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Estonian Jewish Community Unhappy with Plans to Commemorate 70th Anniversary of the Arrival of Hitler's Army

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The Jewish community of Estonia expressed surprise and displeasure over plans to hold an event Friday in Viljandi to mark the 70th anniversary of the arrival of the German army in the city.

“There can be various takes on complex events in 20th century Estonian history,” Ala Jacobsen, chairwoman of the Estonian Jewish community, said Thursday in a statement released by the community.

“It would be cynical to weigh which of two occupations ‘was the better.’ Especially in consideration of the fact the Nazi German regime has been recognized as criminal in the international tribunal,” the statement said.

“The usual attempt to portray as ‘warriors against Bolshevism’ people who collaborated with the Nazi occupational regime, and furthermore on the day when the mass murder of the citizens of Viljandi and Estonia who belonged to the ‘wrong’ ethnicity, according to the ideologues of Nazism, began, appears completely idiotic, if not an intentional provocation aimed at tarnishing Estonia’s reputation in the world,” the statement said.

An Estonian association of soldiers called Sakala initiated the event. Delfi.ee reported members of that association plan to commemorate Friday in a cemetery of German soldiers the 70th anniversary of the German entry to Viljandi in 1941.

Jaanika Kressa, one of the organizers of the Sakala event, told a newspaper “the arrival of the Germans is considered the liberation of Estonia, because it was saved from the order introduced in June, 1940, when about ten thousand people were deported to Siberia and the local people were impoverished.”

“Order has again become a normal thing for Estonians,” she added

“The view on the entry of the German army depends upon the position of the interpreter,” Viljandi museum director Jaak Pihlak said. “For some it was liberation, for others not. In legal terms, one occupation replaced another.”

He said “The terror of 1940 was clearly more destructive than the repressions the Germans carried out over three years.”