

Kurt Wegscheidler – Panel V

Ladies and Gentlemen!

I want to thank you for the possibility to speak about the Austrian situation!

Before I give you an overview over the Austrian Welfare System for victims of Nazi-persecution, I want to touch a point which is connected especially with our Czech hosts!

It is the fact that this meeting takes place at a special anniversary connected with the holocaust, the repression of the Nazis, but also with the freedom fight of the European peoples, especially the Czech and the Slovak peoples! On the 27th of May 1942 the assassination of Reinhard Heydrich took place, the man who governed the repression in this land from this Czernin-palace. And I am especially proud - and we all can be proud - to be here together with other freedom fighters from the nations of Jan Kubis and Jozef Gabcik, and I specially address here among us Colonel Pavel Vransky from the Czech Freedom Fighters Association!

The Austrian Welfare payments for victims of NS-persecution are based mainly on 3 laws, which provide 1. victims' welfare pensions, 2. long-term care – allowances and 3. special pensions for victims. So we have three legal branches of

welfare payments, by which we very specifically try to meet the individual needs of the single victims, caused by the persecution and also by their age.

The first of these laws is the

Victims' Welfare Act

The Victims' Welfare Act from July 1945 was the first law on a government compensation scheme after the liberation and the end of the 2nd World War. It was improved step by step by about 70 novels till today that means in the average one amendment every year. This law provides for pensions, continuous annex payments and other benefits like medical or orthopaedic help to persons who suffered damages between 1933 and 1945 due to fighting for a free, democratic Austria (resistance fighters) or due to political persecution (persecution for ethnic origin like Jews and Roma and Sinti, or for political or religious opposition).

In responding to the needs of these victims the Austrian Victims' Welfare Act provides different pension-payments for victims having been at least 6 months in a concentration camp or one year imprisoned or injured



badly by Nazi-persecution and had been Austrian nationals on March 13, 1938 or resided in Austria for an uninterrupted period of 10 years prior to this date. These pension-payments are independent from income, when they are related to health-damage. Others, which guarantee a special standard of living are income-related. Special pension-payments exist also for surviving dependents.

To give you a concrete picture:

The so called victims' pension, which is the ground pension can range up to 740 € a month, depending on the degree of the health damage by the persecution and the age. Besides this victims' pension there are different annex payments in case of a very high degree of injury up to another 480 € a month and in case of nursery need caused by the persecution also nursing allowances between 980 and over 3.000 € a month. Additionally there is an income depending sustenance pension up to 1.650 €. Surviving dependents also receive pensions.

All these payments for actually 1.700 pensioners are tax-free and paid 14 times per year from the annual federal budget.

Presently Austria spends around 15 million € per year and spent over 900 million € on victims' assistance since 1945.

The 2nd column of our welfare system is the so called

Long-term care allowance for victims

The long-term care allowance addresses the nursing needs of pensioners from Austria including those of the Victims' Welfare Act and is also exported to those victims forced to live abroad by the Nazis. This payment ranges in seven levels from around 150 € per month to 1.655 € for nursing needs independent of persecution.

This was also an important addition to the already long existing nursery allowance of the Victims' Welfare Act for persecution-dependent health damages, while the long-term care allowance is due to all health damages causing need for care.

From 2002 till 2014 over 180 million € were spend for these victims abroad. Presently there are about 1.700 of them living outside Austria.

The 3rd branch of welfare payments are the special pensions for victims based on the

General Social Insurance Act



which provides benefits for victims of Nazi-persecution born till the 8th of May 1945, if they or one of their parents were residing in Austria on 12 of March 1938. Also these victims are entitled to receive pensions under easier conditions.

Presently around 7.380 victims receive such special victims` pensions, which amount to annual costs of 50 million €.

And now I want to describe in a last point how we administrate the Austrian Victims` Welfare System. Because the main point is that we administrate it together with the victims and their organizations:

The Austrian Victims` Welfare Act from the beginning in 1945 was always executed together with victims` representatives from NGOs. This law mentions four organizations, whose representatives take part in the individual administrative proceedings up to the Federal Administration Court, where they decide as lay judges together with professional judges.

It was already a general practice in the democratization process in the first Austrian republic after 1918 and even more after 1945 to administrate social regulations together with those concerned.

These four participating organizations mentioned in the Victims` Welfare Act are 1. the Jewish Community of Austria, 2. the Austrian People`s Party`s victims organization, 3. the Social Democratic Freedom Fighters and 4. the KZ-Union.

These organizations also play an important role in the legislation process, where their demands resulted in the development of the Victims` Welfare Act and its around 70 novels since 1945 and other laws concerning victims up to the present day.

To fulfill these tasks in legislation and administration and for the information work towards the single victims, producing newspapers a.s.o. these organizations also receive financial support by the Social Ministry and other institutions.

Other financial support was given and is given for homes for elder victims or the work of psychological services.

Activities of another very important victims` organization is also supported by Austria: It is the work, which the Claims Conference or as its Austrian branch is called, the Committee for Jewish Claims on Austria does for the former Austrian citizens and inhabitants, who had to flee after the occupation of Austria in 1938 and since then live abroad:

In 1989 a new program of support was established by the Austrian government after negotiations with the Claims Conference spending 300 million Schillings, which were later also increased and distributed by the Committee for Jewish Claims first to homes for elder victims from Austria and now since a few years directly for the help and support for individual victims. For example the Committee in accordance with the guidelines of the Social Ministry can aid dental treatment, eye-glasses, hearing devices, psychological or psychotherapeutic treatment, cures, medical or operation costs and other items.



By this program from 1989 till today over 30 million € have been spend over the Committee for Jewish Claims for the welfare of victims from Austria, additionally to the pensions of the General Social Insurance Act, the pensions of the Victims` Welfare Act and the export of the long-term care allowances.

For many years we have been working together with Moshe Jahoda and Saul Kagan for this program. And now Greg Schneider is already for a longer time in repeated contact with us and I am glad and also proud that we can support the Claims Committee in its important work for the victims!