

WRITTEN QUESTION P-2494/07
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to the Council

Subject: War memorial riots in Tallinn

On the night of 26 April the police closed access to the WWII monument on Tõnismägi in Tallinn (Estonia). The same day in the evening there were clashes between demonstrators (mostly Russian-speakers), who protested against removal of the monument, and the police. The crowd of protesters was dispersed by the police using tear gas, rubber clubs, flash bombs, water cannon etc.

A wave of vandalism broke out in Tallinn later on 26-27 April. Police arrested about 1000 people. One man was stabbed to death and dozens were injured. Meanwhile the monument was moved to another place.

According to reports by witnesses, police in some cases used disproportionate force against demonstrators and riot participants. Some protesters were reportedly hit with batons, beaten and mistreated after being taken into custody in a temporary detention facility established in a terminal at the Tallinn port. Some cases of apparent police brutality were documented by TV broadcasts and cell phone recordings.

On 27 April the security police arrested several leaders of the Night Watch (the organisation which has been trying to oppose the removal of the monument by peaceful means) and of an associated organisation. There are reasons to believe that these persons may be made scapegoats.

What is the Council's view of violation of the principle of democracy, when accepting a decision on the removal, as well as violations of freedom of assembly, prohibition of cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment and of excessive use of force?

Does the Council support the actions of the Estonian authorities before, during and after the riots? Was it appropriate to start the excavations and remove the monument despite clearly expressed public protests and dissent by the relatives of the buried persons? Are the Estonian authorities, in the Council's view, able to guarantee the right to a fair trial for the peaceful defenders of the monument?

How does the Council evaluate the prospects of integration of the country's Russian-speaking minority, which constitutes about one third of the 1.4 million residents?