

War damage in Slovenia during the Second World War and the arranging of rights

Author: Gregor Kaplan MSc., a descendant of Slovenian exiles and a member of the Association of Slovenian Exiles 1941-1945.

I. Introduction

This short composition contains details of the occupation and dismemberment of Slovenia during the Second World War. The forms of violence carried out by the occupier and the denationalization and genocidal policy performed against the Slovenes during the Second World War are described briefly, especially the deportation of Slovenes and the forms of destruction made to public and private property.

The actual inventory of war damage after the Second World War is exposed and the extent of the devastation caused by the German, Italian and Hungarian occupiers, with precise details of this damage, as communicated to the peace and repatriation conferences immediately after the Second World War. Some information is also given regarding the claims for compensation for war damage made by the former Yugoslavia, with details of the amount of compensation requested and the amount actually received. Very briefly, I mention the efforts of the Association of Slovenian Exiles 1941-1945 (DIS) as well, which, in its 25 years of operation, has had a leading role in solving the problems of the status and rights of the victims of war during the Second World War.

At the conclusion of this short presentation, I cite some of the already adopted laws regarding the regulation of victims' rights. To sum up, I list some arguments that may be utilized by the Republic of Slovenia for the recovery of war reparations from Germany.

In the twentieth century, humanity has been marked by two world wars that have made substantive changes to the manner and concept of warfare. Combat technology has been altered and developed in such a way that it causes victims massive injuries and the destruction of enemy infrastructure, causing as much damage as possible in all areas. In both wars, the civilian population suffered enormous war devastation. The Second World War between 1939 and 1945 was evoked by a group of Nazi and fascist states (Germany, Italy and Japan), who were joined in a so-called 'Triple treaty'. The Triple treaty was gradually joined by a number of other states. The confrontation that followed is still the largest, not only by the number of victims, but also by its size, that there ever was. The Second World War claimed some 50 million lives.

II. The occupation and violence carried out by the occupier, against Slovenes
In 1941, Slovenian land was occupied and dismembered. The Germans occupied 10,261 square kilometres, the Italians 4,544 square kilometres and the Hungarians 997 square kilometres, and some villages were occupied by the independent State of Croatia. Countries invading Slovenia wished to destroy the unity of the Slovenian nation as an ethnic unit. By pillaging, plundering and destroying Slovenian private and public property during the war, a large amount of war damage was created. The Second World War affected just about every single family in Slovenia.

As regards the German violence, it is necessary to point out that the occupier's sources from the spring of 1941, indicate that the expulsion of victims would range between 220,000–260,000 persons, meaning every third Slovenian who was living in the area of German occupation. For national or political reasons, the Nazi's drove and expelled Slovenians to Germany with 70 transportations; to Croatia with 21 transportations and to Serbia with 12 transportations. With more than 100 transportations, the Slovenian exiles were driven abroad like livestock. Most of them, 45,000 in total, were physically removed and forcibly deported to Germany; 10,000 were deported to Croatia, 7,500 persons were deported to Serbia and 2,500 to Hungary. A further 17,000 people fled themselves, before deportation took place. The total number of deported Slovenes from the three occupied Slovenian regions mentioned was approximately 80,000, of which 20,000 were children.

More than 12,000 Gottscheer Germans requested resettlement in the empty homes of Slovenian deportees. Germans from South Bukovina, Bessarabia and Dobruja were also given lodgings, in order to strengthen the already existing 'Germanism' and protect against 'de-nationalizing'.

The Italian occupying regime was extremely cruel. Masses of Slovenes were displaced, interned and deported. As one example of torture against Slovenians, it is to be noted that in the Italian concentration camps Rab, Gonars, Padova and others, around 25,000 Slovenes resided and suffered. In 1942, solely in the concentration camp on the island of Rab, 4,000 men, women and children were murdered.

Even the Hungarian occupying regime was harsh. Hungarian occupying authorities classed local inhabitants as only those who had been living in the territory of Great Hungary before 31st October 1918. The rest were listed as immigrants and necessary to be expelled from the country, most of whom were deported to the concentration camp at Sárvár.

At this point I must mention Austria, as the Austrians were actively involved in a national-dividing and genocidal policy towards Slovenes. They issued decrees officiating only in the German language, removing the names of towns in the Slovenian language and abolishing the Slovenian language taught in schools, as 90% of the teachers were of Austrian nationality.

Even casualties in the territory of Slovenia were under constant surveillance, which was pointed out by the data from the Institute of Contemporary History, which cites

the figure of 90,000 victims in Slovenia. For the whole of Yugoslavia, the number is more than 1,700,000 victims.

III. Reparation and Peace Conferences

Similar to the First World War, negotiations and peace-reparative Conferences were carried out after the Second World War.

At the conference in Livadia in Yalta from 4th – 11th February 1945, the Allies (Roosevelt, Stalin and Churchill) agreed that the aggressor countries should pay compensation for war damage. There they also formed an inter-Allied Reparation Committee, comprising the US, Great Britain, Soviet Union and later France.

At the Potsdam Conference in 1945, the victorious Allies decided that Germany should never again threaten European peace. They ordered the abolition of the war industry and demilitarization of Germany, with permanent control over the German capacity to wage war. In Potsdam in June and August 1945 it was also specified how Germany should pay the reparations, which would serve as compensation for the damage caused, and help to rebuild the allied countries which suffered as a result of the German aggression. This included the seizure of German industry, its dismantling and resettlement, seizure of investments abroad, etc. At the Potsdam Conference the division of the Allies on the western and eastern parts was also decided. The Soviet Union and Poland were considered the eastern part, while all others, including Yugoslavia, were considered the western part.

Great Britain, the US and France called the participants of the western part of the coalition to a special reparation conference in Paris from 9th November until 21st December 1945. In addition to the main three, the conference was attended by Yugoslavia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Egypt, Greece, India, Luxembourg, Norway, New Zealand, Netherlands, Czechoslovakia and South Africa. At the initiative of Yugoslavia, Albania was subsequently invited. The Paris Conference founded an international agency for reparation called the Inter Allied Reparation Agency – IARA. The agency cooperated by means of their representatives, with all the interested countries. The Conference had two tasks, namely: i) to determine the demands of each of the interested countries in the context of reparations (apart from the Soviet Union and Poland), and ii) to accept the necessary rules for their implementation. On the basis of the Potsdam and Paris Agreements, any interested country could demand the payment of reparation.

At the end of June 1947, the Paris Conference showed considerable signs of conflict between the eastern and western ministers. Certain quotas were defined. The Yugoslav delegation was against this, as it was not certain exactly how much smaller countries would receive from the reparation.

Yugoslavia should receive compensation of \$ 36 billion dollars from western zones, namely 6.6% of foreign German property and German products and 9.6% of German industrial machinery, including river and maritime fleets.

IV. Surveying the war damage

In accordance with the peace and reparation conferences, former Yugoslavia conducted an inventory of war damage. Even in the area of present-day Slovenia, war damage was meticulously listed. Documents regarding this census are still preserved and are found in the archives of the Republic of Slovenia. The census itself was carried out on the basis of laws, regulations and prices issued by the authorities of the time. Every citizen was obliged to make an inventory of his own war damage and report this to the competent local war damage Commission. Each applicant was also given a certificate of confirmation of war damage. The register of war damage was seen as a civic duty. For this purpose, as mentioned previously, the country carried out the establishment of a National Commission for War Damage. Instruction for the work of federal, district and local committees. Rules on the notification and assessment of war damage, a price list for the assessment of war damage and issuing resolutions for war damage beneficiaries.

On 4th October 1946, the Committee for War Damage in Slovenia sent the Bureau of the Government of LRS in Ljubljana a supplement to the report on war damage made on 30th September 1946, as damage to private property was estimated at 20,114,628,632 dinars. The total war damage after this report now amounted to 47,317,957,106 dinars. It should be noted that this amount did not cover the damage caused to Slovenia by Austrians and Germans on the Slovenian coast, after the capitulation of Italy.

V. Payment of war damage from Italy, Austria and Hungary

The obligations of Italy were fully completed with the Osimo Agreements in 1974. Hungary covered its obligations in full - \$85 million by the conclusion of the peace treaty of 1947. Austrian liabilities were covered by the adoption of the Austrian State Treaty of 1955, where the property of German-speaking persons who left Slovenia in 1945 was handed over to Slovenia.

VI. War damage received from Germany

In accordance with the Paris Agreement (24th January 1946), the Federal Republic of Germany should pay Yugoslavia \$36 billion as compensation for war damage. Of this amount, Yugoslavia received \$36,786,418, in the form of machinery and transport equipment, as follows:

- Under the resolution of the United Nations from 1951 and on the basis of the bilateral agreement of 1963, Yugoslavia received DEM 8,000,000 compensation for medical experiments on the citizens of Yugoslavia, which was divided among the living war survivors. In Slovenia, damages were awarded to only 53 persons, as the victims had not been informed of this opportunity.
- Following an agreement from 1956, Yugoslavia received DEM 26,000,000 compensation from social insurance demands for workers, who were used as forced labour in Germany during the Second World War.

– Funding was also received according to the so-called agreement “Tito-Brandt” 'Kapital-Hilfe'.

Slovenia therefore received DEM 330 million in war compensation in the form of economic aid and a DEM 160 million loan – while it should be emphasized, that Slovenia repaid that loan in full, with interest.

In view of all the above, it is obvious that there still remains an open question of reparation of war damage from Germany to Slovenia and the Slovene people. According to the data above, Germany has paid only 2% of war damage to Slovenia.

VII. Arranging the rights of victims and the activity of the DIS

Until the independence of Slovenia, civilian victims of war violence had no rights and did not receive any reparation. Only after the establishment of the Association of Slovenian Exiles 1941-1945 (on 6 September 1991), were the first initiatives placed in recognition of the status as victims of war and certain rights for personal damages were established.

In particular, I would like to point out, that the Law on Victims of War was adopted in 1995 and gives the status and rights of social, health and pension protection. In 2001, the Act was adopted pursuant to the Repayment of War damages and post-war violence, which were defined as compensation for physical and mental suffering and a symbolic compensation for the loss of life. There is still the unresolved question of damage caused during the Second World War.

The Association of Slovenian Exiles has provided all the current government offices and National Assembly with enough data for Slovenia to successfully collect compensation for war damage from Germany, without the slightest doubt owing to Slovenia and Slovenes. Our association has collected and made available all war damage data from individual occupiers at the time of the Second World War, allowing Slovenia to send Germany a request for repayment and the arrangement of outstanding issues linked to the reparation of war damage. If necessary, Slovenia may also refer to the following:-

- The Decisions of the Peace and Reparation Conference,
- References to the laws used to regulate damages in Luxembourg, Lothringia, Alsace and Lorraine, where there was a very similar situation as in the Slovenian occupied territory,
- Slovenia may wish to submit German documents on their reasons for the expulsion of more than 63,000 Slovenes, of which there were more than 20,000 Slovene children,
- Slovenia may present the agreement made on 22nd July 1942 by Italy, Germany, Bulgaria, Hungary and Croatia (NDH), on the liquidation of property in the former Yugoslav republics (including Slovenia),
- In the book 'Wiedergutmachung' – “Compensation”, experts provide a rating of

recognition of reparations for i) damage to property, ii) damage to work and professions, iii) kidnapping and removal of freedom, iv) psychological violence, v) concentration camp syndrome and vi) loss of parents.

– As Slovenia returned the economic aid it was given with interest, according to the agreement reached by Tito–Brandt in 1974, Germany cannot state that this was war compensation.

– After the fall of the Berlin wall, Germany is now a united country once more. The only remaining open issue with Germany is the fact that Slovenia has not ratified the peace accord with Germany.

VIII. Conclusion

It is more than obvious that every Slovenian government has pushed aside the question of the repayment of damages and other issues, tackling them far too slowly. Likewise, it is equally obvious, and this also applies to the present government, that after more than 70 years, it has ignored the fact and the moral obligation that it now needs to recover the war damage from the successor-aggressor countries and to place them in a fund for the reparation of war damage, as was its intention, all the properties left to Slovenia by the Austrians, Germans, Italians and Hungarians, who departed Slovenia in 1945.

Given the fact that more than seven decades have passed since this great tragedy, it is high time that the Slovenian government acts responsibly and attempt, with moral and legal binding, to reimburse the rightful claimants the war compensation that they are owed.

In particular, this should be met regarding the Slovenian deportees and refugees who were the first mass civilian victims, where entire regions were expelled with all family members losing their entire assets, property and worldly belongings.

Gregor Kaplan, MSc., Slovenia

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