

CAN FINANCIAL REPARATIONS BE A MEANS OF COMING TO TERMS WITH THE PAST?

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This contribution examines whether and to what extent the experience with reparations granted after 1945 to the victims of Nazism in Germany represent a historic precedent for the present situation in the post-communist nations in central and eastern Europe. A comparison between developments in the Federal Republic of Germany and the German Democratic Republic serves to illustrate the point that any initiative aimed at granting reparations to the victims of a totalitarian regime which has been overcome necessarily leads to a reappraisal of the past epoch as a whole. In this regard, in post-1945 Germany, where in the end two very different concepts of reparation emerged along the lines of the different legitimacy needs, conditions for a radical departure were favourable. From this perspective, the main obstacle standing in the way of reparations being granted to the victims of the communist era in eastern and central Europe is the fact that the attitude of the present societies towards their predecessors is still very much in flux.