



PERMANENT MISSION OF THE REPUBLIC OF LATVIA TO THE UN,  
OSCE AND OTHER INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS IN VIENNA

**Statement by Ambassador Nils Jansons, Permanent Representative of the Republic of Latvia, delivered in response to the intervention by the Russian Federation**

Permanent Council No 755,  
Vienna, March 19, 2009

Madam Chairperson,

On the subject matter before us, Latvia fully adheres to the position of the EU, as put forward by the Czech Ambassador. However, I would like to make some comments on the issue that was brought up in discussion, which concerns my country.

It is regrettable that the Russian delegation repeatedly chooses to misrepresent the events of the 16<sup>th</sup> of March as glorification of fascism, whereas in reality it is remembrance of the war-dead.

The Latvian Government or any other state institution does not promote anything resembling fascist ideology, and does not organize any activity that could be interpreted as promoting fascist ideology. Such assertions are completely false.

Let me start by a few comments on historic facts. First, let me repeat that Latvia has always condemned the crimes committed during the Second World War – the crimes of Nazism and Stalinism, the Holocaust and genocide, which do not and cannot have any perpetuity. For Latvia, this was an especially tragic period – three brutal military occupations and two invading armies forced Latvians to serve on both sides of the front, son against father, father against son, brother against brother.

Two Latvian Legion divisions created in 1943 were neither voluntary, nor were they associated in any way with the notorious Nazi SS organization that was responsible for the Holocaust. Most of the estimated 100,000 young Latvian men that made up the Latvian Legion were forcibly mobilized to fight on Germany's collapsing Eastern Front. Draft evasion was punishable by death. The Latvians that were drafted into the Latvian Legion were neither Nazis nor fascists, nor did they wish to see a Nazi German victory in the war.

Hitler's mass extermination of Jews in Latvia had already ended in 1943, long before the Latvian Legion combat units were formed. This was recognized by the International War Crimes Tribunal in Nuremberg, when the Latvian Legion and other conscripted non-German Waffen SS units were exempted from criminal charges associated with the Nazi Holocaust. The same conclusion was reached also by the US

Commission on Displaced Persons on 12 September, 1950, in which *Baltic Waffen SS units by their aim, actions and qualification of soldiers were recognized as special, from the German Waffen SS distinct units.*

Furthermore, after the end of the war, the Allied forces set up Guard companies formed of the members of the Latvian Legion, which guarded the Nuremberg Tribunal's room and prisoners. How could it be? Precisely, because the Legion was a front line unit that had nothing to do with the criminal organization of the SS.

Now, Madam Chairperson, regarding the contemporary events.

For veterans of the front-line units of the Latvian Legion, the 16<sup>th</sup> March has been a day for remembrance of the war-dead. Most of those that go to church or cemeteries on that day have no political agenda whatsoever. They are simply paying their respects to their fathers, sons and friends who became tragic victims of a very costly and complicated war. Everyone is entitled to pay tribute to those who lost their lives. Latvia has a long tradition for honouring the dead, because "*those who do not honour the dead, rarely respect the living.*"

In recent years, some radical political groups have tried to disrupt the quiet March 16<sup>th</sup> events to call attention to themselves and their political causes. Latvian authorities have condemned this, and have repeatedly called upon those involved not to support the extremist approach.

The freedom of assembly and of expression is guaranteed in Latvia. However, it has to be exercised with due account to the requirements of public security, when a number of groups with clearly opposite views on these historic issues want to express themselves the same day, in the same place. You may wish to note that this year, because of security concerns, the Riga City Council refused to authorize any of the organized public gatherings in front of the Freedom Monument. This decision was upheld by the Administrative Court.

The monument, however, remained open for public. After a private memorial service in church, a number of former members of Latvian Legion, in private, laid flowers in front of the monument.

The police faced a difficult task of preventing provocations and safeguarding public order in an environment of a somewhat artificially heightened tension. The police acted effectively in preventing provocations and quickly isolating cases that risked exacerbating the situation.

As explained, Latvia does not mark this day, and we would hope that Russia would also refrain from marking it.

Latvia firmly rejects any attempts to implicate the Latvian State in supporting or cultivating extremist ideologies. Latvia strongly condemns all kinds of extremism and radicalism, including anti-Semitism, xenophobia, racism and other forms of intolerance, the expressions of which, unfortunately, have grown in scale in some OSCE participating states.

Thank you, Madam Chairperson.

