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Estonian authorities and the annual gathering of the veterans of "Waffen SS" from Estonia and other European countries

Written question No. 605 to the Committee of Ministers
by Mr Grigore PETRENCO, Republic of Moldova, Group of the Unified European Left

On 30 August 2011, I took part on behalf of the European Left Party in the anti-fascist picket in Sinimae (Estonia), organised by the "World without nazism" international organisation, together with some anti-fascists movements and activists from Estonia.

The protest was organised against the annual gathering of the veterans of "Waffen SS" from Estonia and other European countries, a gathering organised together with "The Union of the fighters for freedom", an NGO supported financially by the Estonian authorities (Ministry of Defence), to honour SS veterans, presenting them as heroes and freedom fighters. The place for such a gathering was not chosen arbitrarily: 67 years ago, in 1944, Sinimae was a battlefield between the forces of Hitler's allies and the Soviet army, and more than 100 000 people died from both sides in a few days.

I was able to visit the fascist gathering and I observed that not only Estonian SS veterans were present, but also some from Belgium, Germany, Holland and Latvia, some of them wearing a uniform, nazi-symbols and flags of their divisions and legions. Some of the former and current members of the Parliament from the ruling parties were also present, one of them promising in his public speech on behalf of the Minister of Defence, Mr Mart Laar, that until next year these veterans will get an official status of "freedom fighters".

No Council of Europe body has yet taken position on the issue of glorification of neo-nazi criminals in one of the Council of Europe member states or on the fact that such gatherings are permitted and financially supported by the Estonian authorities and the Ministry of Defence.

Mr Petrenco,

To ask the Committee of Ministers,

– To what extent are the actions of the Estonian authorities in line with the standards of the Council of Europe?

– What steps does the Committee of Ministers intend to take to prevent such neo-nazi gatherings taking place in the future, as well as the glorification of neo-nazi criminals in a Council of Europe member state?