

Podcast "The German Wiedergutmachung"

Episode 2: A question of territory: Looking west

[Atmo: Saarburg waterfall / tourists in the centre / a little background music]

Saarburg is a small town in Rhineland-Palatinate. There is a famous waterfall in the centre, nice half-timbered houses and it is an idyll for tourists. A little away from the centre is a house that looks a bit like a former school. But first impressions are deceptive. Now, in this house, the darkest chapter in German history is on the daily agenda.

[Squeaking shoes, echoing empty corridors]

[Britta Weizenegger:]

"So, these used to be offices. Some of them were also the flats of office managers. I was spared that. And now we can see that we have tried to accommodate everything that can still be accommodated here in the building."

Britta Weizenegger is standing on the fourth floor of this building. Echoing, long corridors, wide staircases. But Britta Weizenegger is not a teacher, she is a department head at the Rhineland-Palatinate State Office of Finance and head of the State Office for Wiedergutmachung in Saarburg. Every *Land* or state in Germany has such an office, which looks after people who receive pensions under the Federal Compensation Act (BEG) because they were persecuted under National Socialism or Nazism – on average, these pension recipients are now 92 years old.

[Britta Weizenegger:]

"We currently have 2,309 ongoing pension cases, of which around 1,200 people are resident in Israel. The rest are spread across the USA, Canada and other countries. There are only around 50 BEG pension recipients living in Germany that we look after."

But what will happen going forward? In the foreseeable future, there will no longer be any survivors of Nazi persecution among us.

[Britta Weizenegger:]

"So, if the main task used to be pension processing, pension support, then today 50% of it is also contact with researchers, historians, etc. Of course, we realise, and all employees here realise, that at some point the last case will be closed. But that was foreseeable. Interestingly, it is taking longer than we always expected and I'm doing this with great pleasure."

[Music, Tonal transition]

Almost 80 years after the end of the Nazi dictatorship, there are still people all over the world who are receiving compensation for what the Nazis did to them. And this is part of our responsibility. Wiedergutmachung is the official name in German for the process of rectifying the wrongs of the past. It is a difficult term, but one that is commonly used in a variety of instances, including for payments that the Federal Republic of Germany has made and continues to make to victims of the Nazi dictatorship. The decades-long attempt to make amends is reflected as a tough process in the files that fill hundreds of kilometres of archive space. These files are often the only source that can provide family members with information about the fates of their close and distant relatives who were persecuted under the Nazis. These documents are now being made available via the Online Collection "Wiedergutmachung for National Socialist Injustice". You can find the link in the show-notes.

[Music]

In the last episode, we talked about what actually happened to property that was looted by the Nazis. And we took a little detour into the world of art restitution. If you haven't listened to this episode yet

– I would recommend you listen to this one first.

In this episode, we take a look at the topic of Wiedergutmachung from an international perspective, but with a focus on Western countries, and ask what the experience for people in these countries was of the German Wiedergutmachung policy. To this end, we are once again opening a file from the Federal Archives. We also link to the documents discussed in the show-notes.

So, international Wiedergutmachung: What does that mean? An example: Two people were imprisoned in a concentration camp: One comes from Germany, the other from Denmark. Both people experience the same atrocities, and the German is financially compensated after the end of the war. The Dane, however, was left empty-handed. Sounds unfair, doesn't it? But that's actually how it was at first. And in this episode we explain why this was and how the situation finally changed.

We take another look at some files in the Federal Archives. We talk to historian Tim Geiger about the foreign policy history of Wiedergutmachung, and find out from Nicole Immler from Utrecht in the Netherlands how it was perceived beyond Germany's borders. And we also return to Saarburg.

I am Nora Hespers, journalist, and this is "The German Wiedergutmachung" – Episode 2: "A question of territory: Looking west".

[Music, Tonal transition]

[Files are opened]

[Elke Hammer:]

"We have selected a note verbale from 1956.¹ A note verbale is a letter from a foreign embassy, in this case the Danish embassy, to the German Federal Foreign Office. And the Danish embassy is communicating the Danish government's view on Wiedergutmachung for Danish victims of Nazi persecution. In the opinion of the Danes, the Federal Compensation Act did not take sufficient account of them at the time."

This is Elke Hammer. She works as an archivist at the Federal Archives in Koblenz and has a thick file from the 1950s lying on a large table in front of her. An envelope made of cardboard, inside which are folders containing very thin, filed papers. They are yellowed and were densely typed up using a typewriter.

This note verbale from 21 June 1956, as described by Elke Hammer, was not only sent by Denmark, but by a total of twelve Western European countries.² They have a common demand for the Federal Republic of Germany:

[Elke Hammer:]

"They point out that their citizens must also be entitled to compensation for the injustice they have suffered, similar to those living in the Federal Republic."

This means that if Germans receive compensation payments, people who do not live in the Federal Republic of Germany but were persecuted by the Nazis should also receive them. Such claims by foreign citizens are often settled via reparations. These are payments under international law that a defeated state has to pay to victors for war damages and crimes. German victims of Nazi persecution, on the other hand, receive payments on the basis of German Wiedergutmachung laws, which – roughly speaking – did not apply to foreigners.

Denmark's request now goes to the German Federal Foreign Office. And due to its high diplomatic significance, the Federal Chancellor will also be informed of this.

When subjects become a matter for the Federal Chancellor, they pass through the Federal Chancellery and end up in a file. And this file can then be found in the Federal Archives. That is also the case here. Elke Hammer:

¹ Verbal note from Denmark to the Federal Government, June 21, 1956, BArch, B 136/3306, pp. 8–9.

² Cf. Letter by the Foreign Office to the Federal Chancellery, September 4, 1957 (BArch, B 136/3306, pp. 39–50).

[Elke Hammer:]

"You can read the file from front to back and just take note of the printed text, so to speak. (...) But the really exciting thing is that if you really want to know what happened, what happened in detail, then you will also have to read through the handwritten notes in the margins. Well, sometimes it just says, in inverted commas, 'file it away'."

Elke Hammer continues to leaf through the documents and has found an interesting passage:

[Elke Hammer:]

"This is about a meeting between the Ministry of Finance and the Federal Foreign Office³, where they are discussing the possibilities of meeting these foreign, these Western European demands and the limitations that stand in the way. (...) The Federal Minister of Finance emphasised that the German state was practically broken and driven into the arms of National Socialism due to the over-reaching demands of foreign countries after 1918. And we also want to fight against the completely false thesis that we are a rich nation in view of our central bank's foreign currency reserves. There are other passages in which it is stated that if Western states were to be accommodated, Germany would have to reckon with much higher burdens from Eastern European states. After all, the damage caused by National Socialism was mainly inflicted on the states of the former Soviet Union."

The Federal Minister of Finance fears that a dangerous precedent would be set if the demands of individual countries were to be conceded to. He says: "The Federal Republic may then not be able to cope financially, the federal budget does not allow it."

However, the Federal Foreign Office and ultimately the Federal Chancellery took a different view. In the years that followed, a lively debate ensued about how and to whom the Federal Republic would ultimately pay internationally.

[Music and tonal transition]

[Tim Geiger:]

"Well, the 50s are already a significant turning point. Starting with the Luxembourg Agreement, i.e. the agreement on Wiedergutmachung with the State of Israel, where reconstruction aid for Israel is again paid in the form of integration aid in kind, over a period of twelve years and an additional 3 billion German marks plus 450 million for the Jewish Claims Conference, which is supposed to administer the funds for the homeless Jewish victims of persecution."

You are listening to Tim Geiger. He is a historian at the Institute of Contemporary History and works at the Federal Foreign Office on the edition "Files on the foreign policy of the Federal Republic of Germany".

Tim Geiger has just mentioned the Luxembourg Agreement⁴, which is a key agreement. In 1952, the Federal Republic of Germany undertook to pay money to the State of Israel, which took in hundreds of thousands of Jewish survivors of the Holocaust and now has to provide for them, and to the Jewish Claims Conference. A total of 3.45 billion German marks.

The Claims Conference is an international umbrella organisation of Jewish associations that deals with compensation claims by Jewish victims of the Holocaust.

The settlement of pre-war debts and Allied support payments after the war was the subject of an agreement concluded at the same time between the Federal Republic of Germany and a large number of creditor states, in London. However, this so-called London Debt Agreement⁵ also included a far-reaching agreement on reparations, which the losers usually had to pay to the winners after the

³ Note by the Head of Sub-Department V B in the Federal Ministry of Finance, Ernst Féaux de la Croix, on the meeting between the Federal Minister of Finance, Franz Etzel, and the Federal Minister for Foreign Affairs, Heinrich von Brentano on October 28, 1958 in Bonn, October 28, 1958 (BArch, B 126/3306, pp. 116–118).

⁴ Agreement between the Federal Republic of Germany and the State of Israel of September 10, 1952 (BGBl. 1953 II, pp. 35–97).

⁵ London Agreement on German External Debts of February 27, 1953 (BGBl. 1953 II, pp. 331–485)

end of a war. Tim Geiger:

[Tim Geiger:]

"The now famous article five, paragraph two of the London Debt Agreement provided that all reparations payments would be postponed until the final resolution of the German question in a peace treaty."

[short ping tone announcing an insertion]

This "German question" refers to the division of the country after the war into the Federal Republic of Germany (the western parts of the country, which were initially run by American, France and Britain) and the German Democratic Republic (East Germany, which was controlled by the Soviets).

In 1953, the reunification of Germany – and thus a peace treaty on behalf of the whole nation, and any cohesive agreement over reparations – was still far off in the stars...

[Tim Geiger:]

"To a certain extent, this became a very, very convenient protective shield for the Federal Republic, with which the claims of foreign victims of National Socialism were actually always rejected."

The Federal Republic can therefore say: We can't pay because we haven't been reunified yet. Of course, foreign countries don't like to hear this argument. And especially when the West German economy was so obviously booming, from the end of the 1950s onwards, they were unwilling to accept what they saw as an excuse, says Tim Geiger.

[Tim Geiger:]

"Otherwise, the economy of Federal Republic of Germany is trudging on with leaden boots, but always says we can't pay you compensation for financial reasons. That is a certain contradiction. And of course, the Western European allies, who have the problem of not seeing the USA at their side as the real, decisive hegemonic power in the Western camp, are also picking up on this – it is the time of rearmament, which is also an immense cost factor."

Due to the Cold War, the USA is taking a restrained attitude. Their stance is that an economically strong Federal Republic is the first priority in order to counter the growing power of Soviet Russia.

Nevertheless, the Western European states are hoping for a way forward, namely an amendment to the Federal Compensation Act. They want people who have no territorial connection to Germany to be able to receive compensation. What exactly do I mean by territorial connection?

The Federal Compensation Act follows the territoriality principle, which essentially means that only people who have a connection to Germany and its territory are entitled to compensation. This implies people who were living in the Federal Republic of Germany up to the cut-off date of 1952, or who emigrated, were expelled or deported from the German Reich within the borders of 31 December, 1937.

Let's think back to the comparison between the Danish and the German concentration camp prisoner at the beginning of this episode. The Dane never lived in Germany – a stay in a German concentration camp did not count as "living in Germany" – and he was never expelled from Germany. Therefore, according to the Federal Compensation Act, he cannot be compensated.

However, if this Dane had moved to Frankfurt or Munich after the war, for example, he would have been entitled to compensation. It is therefore completely understandable why countries like Denmark later called for an amendment, because as a survivor it is difficult to understand.

But precisely this hope for a change in the law was dashed, as this would have created overlaps with the reparations issue that would have been difficult to resolve. The only option left to the other Western states was to join forces and approach the Federal Republic of Germany together. The result is the verbal notes that Elke Hammer presented at the beginning of the episode. They are almost all worded the same: Germany should take responsibility for the crimes against humanity and allow

individual compensation.

[Tim Geiger:]

"And of course, the Federal Republic is still under a certain amount of suspicion after the crimes committed during the Nazi era. And the diplomats know that too, some of whom are themselves implicated. But having arrived in their new Federal Republican present, they realise that it is necessary for the Federal Republic to actively distance itself from its Nazi past, also through practical repentance, and in this respect a categorical 'no' is actually politically wrong."

However, the reaction from Bonn, where the federal government was headquartered, is initially cautious: money is offered for hardship cases, or for charitable reasons, to pay for victims' stays in hospital or health spas. This creates a scandal, especially in the international press and among the organisations representing persecuted people. Because the view of those affected is: we are not demanding charity, but fair compensation.

After numerous difficult negotiations with the respective Western states over many years, so-called global agreements are concluded individually with twelve states. "Global" because a "global sum", i.e. a total sum that included all individual claims, was agreed.

The Federal Republic says quite clearly: these are not reparations, but extraordinary payments intended for the individual victims due to the unique nature of the Nazi injustice. The distribution was then the responsibility of the respective contracting states.

[Tim Geiger:]

"It is perhaps also quite significant that the decisive breakthroughs in these global agreements in particular, which are the consequences of this note verbale of 1956, are always in a political context. (...) Ultimately, it was not a question of the right to the amount of compensation, but of political pressure."

The Federal Republic pays almost one billion marks, divided between the twelve countries with which it concludes corresponding agreements between 1959 and 1964. France, for example, received 400 million marks, Denmark 16 million. The distribution of the sums says less about the number of people affected in the country than about the respective diplomatic weighting. With the exception of Luxembourg, all countries wanted to have the possibility to renegotiate again if necessary.

At that time, this Global agreement was also debated in the German Parliament, the Bundestag. Here we listen to extracts relating to the debate on the agreement with Norway. Herbert Wehner, then deputy chairman of the Social Democratic Party and opposition politician, speaks on 11 March 1960, announcing that his parliamentary group would abstain from the vote:

[Herbert Wehner:]

"Excuse me, I don't want to use this opportunity to refer to figures. I just want to summarise: the sums that have been set as our Wiedergutmachung payments to Denmark and Norway in these treaties are only a fraction of the damage that was done to people there. What we have heard again here, that not everything can be made good with money, is correct. On the other hand, what we can do in this area should have been taken to the extreme limit. Unfortunately, that is not the case here. These figures are far below what both countries have had to raise from their own resources in the years that have passed since the war in order to help the victims of National Socialism."

[short musical pause]

What is important about these global agreements is that although West-Germany provides the money, the distribution of the funds among persecuted people is left to the respective states. The last of these agreements was signed with Sweden in 1964.

[short musical pause]

Many countries in which the Nazis wreaked havoc are now receiving payments under the Global Agreements and passing them on to those affected in their own way.

But former victims of persecution in Eastern European countries have no chance of receiving compensation, even though there are many more people affected there. This is partly due to the aforementioned principle of territoriality and the issue of reparations, and partly due to the Cold War. Payments to countries of the Soviet bloc are considered out of the question politically because, from an alliance policy perspective, no Western foreign currency can be supplied to countries behind the Iron Curtain and therefore be seen to be propping up those regimes. In addition, the Federal Republic naturally fears there would be very high claims flooding in from these regions. We will go into this again in a separate episode.

[Tim Geiger:]

"The Eastern Europeans were actually practically always the ones who fell into the void. Before that, they were turned away, always with reference to the fact that there were no diplomatic relations and then with the argument that, well, these are ultimately reparations payments and they are only due if there was a peace treaty. And ultimately, in 1990, it was of course also one of the reasons why we didn't get a peace treaty for German reunification, but a two plus four treaty⁶, a substitute treaty, a final settlement in relation to Germany, as it is called, because they did not want to open the barrel of reparations. That was a clever idea, but in fact it meant that the moral guilt and the moral obligation remained, of course, and all the compensation debates that took place in the 90s are ultimately a consequence of this success, to a certain extent, which have kept the reparations issue outside."

The international dimension of German Wiedergutmachung policy therefore also has an impact on our recent past. But despite all this, a lot has happened in terms of Wiedergutmachung in Western countries, even outside the global agreements: After all, there are still people who are not excluded by the territoriality principle and live in other Western countries after the war. You heard such an example with Eva Evans in the first episode of this podcast. She lived within the borders of the German Reich in 1937 and then fled to England due to persecution. She is therefore entitled to claim under the Federal Compensation Act.

To understand exactly how this worked, we have to go back to the State Office for Wiedergutmachung in Saarburg.

In addition to its main building, the one that looks like a school, the State Office for Wiedergutmachung has had to rent a second property. Because with 910,000 files that have accumulated over the decades, Saarburg has run out of space.

[Music and tonal transition]

[Footsteps outside on a street]

[Britta Weizenegger:]

"We have very narrow aisles here, but people can still get through reasonably well and we have wooden shelves up to the ceiling and they are all stocked. There are six shelves and up to 10 files inside. You can imagine how many files are stored here. Personally, I can say that I started when I was here for just a week and, of course, part of working on a file is studying it intensively. And then, of course, you also read the testimony of the persecuted victim. You also read the witness statements, and at the very beginning I had a file in my hands from a man where he and his twin brother were victims of Mengele's experiments."

[Ping type insertion]

For those who might not have heard of him, Josef Mengele was a notorious Nazi doctor who used people in concentration camps for deadly experiments.

"And you don't have to be a historian to know about his experiments. And to read that again was very frightening. Especially as this man survived and his twin brother did not. And it's also terrible that the survivors in particular suffer so much from the fact that they survived and not their relatives. But on

⁶ Treaty on the Final Settlement with Respect to Germany of September 12, 1990 (BGBl. 1990 II, p. 1317–1329

the other hand: We have a very good relationship with the survivors that receive our pensions until today."

Because the Federal Compensation Act is implemented by the *Länder* or states, there are corresponding compensation offices in each of the so-called old *Länder*, for example in Düsseldorf, Munich, Berlin, etc.

Some offices also have special responsibilities. Saarburg, for example, deals with applicants residing outside Europe – for example in the USA and Israel. For this reason, Saarburg still receives many enquiries from all over the world, which is why the small Rhineland-Palatinate town sees itself as more global than a glance at the map would suggest. Britta Weizenegger describes the procedure:

[Britta Weizenegger:]

"And you have to imagine it like this, to make a long story short: you found out about this application option either through Jewish organisations, through the federal government, whatever, and then in Germany you usually filed an application at a compensation authority, if it wasn't the right one, you were referred to the responsible authority, and they then received a so-called cover sheet. In this they could first enter their name, date of birth etc., i.e. basic data, and tick which damages they were claiming. There are several types of damage. For example, there is damage to life because they lost a husband and children during National Socialism. There is damage to health, physical injury, damage to liberty, i.e. because they had to wear a Jewish star, for example, or were imprisoned in a ghetto or detention centre or imprisonment in general."

Ok, a form, basic data, ticking off a claim – that sounds more like the processing of an insurance claim than Wiedergutmachung. For those affected, the processing was sometimes unbearable and also extremely complicated. Britta Weizenegger also hints at this:

[Britta Weizenegger:]

"Well, the challenge is, on the one hand, it has to be said quite clearly, that the persecution has been very hard on these people and has had a massive impact on their lives. They have lost relatives, some of them have lost entire families, they have fled their home countries after the war, and suffered all that. There was the problem that those affected often did not want to co-operate with the perpetrator state Germany."

The authorities in Germany therefore had to be able to process the applications somehow and needed the relevant information from the survivors or their relatives. Understandably, however, this often placed a great deal of emotional strain on the victims, as they first had to make entries on endless, impersonal forms for the German administration. Tosia Schneider, a Holocaust survivor who emigrated to the USA, reports for a contemporary witness project "Forced Labour 1939–45" how traumatizing contact with the German authorities was. She felt that the Wiedergutmachung was insufficient and insulting "blood money":

[Tosia Schneider:]

"I have a very strange relationship with that. When I was in Germany, they had forms. They had papers that told you: if you lost a mother, you will get compensated so much for a father, so much for a brother, whatever. And I remember seeing that and being so infuriated and saying, 'You don't have enough money to pay for all of that. And I never wanted any compensation for family.'"

The process of filing an application was a very painful one for many, because it naturally brought the grief over the great losses back to the surface. In addition, such a process is also very impersonal and survivors often had the feeling that "the truth", i.e. what they had experienced, was not really believed. In the early years, many applications were simply rejected outright – it doesn't take much to imagine the effect that had. The survivors encountered a bureaucracy that was in many cases "merciless", and they also had to cope with the fact that there were "old Nazis" in the authorities.

The entire compensation process takes years and is also influenced by amendments to the law and foreign policy decisions. However, it is clear that in the course of this process more and more

applications are being submitted, approved and, above all, more claims recognised. According to official figures from the Federal Ministry of Finance, 4.4 million applications were received from all over the world under the Federal Compensation Act. 1.2 million were not recognised.⁷ In addition, there are many hundreds of thousands of cases in which people have been compensated via non-statutory provisions. And so, it is that Britta Weizenegger, who now heads a compensation office, describes the following:

[Britta Weizenegger:]

"I often hear that these people were ultimately persecuted twice, once during National Socialism and later when they applied for compensation. From my contact with the pension recipients and also with the contents of the files, I can't quite understand that. I had the feeling that a lot had been done. There are certainly points in the Federal Compensation Act that could possibly have been adapted. But that's also open to debate. But I would say that it was a very progressive law and that the political and medical world was always taken into account. So, let's take the beginning, when psychological diseases have not been the focus of so much attention because some of them were not even claimed for. Later, by the 1980s, it was realised that a concentration camp, a forced sterilisation, of course does have a huge psychological impact on people and changes their lives permanently. And then these things were implemented very quickly."

Yes, but of course this "realisation" comes far too late for many, many of those affected! And from the applicants' point of view, of course, things often look different.

Imre Gönczi is an Auschwitz survivor and reports on his experiences for the contemporary witness project "Forced Labour 1939–45". He summarises his view of the Federal Compensation Act as follows:

[Imre Gönczi:]

"That was a very bad law. It only wanted to compensate the Germans."

And there are also cases where it worked out quite well for the survivors. This is Jutta Pelz-Bergt, a former prisoner in Auschwitz. Although she categorically rejects the concept of Wiedergutmachung, her experiences with the authorities were not all bad:

[Jutta Pelz-Bergt:]

"They said, well, haven't they recognised your health damages yet? No, I say. That only came out in '48. So, they said: Let's go. It will be applied for immediately. Even if it wasn't until '48... You weren't examined beforehand. And after two months I'd got through it and then I got a pension back [redacted] payment of four thousand marks, which was an incredible amount of money back then. Today it's nothing, but back then it was a lot of money and I could afford to give up my job in Berlin and travelled to Israel."

At the peak of applications under the Federal Compensation Act in the mid-1960s, 760 people were processing the files of applicants in Rhineland-Palatinate alone.

Over the years, an enormous bureaucratic apparatus has also been created in the other Länder to deal with the many applications from survivors.

Today, there are still nine people performing this service in Saarburg.

Because there are fewer and fewer pension recipients, the officials at the State Office for Wiedergutmachung in Saarburg have a great deal of personal contact with each of their applicants.

[Britta Weizenegger:]

"And we have a lady from Düsseldorf who actually calls us every week and they are always nice conversations, even if of course many talks about the bad past, but also always look at what is

⁷ Bundesministerium der Finanzen (Hg.): Leistungen der öffentlichen Hand auf dem Gebiet der Wiedergutmachung. Stand: 31. Dezember 2022.

happening in Germany now. So many of our pension recipients are especially concerned when it comes to the state of democracy in Germany."

We have now heard a lot about how the application procedure from abroad has run. But it is also interesting to see what people outside Germany think about the Wiedergutmachung policy. And that's why we're going to Utrecht in the Netherlands.

[Music and tonal transition]

You may have heard the term "transitional justice" before. Roughly speaking, it summarises processes and practices that describe the transition from a violent dictatorial system to a constitutional democracy. Among other things, it also deals with the question of how remembrance takes place and who is remembered. To put it simply, the post-war trials of Nazi war criminals and other Nazi perpetrators, as well as aspects of German reparations policy, are a kind of starting signal for this discipline. Nicole Immler, Professor of Historical Memory and Transformative Justice at Utrecht University in the Netherlands, is researching this topic.

[Nicole Immler:]

"And it has to be said that in this field, German Wiedergutmachung policy in particular is very important and often circulates as an ideal, because the Nuremberg Trials [where Nazis were prosecuted], the Luxembourg Agreement, the individual and collective compensation measures are very often a point of reference in discussions, especially abroad. I lived in Austria for a long time and now in the Netherlands, in countries where such measures came relatively late and where people always looked to Germany."

In other Western countries in particular, Germany's Wiedergutmachung policy is a point of reference that is still used today.

[Nicole Immler:]

"I believe that the reparation policy and the measures basically stand for the fact that a state has actually tried a lot to face up to injustice and deal with it, to find and implement measures, and that everything is also seen in practical terms with the idea that it is an offer."

Let us briefly summarise once again:

At the beginning of this episode, we looked at the files in the Federal Archives. You remember the global agreements with the twelve Western European countries demanding compensation for their citizens. An important and controversial point was the so-called territoriality principle, i.e. in simple terms, only people who came from the German Reich or who lived in the Federal Republic of Germany on a certain date could be legally compensated.

Tim Geiger from the Institute of Contemporary History explained how this came about. The files from the Federal Archives say a lot about the reasons for this. Here is Elke Hammer again with an exemplary passage:

[Elke Hammer:]

"And this is also about the concerns of the Ministry of Finance. It says that if Article 5 of the London Debt Agreement, which is used as a kind of protective shield to avoid having to pay these indemnities for the time being, is given up, then, as it says here, there is, and I quote verbatim, no longer any defence against the enormous claims that can be expected from the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc states."

Ultimately, there was almost no initiative regarding Eastern bloc countries at all and Germany just reacted to pressure from outside. For those affected, i.e. survivors and their relatives, the application process and the bureaucratic procedure were often extremely stressful. Initially, this could also be due to the staff at the authorities, some of whom would have been involved with the Nazi regime.

At the same time, Britta Weizenegger's experience in Saarburg has shown that quite a lot *has* happened. 910,000 processed files in this one state office alone show that, over the decades, there

have been developments that we could call – to put it mildly – "positive".

And the external perspective also shows that the German Wiedergutmachung policy has been followed with great interest by other countries over the decades and has been subject to a variety of assessments and evaluations.

[Music and tonal transition]

How do these perceptions fit together? How can it be that the policy of Wiedergutmachung is assessed so differently by different people? Nicole Immler from Utrecht University has an explanation. She believes that it depends on which level we are looking at, how the process is perceived and who the observer is.

[Nicole Immler:]

"In our experience, the shortcomings, and this is actually the case with almost everyone I've spoken to in recent years, are that compensation has been very arduous at the individual level, has caused a lot of injuries and is therefore a long process. And we actually know that it's not just about what people get. It's almost never about the money. It's also about how the process is organised. When this process takes too long, is too opaque, contains injustices and so on, then this process, which is also assessed, is detached from what comes out in the end as a compensation payment, as a pension."

Even if this may have improved somewhat over the years, the survivors sometimes found the application processes traumatic. And there were also survivors who never wanted to have any contact with Germany again – not even to apply for compensation.

Here once again Tisia Schneider from the USA:

[Tisia Schneider:]

"I just did not want a letter coming with a German stamp, from a German place, to me after the war. I just wanted to cut that off completely. It wasn't very wise, because we struggled. We didn't have any money when we were young, but I couldn't deal with it."

[Music and tonal transition]

In this episode, we have talked a lot about the international dimension of Wiedergutmachung. In the next episode, we will talk about and with people whose suffering has often been ignored or even denied for decades: the so-called Forgotten Victims.

[Markus Metz:]

"Society was characterised by the fact that it was completely indifferent to the fate of the Sinti and Roma, that there was no empathy for the concerns of the minority and that there was no public pressure on state decision-makers."

More on this in the next episode of "The German Wiedergutmachung."

If you like this podcast, we would be delighted to receive a five-star rating and would be happy if you would recommend it to other people! Do you have any questions about the topic or would you like to browse through the files yourself? You can find the details in the show notes.

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