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"Don't Stand By!", Mr Lidington

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By Monica Lowenberg

At this year's Holocaust Memorial Day, the central message was "Don't Stand By!" the British Conservatives having invested huge sums in the event and also in drawing up Holocaust Commissions to help us never to forget.

Admirable and noble intentions, indeed. Nevertheless, when one considers that, in 2009, the same British Conservatives – intent on moving away from Merkel and Sarkozy – set up shop with a rag-bag of ultra-nationalists from Latvia, the National

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Alliance which, each and every year since 1998, has supported glorification of the Latvian legionnaires who joined the brutal 15th and 19th divisions of the SS, then one can only question how serious the British Conservatives really are regarding Holocaust education, especially if they show such duplicitous standards.

After the 2009 Latvian liaison started, only three years later the Latvians set up, the first memorial in Europe to honour the SS! The British Conservatives said nothing.

To date there have been two Early Day Motions on the matter, talks in the Bundestag, talks in the European Jewish Parliament in Brussels, the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance, (a human rights body of the Council of Europe) condemned the march, the UK Jewish Board of Deputies contacted the Latvian ambassador and even wrote a manifesto stating that all attempts in the Baltics to equate Nazi crimes with Stalin should be stopped.

Additionally, the All-Party Parliamentary Group against Antisemitism condemned the march and numerous British politicians of all persuasions voiced their concerns, Richard Howitt, a Labour MEP, writing a speech to be read out at the 2014 march by Dr Efraim Zuroff of the Simon Wiesenthal Centre and Gareth Thomas, former shadow Europe minister, writing numerous letters. In the face of all this, the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office has remained steadfastly silent.

According to David Lidington, the current Europe minister, such "complex matters" are best dealt with by historians, at the same time as failing to condemn Baltic state policies and practices that promote glorification of Nazism.

Since 2014, the Latvian parliament has made it illegal for any minister to attend the march, Minister Einars Cilinskis from the National Alliance was sacked for doing so in 2014 but it has come to light that in 2015, despite the ban, justice minister Dzintars Rasnačš from the same party attended the march. He was not sacked.

Fast forward to this year's SS commemorative march and though the number of participants may have dropped by a couple of hundred, around 1,000 still attended, mainly young and misinformed...

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passionate in their deluded belief that their fathers and grandfathers were freedom fighters against the Soviets rather than collaborators with arguably the most genocidal regime the world has ever known.

It is reported that 13 members of Latvia's parliament attended the 2016 march, including the usual suspects such as "law maker" Janis Dombrova with his other "law making" friends from the National Alliance: MP Raivis Dzintars who thinks Nazi salutes are funny, MP Imants Paradnieks who, outside the cathedral, befriended a group of Ukranian Azov Battalion nazis wearing Nazi insignia and proudly carrying blue, yellow flags with swastikas to the Monument of Freedom and Atis Jānis Krūmiņš from Riga's City Council.

No ministers attended but, as in previous years, quietly slipped away from the foreign press to the Lestene cemetery where SS soldiers are buried. However, Kaspars Gerhards, of the National Alliance and Minister for Environmental Protection and Regional Development of the Republic of Latvia, did arrange for his parliamentary secretary, Jānis Eglīts, to attend the march and accompany the notorious right-wing Estonian politician Jaak Madison there.

Madison is the man who in 2015 defended, on his old blog spot, the economic aspects of the Nazi regime. At the Monument of Freedom Madison was promptly challenged by Kremlin stooge and British journalist Graham Philips who quite rightly asked him, if he was not ashamed to be attending a fascist march.

Madison responded with childish insults, feeling strong in the company of numbers whilst Philips was swiftly whisked away by armed police and dumped into a van to the amusement of the crowd.

Justice Minister Rasnačš did not attend the march, as he had illegally done in 2015 – clearly he is above the law – but not so long ago his parliamentary secretary, Jānis Iesalnieks is known to have stated on Twitter that Norwegian mass killer Anders Breivik is a good boy, to which Breivik responded by stating that the National Alliance and Mr. Iesalnieks are in his imaginary nazi network!

Alarminglly, The National Alliance, whose parliamentary secretaries clearly have their uses, has been in the ruling coalition with the Greens



since February.

If all this was not enough, only a few days before the march, Kārlis Seržants, a high-ranking Greens politician who sits on the Latvian Parliament's national security committee outrageously stated, that "clever Jews" were compromising state security while Cornelia Kerth, chair of one of Germany's most important anti-fascist organisations, the Association of Persons Persecuted by the Nazis/Federation of Antifascists (VVN-BdA), entered Hamburg airport to board her flight with Air Baltic to Riga only to be informed by the airport authorities that she could not board the plane as she was on a "black list of the Latvian immigration authorities".

Five other VVN-BdA members, Thomas Willms, Markus Tervooren, Günther Hoppe, Lothar Eberhard and Werner Müller, who took a Ryanair flight from Berlin, thought they were lucky to be allowed into Riga, only to be immediately arrested at Riga airport.

They were informed that they fell under §61 of Latvian immigration law, the *persona non grata* rule, which can be applied when a "foreigner causes a threat to national security or public order and safety." And this in the Schengen zone!

The five detained protesters were given a choice of deportation or two-days incarceration and chose the latter. In response, the VVN released, the day before the march, a statement accusing the Latvian authorities of "repression" against Latvian protesters.

"For years, the march by Waffen-SS admirers has enjoyed the protection of the Latvian government. The few anti-fascists protesting...will be handled by politicians and the media as enemies of the state", it said.

Dr Efraim Zuroff of the Simon Wiesenthal Centre agreed and branded the arrests of the anti-fascists as "absurd" and "highly objectionable."

"Anyone," Zuroff said, "who fought for the victory of the Third Reich shouldn't be a hero." The Latvian patriotic account often omits that about 70,000 Jews were exterminated in Latvia, largely with local collaboration, while the Nazis were hailed as liberators.

"The Latvian Legion did not directly participate in

Holocaust crimes but it did fight for the Germans and many of its members had previously taken part in the mass murder of Jews as part of the Latvian security police and the Arajs Kommando, a police unit connected to the German SD.

The organisers of the Riga march continue to present the members of the Legion as freedom fighters who paved the way for Latvian independence but nothing could be further from the truth.

The Nazis had absolutely no intention of granting independence to any of the Baltic countries and it is only because Nazi Germany lost the Second World War that Latvia could regain its independence after the fall of the USSR. People who fought for the victory of Third Reich should not be glorified as heroes – such a victory would have meant the end of Western civilisation.”

Zuroff further told the press that Russia, under Vladimir Putin, uses the Baltic nations’ ultra-nationalist marches in propaganda to falsely depict the populations of those countries as fascist.

“They are not,” he declared, “but they are also derelict in confronting the canard that fighting alongside Nazis was patriotic, and that Soviet domination was in any way comparable to the Holocaust.”

Latvia also does its international reputation no favours by entertaining nazis from the UK, Estonia and Ukraine whilst arresting law-abiding anti-fascists, putting on huge swastika dances at ice hockey matches, allowing Latvian youths to destroy wreaths to the victims of Nazism, ignoring international pressure to ban the SS march, pleas from the ECRI, the PCAA, the Jewish Board of Deputies, Early Day Motions, the Simon Wiesenthal Centre, the European Jewish Parliament in Brussels and MEPs like Richard Howitt and by proudly stating to world press that, as from 2014, ministers are not allowed to attend the march but on the quiet one of them does in 2015 and is not sacked.

Nor do they help themselves by ignoring the voices of their own citizens, many of who are ethnic Russians and totally opposed to such manifestations of Nazi glorification.

Having myself become aware of this disgusting spectacle since 2011 and actively protested against

it since 2012, I have to ask today where will this situation lead as tensions between the Baltic states and Russia escalate and when, suddenly, the murder of thousands of innocent Jews by men who later joined the Latvian SS – and the deaths of 1,500,000 innocent men, women and children, just outside Leningrad, caused by starvation, as a consequence of the Nazi blockade that the Latvian 15th and 19th SS divisions helped forge as they fought against the Red Army – are not murders to be remembered and condemned but rather ignored or just seen as another statistic, another sad casualty of war.

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