

Both Nazi Germany and Stalinist USSR were Enemies of the Republic of Latvia in World War II

The Second World War and its events are still seen as controversial in the society. Although more than 70 years have passed since the end of the war, passions still stir up in Latvia, especially in spring. It takes place around two significant dates that are highlighted in the context of the Second World War – March 16 and May 9. It is not easy to navigate in the complex and controversial historical processes, so people quite often take sides on the interpretation of events, influenced more by emotional than rational considerations. The current situation is skilfully used also by the world of politics promoting polarization in the society. The hostages of the situation, unfortunately, are still those residents of Latvia who were direct participants of the historic events, for example, they were forced to fight in the armies of two totalitarian countries.

The aim of this article is to analyse the main events of the Second World War from the point of view of the Republic of Latvia. In this story the Republic of Latvia is a country that due to the brutal aggression during the World War II lost not only its independence, but also a large part of its identity. It lost people, including two remarkable national minorities with centuries-old roots in Latvia - Baltic Germans and Jews, and also many material and cultural values. The development of the events in the war and post-war period as Latvia remained in the Soviet occupation left very serious consequences in many areas, which we still feel today. Also emotionally, when searching for answers to the questions that are still unclear.

International context

The Second World War (1939 - 1945) did not start suddenly; geopolitical tensions in the world had increased for several years before that. In Europe a number of countries were ruled by anti-democratic regimes whose leaders tended to revise their territorial order, which had formed after the First World War. There was already a war in Asia, as Japan was aggressively expanding its direct and indirect influence in China.

In Europe Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union came forward as the main revisionist countries, actively seeking opportunities for the expansion of their territories by any means.

For some time the USSR had been looking for „accomplices” who would accept the sending of its troops in the territory of the former Russian Empire. The Western

countries did not want to engage in such deals, but Germany had willingly agreed. The Third Reich itself was seeking to settle a score with Poland, which did not engage in discussion on a voluntary return of some territories to Germany. The agreement concluded by the USSR and Germany on August 23, 1939 (the Molotov - Ribbentrop Pact) paved the way for starting the war, which happened after a week. On September 1, 1939, the Second World War started with the German attack on Poland.

Complying with its international commitments to Poland, Great Britain and France declared war on Germany, although they did not start the hostilities against Germany. The idea of war remained very unpopular in Great Britain and France, especially when it came to sending troops to deal with the problems of some other countries. The USSR skilfully maneuvered in the international arena attacking Poland only after Germany had invaded the country. In this way the USSR temporarily managed to avoid the wrath of the international community and to continue positioning itself as a neutral state.

In the autumn 1939, the USSR demanded the deployment of military bases in the Baltic States and Finland. The Baltic States agreed, but Finland did not consent, which a few months later provoked the USSR military aggression and international implications - the USSR as an aggressor was excluded from the League of Nations.¹ Finland fought valiantly, and even though it lost a significant part of its territory as a result of the war, it defended its independence. The joys of the Baltic countries on avoiding the neighbouring country's aggression turned out to be fairly short, as on June 1940 the USSR presented new ultimatums and occupied the Baltic States by adding them to the Soviet Union in a short time. More than half a century long Soviet occupation period began in the Baltic countries, temporarily interrupted by the occupation pursued by Nazi Germany.

The territorial ambitions of the USSR and Germany did not stop on the divided Poland and the Baltic States. When their spheres of interest began to overlap, the short friendship very soon reached an impasse. As a precondition for joining the so-called "axis" countries (Germany, Japan and Italy) in a long term, in autumn 1940 the USSR put forward overly broad territorial claims in Europe and Asia (Germany was ready to accept the USSR territorial expansion in Asia by annexing India, Persia and other countries, but it was against bestowing Turkey and the Balkans to the USSR). Outwardly continuing to demonstrate friendly relations, both countries intensively began to prepare for the mutual warfare.

¹ The League of Nations was an international organization regulating collective security, which in the early 30s of the 20th century united more than 50 countries. With the geopolitical situation becoming more complicated at the end of 30ies, it turned out to be incapable of influencing the activities of the great powers. Formally, the organization continued to exist until 1946. To a great extent the functions and tasks of the League of Nations were taken over by the United Nations (UN).

The similar policies of the USSR and Germany occupation regimes in Latvia

The policies of the Soviet and Nazi occupation regimes in Latvia were very similar in many respects. The substitution of characteristic national symbols with the symbols of the USSR and Germany; the substitution of Karlis Ulmanis cult with Joseph Stalin and Adolf Hitler; the introduction of a new ideological terminology; renaming streets after the authorities or symbols pleasing to a particular regime are some of the external aspects that Latvian residents soon faced. It was also inherent to persecute certain categories of the population, which most often did not show any resistance, but one or the other occupation regime still considered them as hostile and extinguishable. Nazis chose racist aspects as the main priority for their repression - it manifested particularly drastically in the extermination of Jews or the Holocaust, while the Soviet regime turned against certain social groups - the economic and political elite of the independent Latvia. In both cases, the repressions also affected the family members, including the elderly and children.

Distrust of the local population united both regimes. Both regimes established a specific unit in the territory of Latvia that controlled the political and economic processes, and invited a large number of different officials, whose mandate was significantly greater than the capacity of local authorities made up from local collaborators. There was a difference in the fact that the Nazis did not hide their dominance, while the Soviet regime by all means and in all aspects was trying to create an impression that decisions are taken by the "locals". A special recruitment campaign of Latvians living in the USSR was carried out, appointing them in responsible positions in Latvia. Special attention was paid to the Latvian surname of the officials sent to Latvia, but their real Latvian language skills and professional competencies were of secondary importance. Finding competent staff of Latvian origin in the USSR in 1940 was very difficult because almost all responsible staff of Latvian nationality were destroyed by Stalin in the repressions of 1937 - 1938. In turn, the direct subordinate bodies of the occupying power most often remained unnoticed in the public space.²

There were just as large similarities in the framework of the economic processes during the Second World War. The first and foremost condition in setting priorities in the economy was the geopolitical situation – the war in Europe, which led to a substantial reorientation of the economy towards the military needs. In Latvia in this respect the turning point was June 22, 1941, when the war between the USSR and Nazi Germany started, and the economic subordination to the needs of the war

² For example, The Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and the USSR Council of People's Commissars special representative bureau, the USSR State Planning representative bureau.

reached extreme forms. This includes also a purposeful destruction of infrastructure and material goods, as well as human evacuation, as one or the other army retreated.

An important aspect of the occupation of the territory was taking over all kinds of material resources and infrastructure. In the summer of 1940 upon entering the Latvian territory, the Soviet occupation forces in a month's time paved the way for the preparation of a legal framework corresponding to the Soviet standards for its war booty. In the USSR understanding, the easiest way to achieve this was by nationalization. The day after the proclamation of the Soviet regime, on July 22, 1940, the declarations were adopted on the state property status of the land, banks, large industrial, commercial and transport companies. These decisions also applied to the companies that were previously state-owned – namely, also the property of the Republic of Latvia was nationalized. Thus, basically everything in Latvia was declared a Soviet war booty. There is no other way to explain the confiscation of bank deposits, securities and valuables stored in bank safes. In the summer of 1941, the German occupation forces acted similarly, declaring Latvian material values as the German war booty. The most significant Latvian companies were turned over to German authorities that were free to handle the newly acquired values.

An important aspect for the occupying powers in taking over and plundering the territory was also the monetary policy. During a year and a half the Soviet and Nazi Germany occupation powers managed to completely destroy the stable Latvian monetary system and the balanced market. In early June 1940, on the eve of the Soviet occupation it was possible to buy food and industrial goods in Latvia without any restrictions, while in the autumn of 1941 the money in circulation had lost coverage, and it was not possible to purchase goods for state-defined prices without restriction in a free trade. In a short time the money had lost its value approximately tenfold. This situation was caused by the purposeful policy of the occupying powers – to impose its currency in the occupied territory, devaluating the currency previously in circulation to unduly low levels. The Soviet authorities established the exchange rate of Latvian lats and the Soviet ruble at 1:1, and then carried out a transition to the Soviet ruble according to such exchange rate. By contrast, in reality it was possible to buy 15 times more goods for one lats in Latvia than in the USSR (see Table 1).

Table 1

Prices in the Latvian markets and the USSR city of Smolensk collective farms' markets in July 1940

Type of produce	Price in Latvia (in lats) ³	Price in Smolensk ⁴ (in rubles)	Price in the USSR market, a percentage
-----------------	--	--	--

³ Source — Regional newspapers of Latvia, as well as the State Archives of Latvia, F 389., Descr. 1., 248. F. 1.

⁴ Russian State Archive of Contemporary History. F. 5., Descr. 24., F.

			of the price in Latvia
Beef (kg)	1,15	18	1565
Milk (litre)	0,22	3,5	1590
Butter (kg)	2,40 — 2,70	40	1568
Eggs (10 pcs.)	0,9 — 1,1	14	1400
Potatoes (kg)	0,07	3,50	5000

The Nazi Germany policy was similar – introducing the exchange rate 1 Reichsmark - 10 Soviet rubles after the occupation.⁵ Also in this case the value of the German currency was unreasonably high, and this allowed German soldiers and officials to buy goods much cheaper than in Germany. During Nazi Germany occupation the black market was flourishing with certain categories of goods priced dozens of times higher than the state defined.⁶ The occupation forces tried to regulate this situation by issuing the vouchers to the residents, which guaranteed purchase of the limited minimum of necessary goods for the prices defined by the state.

The priority of the industry was to fulfil the military department orders. Already in autumn 1940, the USSR central government ordered to build a military aviation factory in Latvia (by secret record-keeping code No. 464), which was to start its operation in the summer of 1941. For the needs of this factory not only skilled labour was mobilized from the whole of Latvia, but also the equipment was requisitioned from the largest factories (eg., VEF, Vairogs, Tosmare etc.).⁷ Also other companies were to fulfil the orders of the USSR army. As already mentioned, the German occupation forces took directly over the Latvian companies in a similar way - 14 significant companies (among them VEF, Kvadrāts, Vairogs etc.) were enlisted as the military industrial enterprises (*Wehrmachtsbetriebe*) in December 1941.⁸

In the view of the occupying powers, the main task of agriculture was acquiring the maximum possible quantity of produce and delivering it to the needs of troops and other consumers. Admittedly, the approach in agrarian policy of the occupying powers differed. For German regime the structural changes were secondary (the main thing was to gather a certain amount of production), while the Soviet regime quite soon began to impose their model of agricultural management - collective farms. There were several targeted steps in order to collectivize the Latvian agriculture in a short time. First, the absolutely meaningless, from the economic point of view,

⁵ See more: Krūmiņš, G. Economic and Monetary Developments in Latvia during World War II . Grām.: The Bank of Latvia XC. Rīga, p. 92 — 96

https://www.bank.lv/images/stories/pielikumi/publikacijas/citaspublikacijas/Krumins_WW_II.pdf

⁶ See more: Evarts E., Pavlovičs J. Ikdienas dzīve Latvijā nacistiskās Vācijas okupācijas laikā 1941 — 1945. Rīga, 2016. p.152 - 175

⁷ See more: Krūmiņš, G. Economic and Monetary Developments in Latvia during World War II . Grām.: The Bank of Latvia XC. Rīga, p. 98

https://www.bank.lv/images/stories/pielikumi/publikacijas/citaspublikacijas/Krumins_WW_II.pdf

⁸ Aizsilnieks, A. Latvijas saimniecības vēsture 1914 — 1945. Stokholma, 1968, p. 925

agrarian reform was implemented – 10 hectares of land were granted to a part of landless farmers. At the same time this weakened the strongest farms, depriving them of land and labour. The new owners of the land were in an unenviable situation – they had turned from well-paid agricultural workers into poor owners of a small plot of land, in most cases without farm buildings, livestock and equipment. In the spring 1941 the USSR occupying power organized a collective cultivation of the land owned by the new farmers, a part of the territory was handed over to *sovkhozes* (state-owned collective farms). The planning documents of the Communist Party confirm that in the autumn of 1941 it was planned to launch the collectivization in Latgale region, but after that – in the rest of Latvian territory. This process was delayed for a few years by Nazi Germany occupation of Latvia. Seeing the economic absurdity of the Soviet agrarian policy, German power abolished the Soviet agrarian reform and the size of farms was determined identical to those before the USSR occupation.

Both occupying powers ruthlessly and massively exploited Latvian citizens by ordering them to do various public works. For example, when in the spring of 1941 the Soviet Union began the construction of ambitious military objects, including several airfields, many rural residents were commanded into forced labour. In June 1941, 15 to 19 thousand horse carts were assigned for the construction of airfields with at least an equal number of farm workers, ignoring the fact that it was an intensive field work period. The airfield construction was stopped by the attack of Nazi Germany.

Both countries deported a considerable number of Latvian civilians to their territories. The USSR deported those Latvian citizens who were considered politically unreliable to its territory, while Germany organized the population displacement for employment in its own economy. Also the USSR linked its repressive policy with the economic development of its outermost regions, having carefully plotted the placing of the deported in different regions. The highest degree of the exploitation of the population (also in terms of audacity) was undoubtedly the illegal mobilization in the Soviet and Nazi Germany troops and the involvement in the hostilities.

Latvian population and the troops of the occupation armies

According to international conventions, the mobilization of the population of occupied territories, or other kind of involvement in warfare is illegal. Despite this, the totalitarian powers, **Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union during World War II mobilized more than 200 thousand Latvian citizens in its armed forces, of which about half were killed.**⁹

⁹ Neiburgs, U. Latviešu karavīri Vācijas un PSRS armijās: galvenās problēmas. *Konferences "Latvija Otrajā pasaules karā" rakstu krājums*. Rīga, 1999, 25. lpp. http://www.archiv.org.lv/LVA/pdf/Tezes1999_latv.pdf

The illegality of occupied territory population involvement in the armed forces was defined already in 1907 in IV Hague Convention on land war regulations, and the countries involved in the First World War generally respected this principle of the Convention. Latvian citizens were involved in the army of Russian Empire, of which they were nationals at that time. But the German Empire did not recruit the local residents in their armed forces, although it had occupied a large part of Latvia for a long time.

During World War II the situation turned out quite differently. Following the decision taken by Ulmanis government on 1939 - 1940 to meet all the requirements of the USSR, Latvia managed to escape its army clashes with the Soviet troops. Consequently, without a fight the USSR obtained not only the Latvian state, but also its army. The Latvian army soldiers were not given the status of detainees, taking into account surrendering without a fight, although in light of the potential resistance of the Latvian army, in June 1940 the USSR had prepared a number of camps for placing the captured soldiers of the Baltic States. Soon after the occupation, the Latvian army was included in the Soviet army as 24th Territorial Corps, however, the Soviet regime was aware of the low level of loyalty of Latvian soldiers towards the occupying power. Therefore the personnel were purposefully reduced, there was a massive cleaning and repression against the officers, and a large part of the Latvian army officers were repressed and killed. In Litene in June 1940 several dozen were killed on the spot, but several hundred Latvian army officers and soldiers were arrested, almost all of which were destroyed after the deportation to the USSR. The USSR acted in the same way with the troops of the occupied Poland by killing thousands of Polish officers in Katyn in March 1940. It is hard to predict what would be the fate of the rest of the remaining less than three thousand former Latvian army soldiers, if not for the German attack on the USSR on June 22, 1941.

The German army quickly conquered the Latvian territory; the USSR occupying power did not carry out mobilization or similar activity. It is not surprising that a significant number of the remaining 24th Territorial Corps soldiers deserted before it left the territory of Latvia. In the coming months 24th Territorial Corps and a couple of other military units suffered heavy losses and were disbanded. Their residues were added to 201st Latvian Riflemen Division, which in the autumn of 1941 was formed near Moscow. In early October the Latvian Division had 10,877 soldiers, their number increased by the mobilized Latvian origin residents from the territory of the USSR. A large part of the division still consisted of the citizens of the Republic of Latvia whose involvement in the USSR army from the perspective of international law undoubtedly shall be declared unlawful.

Upon the occupation of the Latvian territory in 1941, the German occupation forces, contrary to the expectations of a significant part of the society, rejected any ideas on

the restoration of the independence of Latvia. Just as dismissive was the attitude towards the establishment of units of Latvian armed forces. The only exception was the units providing internal security, as well as the notorious special forces whose personnel were involved in the extermination of Jews and other repressive schemes under close supervision of German commanders.

The Nazi attitude changed when serious problems arose on the front. After the defeat at Stalingrad, the German army lost several hundred thousand soldiers and the internal resources to fill this gap were exhausted. Guided by pragmatic considerations, the Nazis decided to involve citizens of other occupied nations. In order to circumvent the international conventions which the Nazis did not want to flatly violate at least outwardly, the mobilisation of the population of the occupied states was presented as voluntary enlisting for the SS, which officially was not considered as a part of the German armed forces.

On January 23, 1943, A. Hitler "authorized and ordered" SS *Reichsführer* Heinrich Himmler to set up a "Latvian SS Volunteer Legion". On February 23 – on the date, which coincides with the USSR "Army Day", General Commissioner of Latvia Otto-Heinrich Drechsler, in violation of the aforementioned 1907 Hague Convention on the legal status of an occupied country, ordered the labour administrations to enlist Latvian young men born in 1919 – 1924 for the military service.

The alternatives were not bright - those who did not apply were sent to a concentration camp for six months, and then anyway were sent to the Legion. Later also the death penalty was used for avoiding the mobilization. In the following period the Nazis carried out several mobilizations, involving younger and younger Latvian citizens in its army. As indicated by the expert dr. hist. Uldis Neiburgs, the total number of Latvian citizens involved in various German military units is estimated at 110-115 thousand. When the legionnaires who had been on the front came back to Latvia for holidays, the number of those who escaped from the mobilization increased significantly. After learning about the horrors of war, quite a number chose fleeing as the lesser evil, despite the severe sanctions.

When the Soviet occupation forces returned to Latvia, continuing the hostilities, it also started the mobilization, until the end of the war illegally mobilizing approximately 57 thousand Latvian inhabitants in its army. Overall, adding those who were mobilized in the previous war years, almost 100 thousand Latvian citizens had to fight in the USSR army.¹⁰

¹⁰ Neiburgs, U. Latviešu karavīri Vācijas un PSRS armijās: galvenās problēmas. *Konferences "Latvija Otrajā pasaules karā" rakstu krājums*. Rīga, 1999, 26. lpp. http://www.archiv.org.lv/LVA/pdf/Tezes1999_latv.pdf

“On the front they lasted no longer than a month”

The soldiers of both armies were confronted with the horrors of the war to an equal extent. The number of the killed and crippled on the front was enormous. Only few managed to survive after getting to the epicentre of the battle. The total number of the killed Latvian citizens in both armies is estimated at around 100 thousand.

I have got several memory (memoir) notebooks of World War II participant Kristaps Kaugurs¹¹, where he in the 70ies of the 20th century, among other things, provided a detailed description of the events of World War II from the point of view of a Latvian citizen enlisted in the Soviet army. I offer a few fragments that reflect the tragic fates of the people dragged into World War II:

The situation on the front in that summer (in 1943 - G.K.) was quiet, but the echelons of the wounded (at Kursk and Belgorod ruthless battles took place) suggested that the silence is disguised not to unsettle the people. In the external silence also our division endured a fierce battle at Rusa. Now it was already the 43rd Guard Division, but there were few of the old soldiers. From the officers there were only headquarters staff, from combatant commanders to battalion commanders including usually lasted no longer than a month.¹²

Also K. Kaugurs memories of the situation behind the front, where he participated in the military training of conscripts, are harsh:

There were no men in the village. There were only the disabled and old men, the collective farm chairman asked for the labour in the autumn. And we quietly helped. In the October festival we were at the kolkhoz ball. Then I saw the festive table with a pile of sauerkraut, cranberries and corn fried in fat, cucumbers on it. Literally no meat. Wives got drunk and cried because of “*mužiki*” (men in Russian), and jumped their folk dances around us while they fell. In their tears I saw the tragedy the war had brought. I realized that also our army had no reserves, also kind of total mobilization, throwing of all reserves to the front. The people were half-starved. When any of our wounded soldiers were demobilized, he returned and said: “I was appointed the village council chairman, but I didn’t want to die of hunger. They didn’t let me be the bread deliverer, so better here. I will eat worse, but I will be eating.” Everybody was thinking of how to survive. They told that women are all ready to have sex for a place in the canteen, for a better piece of clothing. Also most of the regiment was older officers; the young risked and better went to the front. (...) But we had boys sent for training who could

¹¹ At the start of the war, K. Kaugurs came to the Red Army as a cadet and retreated to inner Russia with it, in 1944 returned to Latvia as the battalion commander of 308th Latvian Riflemen Division 323th Latvian Riflemen Regiment, gaining a serious injury at the Battle of Krustpils. An interesting nuance – the name of K. Kaugurs can still be found in the Soviet repressed lists, it was put there due to the lack of information about him during the German occupation. Following his ideals, K. Kaugurs was involved in the “construction of socialism”, but very soon realized that the words and deeds of the communism teaching differ. After the war K. Kaugurs turned to journalism, worked in the newspaper “Cīņa” (fight in English), but his career peaked in 1953, as he became the “Padomju Jaunatne” (Soviet Youth) chief editor. In 1959 events, with the LCP CC Bureau decision of September 22, K. Kaugurs lost the editor position due to “allowing fundamental deficiencies and political mistakes”.

¹² Memories of Kristaps Kaugurs. Handwriting. 5th notebook, p. 45.

barely carry a gun. Even Tatar unit was recruited which previously never happened (the Soviet regime considered Tatars a disloyal nation - G.K.)¹³

The aim of this article is not to analyse the battles and heroic deeds of the people involved in the war, as well as the war propaganda of two totalitarian superpowers, trying to raise the loyalty of Latvian population towards their regime. But I would like to emphasize again that **neither Nazi Germany, nor the USSR fought for the Latvian national interests, “for Latvia”, thus also the involved Latvian citizens. Neither one, nor the other totalitarian regime intended to re-establish Latvian state. Latvian citizens who were illegally engaged in the hostilities were the victims of the totalitarian superpowers’ policies.** The involvement of Latvian citizens in both armies is to be treated as a war crime.

Question on World War II participants - an unresolved USSR ideology dilemma and a stumbling block of Latvian exiles

The topic of Latvian citizens fighting on German side was a taboo during the post-war period of the Soviet occupation. The Soviet regime did not manage to find an explanation of how to give some evaluation from its ideological position for more than 100 thousand of Latvian residents participating in the German armed forces. In fact, the Soviet regime had come to an ideological dead-end. If recognizing the illegal nature of the mobilization, no penalty could be applied, which would mean the need to rehabilitate all the legionnaires sentenced in the post-war period, as well as those who were repressed because a member of their family had fought on the German side.

By contrast, recognizing the Nazi interpretation that the legionnaires enlisted "voluntarily" would mean the need to look for an explanatory answer to the question why more than 100 thousand of Latvian residents (in fact, all the males at the relevant age) became the "traitors" and enlisted for the service in the enemy troops. There had just been a "socialist revolution" in Latvia, and the nation had supported the accession to the USSR with a wide consensus. The Soviet regime chose not to talk about the subject at all, and put the whole emphasis on those who had fought on the Soviet side. They were granted a war veteran status resulting in various privileges, awards, honour and glory. Schools, streets and squares were named after the "liberators" of Latvia. This undoubtedly was the "winner" version.

But alongside this version, in Latvian society living in the West another interpretation of events started to strengthen.¹⁴ Its main idea was not always expressed directly, but indirectly there was a hint: the legionnaires fought for Latvia, they were more valiant

¹³ Ibid., p. 46

¹⁴ Zelče, V. Latviešu leģiona piemiņas dienas ģenēze un leģionāru komemorācijas tradīcija Rietumu latviešu kopienā. Grām.: Muižnieks, Nils, Zelče, Vita. *Karojošā piemiņa: 16. marts un 9. maijs*. Rīga: Zinātne. 2011. 103. — 104. lpp.

than those fighting on the opposite side, and in general – it was lesser evil to fight on the German side. The development of this version can also be attributed to the fact that there was nobody who fought on the Soviet side in the West, but many thousands of Latvian residents fighting on the German side managed to intern in the western zone of the occupation. And they felt hatred and bitterness of the loss of their homeland as the Soviet regime had been established there. Former legionnaires added an explanation to their heroism in battles - they were driven not only by a desire to survive, but something more important - the fight against the Bolsheviks. Similar to the Soviet version, also this one most often not even mentioned those Latvian citizens who had fought on the opposite side.

The Second World War and the modern context

It is not surprising that after the restoration of Latvian independence the two interpretations of the Second World War events described in the previous chapter collided in the public space. There were different levels of conflict, starting from discussions among historians to sorting out the political relations. There was a collision of a justified wish to pay homage also to those war veterans who were forgotten for dozens of years during the Soviet occupation, and the indignation of those who were used to the order of things of the previous decades.

Ideally, alongside the restoration of independence, in a foreseeable period the society should have made an agreement on a new World War II event interpretation from the perspective of the Republic of Latvia. The paradigm of **two enemies of the Republic of Latvia - Nazi Germany and the USSR** should have been created. **Both of these regimes acted similarly in the Latvian territory bringing Latvia and its people misery and suffering.** However, such an agreement, unfortunately, did not take place.

The part of the society who basically lives in the information and values' space of the Republic of Latvia can understand the paradigm of two evils. By contrast, those who are currently in the information space of the Russian Federation controlled media find it hard to accept the following explanation. In Russia, of course, one enemy paradigm is dominating, in which the evil is only Nazi Germany. In turn, nothing has changed in the war hero position since the Soviet times - the winner is the Soviet army and those who fought in it. There is no surprise that other interpretations are perceived by a large part of this society if not with a hatred, then a lack of understanding.

This happens due to both a formed different historical memory, as well as today's Kremlin propaganda. One of the ways it tries to divide Latvian society is by spreading false information on the atrocities and war crimes committed by Latvian citizens fighting on the German side of the war. This is done by ignoring the facts of the

history and the fact that no international litigation in which World War II crimes have been investigated, including the Nuremberg process, has brought any charges against the Latvian Legionnaires.

Conclusions

The explanation of the events of World War II is complicated, but now enough time has passed in order to start viewing the events of the Soviet and German occupation in a complex way as a united harm caused to the Republic of Latvia and its people. Historical researchers need to work on studies that simultaneously describe both the Soviet and German occupations, educating the society with the examples characterizing both occupation regimes.

Search for a "lesser evil" or "liberators" is a dead-end, it is the way in the direction of further segregation and weakening of the national identity – both were evils, and there was no liberator. It would be proper of Latvian politicians who want to pay homage to Latvian citizens who fought in the Second World War to remember both those who fought in Nazi Germany and the Soviet army. Also, not forgetting the followers of the third path who chose not to fight on one or the other side.