monuments have publicly occurred since the dismantling process began last year either. That is a rather alarming issue, which nobody would dare to touch at the moment.

The Upīts monument is a case in point: the fact that its author was the sculptor Alberts Terpilovskis, a professor and the head of the sculpture department at the Art Academy of Latvia (1976–1998), is publicly seldom acknowledged. He was the author of many monuments, including the Monument for Fighters of 1905, located at the edge of the river Daugava in Riga, as well as many portraits of famous cultural figures. In the letter against the dismantling or removal of the Upīts monument signed by a number of art and culture professionals, it was indicated, instead, that

*"the writer's pose, his rich achievements in Latvian literature and the contradictory, portrait-like nature of his character are clearly seen in the work. The ensemble itself can be seen as a whole with the adjacent building [i.e. the Riga Congress Centre], the*



Fig. 12: Sculptor Aivars Gulbis in the process of creating Homeland the Mother for the Victory Monument. Still from the film *The Stone of Sisyphus*, directed by Juris Podnieks, 1985.



Fig. 13: A close up view of Homeland the Mother, Victory Monument. Still from the film *The Stone of Sisyphus*, 1985.



Fig. 14: The instalment of the Soldier Liberators for the Victory Monument. Still from the film *The Stone of Sisyphus*, 1985.





Fig. 15: Monument of Andrejs Upitis in Riga, 2023. Photo: Ivars Drulle.



Fig. 16: The proposition *Divuprīts* (Upītis-divided) for reinterpreting the Monument of Andrejs Upitis. Author: Ivars Drulle, 2023.



Fig. 17: The proposition for placing *Divuprīts* in front of the Academy of Sciences building in Riga. Author: Ivars Drulle, 2023.



*location and the lawn (as a reference to a cultural and historical novel, Upīts's "Green Land"), and with its generalised, geometricised forms and rhythm it is a unique artistic testimony of its era. It should be noted that there are not many ensembles of such high quality left in Latvia, and they form an important stage in the continuity of Latvian sculpture<sup>23</sup>.*

While the media has focused more on biases and political vicissitudes than on substantive issues, there is a need for more nuance and openness to discussion with art professionals as the defenders and initiators of conversations around monuments, who can point out their complex and ambivalent natures. This one-sidedness has also been reinforced by various state or non-profit organisations, not to mention a certain passivity among art professionals, who either lack the will or the power to raise these concerns publicly.



Fig. 18 Monument to the Liberators of Tukums by Arta Dumpe, 2022. Photo: Inga Hartika (Tukums TIC photo archive).

### Tentacles of Nationalism and Local Bias

As mentioned above, the impact of the nationalistic discourse has been quite prevalent in Latvia over the last ten years, since the Ministry of Culture came to be led by the National Alliance Party. Since the fall of 2023, however, the ministry has been under the control of a social-democratic party called the Progressives (Progresīvie), which provides a little hope that the strongly nationalistic discourse might fade away in future. This discourse has contributed greatly to how Soviet monuments have been approached, both by academics and the society at large. In the public

realm, the Soviet heritage is seen as something almost exclusively negative. For the support of the removal of the Victory Monument in Riga, for example, more than 200,000 Euros were donated in an online fundraising campaign<sup>24</sup>.

Art professionals have also not contributed greatly to informing and educating the society about the heritage of Soviet culture. Since the restoration of Latvia's independence in 1991, relatively little research has been undertaken by art historians or historians on these matters, leaving a gap in the understanding of the historical, cultural and aesthetical value of Soviet heritage, especially monuments. The most notable research on this issue has been carried out by Professor Sergejs Kruks and the historian Mārtiņš Mintaurš<sup>25</sup>. The postcolonial and decolonial theories have been applied in academic research only quite recently. Significant research has been carried out by the literary theorist Benedikts Kalnačs, whereas in the art scene only a few sporadic contributions have been made by such authors as Santa Hirša, Jānis Taurens, Inga Lāce, Toms Ķencis and others<sup>26</sup>.

Another important point is that most of this heritage is not under the protection of the State Inspection for Heritage Protection. For the past year and a half, the organisation has been very passive in changing or coming up with regulations that would contribute to preserving the Soviet past. As Mintaurš has very aptly pointed out:

*"The relationship between the cultural heritage protection sector and the political authorities has always been complex: the formation of the cultural heritage sector is the result of certain historical processes, and therefore the attitude of the sector's specialists towards a group of protected sites is subject to influence by historically dominant ideological conceptions and socio-political conditions."<sup>27</sup>*

The above-mentioned factors give a clearer picture of why there has not been an educational approach in the society at large that would create a better understanding of the complexities of the heritage of Soviet culture, one which would help people come to terms with their difficult past.



Fig. 19: The demolition of the Victory Monument, 2022. Photo: Andrejs Strokins.

Recently the decolonisation discourse has been on the rise in art circles, but there is a lack of knowledge and experience from which the decolonisation process could take place. Some people call the monument-dismantling campaigns non-democratic, while others say that justice is finally being served. In the article "A Strange Decolonisation: Monument Wars in the Baltics" the Estonian historian Aro Velmet compares the dismantling of the Soviet monuments to the Confederate monument removals in the US<sup>28</sup>. Although the decolonisation process is on the rise all over the world, each context contains differences and particularities. He stresses that while many of the Soviet monuments have become separated from their ideological starting points and have gained additional meanings over time, many of them still serve as war memorial sites (even if it is just for the Russian minority). Numerous examples have been affected by the new law in Latvia.

One example that "survived the process of inspection" is the monument to the Liberators of Tukums, which was installed in the city of Tukums in 1975. It was sculpted by the renowned Latvian sculptor Arta Dumpe (fig. 18). Again, the artist has embodied in the monument another meaning, beyond the ideologically obvious one: a symbol of strength, a mother as strong as an oak tree in the centre of the composition, holding her two sons who are fighting on the opposite

sides of the front<sup>29</sup>. This monument is also a good example of Soviet modernism in Latvia and its dynamism, which entered the artistic language around that time.

Unfortunately, the current "war on monuments", which is a very politicised process as we have seen, has not done justice to the language of the original artworks. Their visual appearance in many cases symbolised a certain resistance, a hidden message that could not have been communicated clearly in Soviet times. Nowadays little attention is paid to considering and communicating to the public that the nature of Soviet aesthetics and material obstacles, as well as the challenges that the artists at that time had to deal with, were highly complex (as mentioned above regarding the Victory Monument).

This leaves open the question of what will be left of this heritage and how it will be communicated in the future. While preparing this text, I was informed that a very good 3D-scan of the Victory Monument was prepared before its demolition (fig. 19), a hint that not all is lost, and opening up a space for imagination for future generations who might want to rebuild it at some point. Although this could be seen simply as an act of documentation, it cannot be excluded that future generations might have a different vision of the historical or aesthetic meanings of Soviet monuments, apart from their political dimensions.



## Endnotes

- Gulbja spārni. Grāmata par tēlnieku Aivaru Gulbi [Wings of a swan: A book about the sculptor Aivars Gulbis], Rīga 2021, p. 112. – The work on my article was supported by the Estonian Research Council grant PSG530.
- Email from Rihards Pētersons, sent to the author of the article, dated 22.8.2023. – Translations by the author, unless otherwise noted.
- "Par 1994. gada 30. aprīlī Maskavā parakstītajiem Latvijas Republikas un Krievijas Federācijas līgumiem" [On the treaties between the Republic of Latvia and the Russian Federation signed in Moscow on 30 April 1994], in: Likumi, 10.12.1994, <https://likumi.lv/ta/id/58917-par-1994-gada-30-aprili-maskava-parakstitajiem-latvijas-republikas-un-krievijas-federacijas-ligumiem> (last accessed 2.12.2023).
- "Par padomju un nacistisko režīmu slavinošu objektu eksponēšanas aizliegumu un to demontāžu Latvijas Republikas teritorijā" [On the prohibition of the display and dismantling of objects commemorating the Soviet and Nazi regimes in the territory of the Republic of Latvia], in: Likumi, 23.6.2022, <https://likumi.lv/ta/id/333439-par-padomju-un-nacistisko-rezimu-slavinoshu-objektu-eksponesanas-izliegumu-un-to-demontazu-latvijas-republikas-teritorija> (last accessed 2.12.2023).
- The following people represented the working group: the art historian Gundega Čebere, the sculptor and the head of the Latvian Artists' Union Igors Dobičins, the lawyer Jānis Junkers, the parliamentary secretary of the Culture Ministry Ritvars Jansons, the director of the Museum of the Occupation of Latvia Solvita Vība, the deputy director of the Museum of the Occupation of Latvia and its main keeper of the collection Taiga Kokneviča, the historian Kārlis Dambītis, and from the staff of the State Inspection for Heritage Protection: the head of the organisation Juris Dambis, the head of the Culture Objects Circulation Unit Jānis Asaris, the head of the Information Centre of Culture Heritage Simona Čevere, and the expert on Culture Objects Circulation Unit Agnese Černaja ("Cabinet of Ministers regulation no. 448 of 14 July 2022"; "Apsekoti un izvērtēti okupācijas režīmu slavinoši objekti" [Objects commemorating the occupation regime surveyed and evaluated], in: Nacionālā kultūras mantojuma pārvalde, 30.6.2022, <https://www.nkmp.gov.lv/lv/jaunums/apsekoti-un-izverteti-okupacijas-rezimu-slavinosi-objekti> (last accessed 2.12.2023); email from Igors Dobičins, the head of the Artists' Union of Latvia, sent to the author of the article, dated 2.9.2023).
- "Par padomju un nacistisko režīmu slavinošu objektu eksponēšanas aizliegumu un to demontāžu Latvijas Republikas teritorijā" [On the prohibition of the display and dismantling of objects commemorating the Soviet and Nazi regimes in the territory of the Republic of Latvia], in: Likumi, 23.6.2022, available: Anotācija (ex-ante), <https://titania.saeima.lv/LIVS13/SaeimaLIVS13.nsf/0/E5E09B97C A3BF00BC225884D00380658?OpenDocument> (last accessed 2.12.2023).
- Paula Dēvica and Dāvids Freidenfelds, "Eksperti valdībai piedāvās 69 nojaucamu padomju režīmu slavinošu objektu sarakstu" [Experts to propose a list of 69 objects glorifying the Soviet regime to be demolished], in: LSM.lv, 30.6.2023, <https://www.lsm.lv/raksts/zinas/latvija/30.06.2022-eksperti-valdibai-piedavas-69-nojaucamu-padomju-rezimu-slavinoshu-objektu-sarakstu.a463561/> (last accessed 2.12.2023).
- From the email by Igors Dobičins to the author, dated 2.9.2023.
- E.g. LTV Ziņu dienests, "Intervija ar Latvijas okupācijas muzeja direktori Solvitu Vību" [An interview with the director of the Museum of Occupation of Latvia, Solvita Vība], in: YouTube, 23.8.2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IYUj-14gVIs> (last accessed 2.12.2023).
- Some criticism regarding the nationalistic discourse and the way it has affected the local art realm is found in Wunderkombināts. Latvijas mākslas gadagrāmata, vol. I, 2022, Rīga 2022.
- Laila Bremša, "Pieminekļi Padomju karavīriem – Padomju Latvijas un Rīgas atbrīvotājiem no vācu fašistiskajiem iebrucējiem" [Monument to the Liberators of Soviet Latvia and Riga from the German Fascist Invaders], in: Nacionālā enciklopēdija, s.a., <https://enciklopedija.lv/skirklis/146216> (last accessed 2.12.2023).
- "Monument to the Liberators of Soviet Latvia and Riga from the German Fascist Invaders", in: Wikipedia, last modified 5.8.2023, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Monument\\_to\\_the\\_Liberators\\_of\\_Soviet\\_Latvia\\_and\\_Riga\\_from\\_the\\_German\\_Fascist\\_Invaders](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Monument_to_the_Liberators_of_Soviet_Latvia_and_Riga_from_the_German_Fascist_Invaders) (last accessed 2.12.2023).
- See Inga Šteimane, "Ko iesākt ar pieminekli Uzvaras parkā? Vērtē kultūras eksperti" [What to do with the monument in Victory Park? Judged by culture experts], in: LSM.lv, 1.4.2022, <https://www.lsm.lv/raksts/kultura/kulturtelpa/ko-iesakt-ar-pieminekli-uzvaras-parka-verte-kulturas-eksperti.a450647/> (last accessed 2.12.2023).
- Email from Igors Dobičins to the author, dated 2.9.2023.
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## Abstract

The article analyses a number of processes that have taken place in Latvia regarding Soviet monuments since Russia launched a full-scale war in Ukraine on 24 February 2022. The Latvian government, in cooperation with several local organisations, has implemented a new law that has affected 70 monuments built either in the Soviet times or during the German occupation of Latvia during World War II. At the top of the list of monuments to be dismantled or demolished was the Victory Monument (1985), located in Victory Park in the Pārdaugava district of Riga. The article seeks to explore how these processes have been carried out and who have been involved in their implementation. It looks at the decision makers, as well as the context in which particular views were formed, by politicians, art experts or the society at large. Focusing on the controversies surrounding the monuments, the article specifically points out the politically charged decisions in the dismantling/demolition process, as well as the influence of the nationalistic discourse.

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