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100 Hit the Streets of Tallinn To Mark Bronze Soldier Riots

By Unknown

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A Russian, right, speaking to an Estonian during a rally in Tallinn on Saturday. **Ints Kalnins**

TALLINN, Estonia — About 100 demonstrators gathered in the Estonian capital on Saturday to commemorate the anniversary of the riots that shook the country one year ago.

A decision by the government to remove a pro-Soviet war memorial — dubbed the Bronze Soldier — and a nearby war grave sparked two nights of unrest in April 2007 that left one dead, more than 100 injured and many shops looted and burned.

On Saturday, protesters — mainly ethnic Russians — met in a park holding banners calling on people to turn their backs on the government and demanding that Prime Minister Andrus Ansip resign. The event was peaceful.

Moscow harshly criticized the decision to move the Bronze Soldier, calling it a sacred symbol of the defeat of Nazi Germany. But to many Estonians the monument was a caustic reminder

of five decades of Soviet occupation.

The statue was relocated to a military cemetery some three kilometers from the downtown square where it had stood for over half a century.

Relations between Estonia and Russia deteriorated after the incident, with Moscow making efforts to isolate the Baltic state and punish it economically. A recent Estonian government study said the country lost 450 million euros ($700 million), nearly 3 percent of GDP, in business with Russia after the dispute.

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