



MilanMUN 2018
Political Committee

*The question of revisionism concerning historical
monuments*

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INTRODUCTION

Cultural heritage, according to UNESCO, “is the legacy of physical artefacts and intangible attributes of a group or society that are inherited from past generations, maintained in the present and bestowed for the benefit of future generations. Tangible heritage includes buildings and historic places, monuments, artifacts, etc., which are considered worthy of preservation for the future. These include objects significant to the archaeology, architecture, science or technology of a specific culture”.

Objects are important to the study of human history because they provide a concrete basis for ideas, and can validate them. Their preservation demonstrates recognition of the necessity of the past and of the things that tell its story. Preserved objects also validate memories; and the actuality of the object draws people in and gives them a literal way of touching the past.

In historiography, the term historical revisionism identifies “the re-interpretation of the historical record which implies challenging the orthodox views held by professional scholars about a historical event, or introducing new evidence, or of restating the motivations and decisions of the participant people”.

In recent years, there has been a lively debate on whether or not monuments recalling and proclaiming dark pages of the world’s history (Nazi period, Soviet Union dictatorship, etc.) should be removed from public spaces and what will be the destiny of those removed monuments.

Monuments are traditionally erected while a particular regime is in power, but for the United States case, Confederate monuments were erected only after the fall of the Confederacy.

A revised view of history allows us to acknowledge what is not debatable and is essential to help us resolve what is debatable, whether or not we rename institutions and dismantle monuments.

DIFFERENT POINTS OF VIEW

The argument about monuments, which should be resolved mostly between historians and citizens, has become a substitute for everyday political fights.

Some experts believe that the aforementioned monuments represent a painful legacy of slavery, racism, dictatorship, and much more, and so they should not be glorified, but they should be preserved because, making these artifacts disappear allows powerful people to rewrite history, whereas, keeping them in place stands as a silent reminder of the times. These experts also believe that as a society, we benefit from learning about our own past in all its complexity.

Other experts believe that removing or rethinking the specific monument landscape that glorifies racism, dictatorship and violence, whether that involves moving monument or reshaping how they are viewed, is a necessary step in creating a more inclusive history and more inclusive public spaces.



A GLOBAL ISSUE

Globally, iconoclasm has been practiced at least since ancient times. Instances were recorded in the Bible.

Medieval Christians smashed sculptures of Ancient Rome. Spanish conquerors destroyed temples of the Aztecs and the Incas. The Taliban destroyed giant statues of the Buddha in central Afghanistan in 2001, and in 2017 ancient structures in Syria were toppled by Islamic State militants.

Symbols of reviled leaders like World War II Germany's Adolf Hitler were destroyed after his fall from power. Monuments seen as symbols of European colonialism have been torn down in several countries.

In Cape Town, South Africa, a statue of the imperialist businessman Cecil John Rhodes was dismantled in 2015. A monument to Christopher Columbus, who claimed the land for Spain during the 1400s, was toppled in Caracas, Venezuela, in 2004.



Monument to Christopher Columbus

MAJOR PARTIES INVOLVED

Countries that have faced and that are still facing the question of revisionism concerning historical monuments are the United States of America, Germany, Spain, Poland and many other Post-Soviet States.

COUNTRY-BY-COUNTRY ANALYSIS

Germany

The Allied Control Council, after World War II, ordered the demolishing of Nazi symbols that weren't destroyed during the war. The German government, after the previous decision of the Allied Control Council, banned any form of Nazi symbols or propaganda by codifying it in the German criminal code. The German Criminal Code outlaws "use of symbols of unconstitutional organizations" outside the contexts of "art or science, research or teaching". This concerns Nazi symbolism in particular and is part of the denazification efforts following the fall of the Third Reich. The law prohibits the distribution or public use of symbols of unconstitutional groups such as flags, insignia, uniforms, slogans and forms of greeting.

The site of the bunker where Hitler died has been obscured, to deny neo-fascists a rallying point. The Olympic Stadium, where Hitler presided over the 1936 Games, is still in use, though stripped of all Nazi regalia. In Berlin, the headquarters of the Nazi secret police, the SS leadership offices, and the Reich Security Main Office were razed in the aftermath of the war. In the late 1980s, the grounds were used as an exhibition to educate people about the horrors that occurred there. Statues of Lenin were swiftly removed in the early 1990s, but some sites were converted,



including a former prison for the Communist security police that was turned into an informational center teaching about the past.

The ruins of the Old Reich Chancellery on the left, Berlin, 15th August 1947.

Poland

Poland's government has given local officials and landowners just one year to remove all public monuments and memorials that pay tribute to persons, organizations, events or dates symbolizing communism or other totalitarian systems.

The head of the Institute of National Remembrance said the Polish government plans to demolish about 500 Soviet monuments throughout the country and this has led to a strong negative reaction from Russia.

The demolished monuments will be removed and transferred to museums where they can become, as the head of the Institute of National Remembrance, a "witness of hard times".

Russia

Numerous monuments to Soviet icons were toppled after the fall of the Soviet Union. In 1991, for example, a crowd of tens of thousands in Moscow tore down a monument to the founder of the USSR's secret police force, the KGB. The statue is now preserved, along with numerous busts of Lenin and statues of Stalin, in Muzeon Park of the Arts. The approach to the park is entirely historical, because the responsibility of any museum is to collect, store, protect and display.



Spain

A law of "historical memory" was passed in Spain in 2007 to provide protection and recognition to those who suffered during the country's civil war. The law includes a provision about monuments to Francisco Franco.

The Historical Memory Law principally recognizes the victims on both sides of the Spanish Civil War, gives rights to the victims and the descendants of victims of the Civil War and the subsequent Spanish State of General Francisco Franco, and formally condemns the Francoist State. Amongst the provisions of the law, such as the recognition of the victims of political, religious and ideological violence on both sides of the Spanish Civil War and of Franco's State and the Condemnation of the Francoist State, the Historical Memory Law instructs the government to take measures to remove shields, insignia, plaques and other objects or mentions commemorating the military uprising, civil war or dictatorship with the exception made for objects with artistic, architectural or religious relevance.

The last statue of Franco was removed from the mainland in 2008.



United States of America

President Donald Trump believes that the removal of Confederate monuments could lead the taking down of monuments to the Founding Fathers and that the removal of Confederate monuments is tantamount to changing history.

Recent episodes of rage and bloodshed over the removal of Confederate statues in the United States resemble those European battles over their historical narratives and tearing down statues.

The mayor of New Orleans, Mitchell Landrieu called for the removal four Confederate statues from public spaces around the city of New Orleans. Many debates over the



appropriateness of honoring Confederate legends with memorials, eponymous roads, streets and buildings are taking place across the nation. Debates are raging over whether the statues should fall because they commemorate those who fought to uphold slavery, or stand because they remind us of a history that cannot be erased.

The issue of the removal of Confederate monuments resurfaced after the June 2015 murder of nine African Americans parishioners by white supremacist in Charleston. After this tragic event, South Carolina removed the Confederate flag from its statehouse grounds. Together with South Carolina, other Southern cities have started debating the removal of their Civil War monuments.

Some states have made it impossible to remove or alter their historic structures, regardless of the desires of local municipalities. In 2000 South Carolina passed the Heritage Protection Act to prohibit the removal of Confederate monuments from public property. The law affirms that the Legislature must approve by at least a two-thirds vote

any change to a historical monument such as lowering a flag or adding a name. This law is so far-reaching that people have sued the government



saying they have been unable to change plaques on a World War I monument that separates soldiers killed into “colored” and “white” categories. Some people

believe, as previously stated, that the monument is a relic of the South’s scarred past and should be changed in the spirit of equality with the old plaques put in a museum,; others say it should serve as a reminder of the once-segregated U.S. military.

SUGGESTIONS

Delegates in the Political Committee must focus on finding solutions on the matter of revisionism concerning monuments by establishing policies to regulate such issue keeping in mind the need to preserve cultural heritage and to prevent and eliminate any form of discrimination (ethnic, cultural, religious, political, ecc).

USEFUL WEBSITES

<https://themoscowtimes.com/news/poland-set-to-demolish-500-soviet-monuments-52341>

<http://dailycaller.com/2017/08/18/historical-revisionism/>

<https://www.nbcnews.com/news/nbcblk/are-removing-confederate-monuments-erasing-history-n750526>

<https://www.npr.org/2017/05/20/529232823/with-lee-statues-removal-another-battle-of-new-orleans-comes-to-a-close>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historical_Memory_Law

<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/17/world/controversial-statues-monuments-destroyed.html>

<https://latinamericanpost.com/index.php/global-issues/18936-why-are-the-confederate-s-statues-falling>