

Burgemeester, Schepenen en iedereen begaan met het kunstwerk 'Letse Bijenkorf' op het Brivibaplein. Dear delegations from the Museum of the Occupation of Latvia and the Daugavas Vanagi, Kristaps Gulbis, dear friends from Latvia. Welcome to Zedelgem.

Finally, tomorrow is the unveiling of Kristaps Gulbis work of art, the classic 'Latvian Beehive' on Brivibaplein - Freedom Square. Tomorrow all speeches will underline the good relationship between the Museum and the city of Zedelgem and everyone will be able to enjoy the wonderful artwork, the Latvijas stāvstrops. So, I don't want to interfere too much into speeches of tomorrow but say a few words about the cause that Zedelgem connects with Latvia and I want to do this, based on two words.

The first word is 'cage', 'cages' or 'being caged in'. A couple of months ago I had a visit from Baņuta Rubess whose father was a PoW in Zedelgem. During the walk on the former PoW-site we've talked about the life of the prisoners in the different camps who were divided into separate 'cages'. And I've used the word 'cages' several times, until a certain moment Baņuta, a little bit bewildered, asked me why I kept using the word 'cages', instead of 'compounds' or 'sections'. Thus, I explained to her that in all the British documents, war diaries, reports from the visiting relief organisations such as the Red Cross, the YMCA or the different churches and even in the records from the British House of Commons and diplomats, the word 'cage' is almost always used. So, last week I received the first draft of an essay that Baņuta Rubess is writing about Zedelgem and her father, and she quotes the conversation as this. - *The word Cage is the British military term, and it's harsh. Plainspoken. You put animals in a cage, dangerous animals, or animals who pine for freedom, like birds. You put criminals in cages, murderers and arsonists. In Latvian descriptions of the camp, the word 'cage' is not used. They are called 'sections'. People can live in 'sections'.* (end quote) - And, yes, Baņuta is right. That is why we will keep using the word 'cage', to recreate, with that heavy burden word, a momentum in time that brings us back to the harsh reality of Zedelgem PoW-camp.

The second word is 'freedom'. The word 'freedom' runs like a thread through our shared Latvian and Zedelgem history. It starts with the creation of a replica at scale of Riga's Brīvības piemineklis in 1945. And this week I received an E-mail from Australia, from Valdis Juškevics, who I had the pleasure of meeting when he visited Zedelgem in 2012. He asked me to read this Dedication on his behalf.

#### *Dedication*

*On November 18th, 1945, in Belgium, province of Flanders, at Zedelgem prison camp, POW Camp 2227, Cage II a replica of the Monument to Freedom in Riga was built. This monument was built by my father Sergeant Jānis Juškevics, the artist Ēriks Šics, and soldiers Voldemārs Cīrulis and Harijs Mieriņš.*

*The camp was constantly monitored by the agents of the People's Commissariat for State Security or NKGB, and the information about the monument was sent to Riga, then forwarded to Moscow.*

*My father, with his actions, showed that Latvia's freedom should be defended even behind the barbed wire.*

*I sincerely thank all those who were involved in the construction of today's monument from its inception to today's dedication.*

*I thank all the people who are present here today and at the unveiling of this monument tomorrow.*

*One day I will again come to Zedelgem with my family to honour my father and the freedom of Latvia.*

*(signed) Valdis Juškevics*

With these words about freedom, Valdis Juškevics makes the connection from the 1945, freedom monument to the 2018 artwork which has the same set-up, to refer to the concept of 'Briviba' or freedom as a universal value, in all its different meanings.

Dear Valters,

The city of Zedelgem wants to emphasize the excellent and constructive cooperation with the Museum of the Occupation of Latvia with an appropriate gift. It is a small booklet called 'Viena diena Cedelghēmā', 'A day in Zedelgem'. It depicts in a somewhat sarcastic and with a dark sense of humour the daily life of the Latvian prisoners of war in Zedelgem. Each time the cartoons are described by a verse of two lines. And because singing is part of Latvia's cultural identity, and it's not overconfident to say that Latvia is the Singing Nation, there are also two songs included in the booklet. Tai Cedelghēmā, draugs – Over there in Zedelgem, my friends – it was sung on the tunes of Lili Marleen and the Cedelghēmā Lambetvoks – The Zedelgem Lambeth Walk - was sung, as the title suggests, to the tunes of the very popular 1940's dance song, the Lambeth Walk.

And to return back to the two words 'Cage' and 'Freedom'; on the front, we see a sad Latvian prisoner behind barbed wire, in a Belgian 'Cage' and on the back is a suitcase ready for the walk to freedom. But what kind of freedom? What means freedom in a strange country, separated from family, friends and homeland, separated by a new kind of barbed wire, the Iron Curtain? So, how free were they, really?

Dear Valters,

This little booklet, with its heavy historical burden, is a gift from the whole Zedelgem community to all ex-Zedelgem Latvian diaspora and their offspring. It is also gift from the Zedelgem town council to the Museum of the Occupation of Latvia. And, although Zedelgem paid for it, It's a gift from me to you, Valters Nollendorfs.

Pol Denys

