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INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Germany to Pay $11 Million WWII Compensation to Soviet Prisoners

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People look at photos on the "We have won!" memorial panel in Stavropol, May 5 2015.

BERLIN — The German government plans to pay a total of 10 million euros in compensation to an estimated 4,000 surviving World War II Soviet prisoners for their suffering at the hands of Nazi Germany, coalition sources said on Wednesday.

Europe marked the 70th anniversary of the end of the war earlier this month, and the event threw a spotlight on some of the more rarely discussed aspects of the conflict, such as the fate of many millions of prisoners of war.

The sources told Reuters that Chancellor Angela Merkel's conservatives have agreed with their Social Democrat (SPD) partners to set aside the sum in a supplementary budget, with each survivor due to receive 2,500 euros ($2,780).

The suffering of the 5.3 million Soviet prisoners of war, who were held by German forces between 1941 and 1945, was extreme and more than half died. Held in inhumane conditions, many were executed. Others starved or died of disease.

In a speech commemorating the end of the war in early May, German President Joachim Gauck emphasized the responsibility Germany bears for these deaths, and said the cruel fate of the Soviet prisoners had not been fully recognized in Germany.

German-Russian Ties Under Strain

A spokesman for the Foreign Ministry declined to confirm the plans as they were a matter for the Bundestag lower house but he said he believed they were correct.

"In the view of Foreign Minister [Frank-Walter] Steinmeier, it is a good initiative from the Bundestag that he welcomes and supports," said the spokesman.

Ties between Berlin and Moscow have been under strain since 2013. Western countries, including Germany, accuse Russia of direct involvement in the conflict in Ukraine, although Moscow denies this.

Nevertheless, Merkel, a central figure in trying to get a cease-fire implemented in Ukraine, attended a May 10 end of war memorial in Moscow with Russian President Vladimir Putin.

It was unclear whether the compensation affected only survivors in Russia or in other former Soviet states.

The Bundestag must still approve the payment, but given support from both ruling parties and from the opposition Greens, its passage is likely to be smooth.

Germany has paid more than 72 billion euros in damages for crimes committed by the Nazis, but it is difficult to put a figure on the amount paid to the Soviet Union, which, as one of the four occupation powers, seized assets such as industrial plants as compensation.

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