

# History under the Threat of Politics

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There is a church in the centre of Prague, near Karlovo Namesti. One who is unfamiliar with its history may simply pass it by. As many buildings in Prague, it is charming; retaining its own history and specificity. Nevertheless, there is a unique story attached to this particular church. On the south wall of the building there remains the physical manifestation of a chapter in its history, as bullet holes scar the façade, while fresh flowers sit under the memorial notice plaque. This is a stain of history, which the Orthodox Cathedral of St. Cyril and Methodius bears.

Parachutists from the Czechoslovakian resistance movement sought refuge in this church after their successful assassination of Prague's Nazi commandant, Reinhard Heidrich, the German *Reichsprotektor* of Bohemia and Moravia. The assassination occurred on 27 May 1942. After heroically combating more than a thousand Gestapo shock-troops for over six hours, with their ammunition exhausted, they surrendered themselves to their fate. As reprisal, the Nazis executed most of the priests, profaned the cathedral, and literally exterminated the villages of Lidice and Lezaky. This is but one episode in a war that should not soon be forgotten.

However, current politics often placate the past. This seems to have recently occurred in Estonia. With the memories of the Nazi era still guiding the politics of Europe, it was painful to watch the Estonian parliament pass national legislation to remove the monument in Tallinn which honours the Soviet soldiers who fought against fascism.. The monument was a physical reminder of the rise of evil and the international drive to remove such evil from the world. Watching recent events unfold is painful not only because it is clear that some people are attempting to erase the memory of the dead, but also because of the increasing trend of tolerance towards fascism. There is little doubt that many in the Baltic states and Europe more generally, regarded the Soviet military presence (after the war) as an occupation. However, how the removal of a monument honouring the fallen soldiers of the Second World War found its way atop Estonia's policy agenda remains a tragic mystery. The monument transfer alone is not especially important. Rather it is the negative tone of official Estonian comments on the threshold of the 62nd anniversary of victory over fascism which is worrying. Politicising the allied victory for current gains sets a negative precedent of historic adaptation and revision for political needs.

Neo-Nazism is growing at an alarming rate in many regions of Europe. And yet, many governments have not taken appropriate measures to stem its growth or attraction, especially among Nazi-era enthusiasts and the multitudes of economic disadvantaged.

EU states are not experiencing the rise of neo-Nazism alone. In Russia, where everything related to the 'Great Patriotic War of 1942-45' evokes memories of tragedy and triumph, there are a multitude of neo-fascists movements which target Muslim and Asian citizens. Sadly, the city of St. Petersburg, which some sixty years ago suffered one of history's most complete and terrible military sieges at the hands of the Nazi army, has now become a hotbed of neo-Nazi sympathy and violence.

The generation which directly witnessed the horrors of World War II is rapidly passing away. There are only a few veterans to testify to the WWII era; to tell the stories they lived through to the younger generation of Europeans.

Although more than sixty years have elapsed since WWII concluded, the precise number of that war's victims' remains an estimation. It is essential to keep honouring the memory of all victims and urging the young generation to bring fresh flowers to the monuments. It is a question of vital significance for European security not to allow for neo-fascism to fill an ideological vacuum, because Nazism is something which is crucially dangerous to forget, lest history repeat itself.