

WHY SIGN THE PETITION ASKING GERMANY TO REPAY A FORCIBLY OBTAINED OCCUPATION LOAN AND WWII REPARATIONS TO GREECE

More than 200 thousand petitioners from Greece, other European countries and the Americas have already signed a petition asking Germany to pay up the money it took from Greece through a forcible loan and war reparations for the damage it caused during World War II. The following is a brief text accompanying the petition and can be found in <http://www.greece.org/blogs/wwii/>

«In October 1940, Greece was dragged into the Second World War by the invasion of its territory by Mussolini. To save Mussolini from a humiliating defeat, Hitler invaded Greece in April 1941.

Greece was looted and devastated by the Germans as no other country under their occupation. The International Red Cross has estimated that between 1941 and 1943 at least 300,000 Greeks died from starvation – the direct result of the plundering of Greece by the Germans. Mussolini complained to his minister of foreign affairs Count Ciano “The Germans have taken from the Greeks even their shoelaces”.

Germany and Italy, in addition to charging Greece exorbitant sums as occupation expenses, obtained forcibly from Greece a loan (occupation loan) of \$ 3.5 billion. Hitler himself had recognized the legal character of this loan and had given orders to start the process of its repayment. After the end of the war, at the Paris Conference of 1946 Greece was awarded \$ 7.1 billion, out of \$ 14.0 billion requested, for war reparations.

Italy repaid to Greece its share of the occupation loan, Italy and Bulgaria paid war reparations to Greece, and Germany paid war reparations to Poland in 1956 and to former Yugoslavia in 1971. Greece demanded from Germany payment of the occupation loan in 1945, 1946, 1947, 1964, 1965, 1966, 1974, 1987, and in 1995. However, Germany is consistently refusing to pay its obligations to Greece arising from the occupation loan and war reparations. In 1964, German chancellor Erhard pledged repayment of the loan after the reunification of Germany, which occurred in 1990.

***Indicative of the current value of the German obligations to Greece are the following: using as interest rate the average interest rate of U.S. Treasury Bonds since 1944, which is about 6%, it is estimated that the current value of the occupation loan is \$163.8 billion and that of the war reparations is \$332 billion.** The French economist and consultant to the French government Jacques Delpla stated on July 2, 2011, that Germany owes to Greece **575 billion euros** from Second World War obligations (*Les Echos*, Saturday, July 2, 2011). The German economic historian Dr. Albrecht Ritschl warned Germany to take a more chaste approach in the euro crisis of 2008-2011, as it could face renewed and justified demands for WWII reparations (*Der Spiegel*, June 21, 2011, guardian.co.uk, June 21, 2011).*

The Germans did not just take “even their shoelaces” from the Greeks. During WWII Greece lost 13% of its population, some of it in battle, but mostly from the famine and from German war crimes. The Germans, murdered the population of 89 Greek villages and towns, burned to the ground over 1,700 villages and many of their inhabitants were also executed, they reduced the country to rubble, and looted its archeological treasures.

We request the German government to honor its long-overdue obligations to Greece by repaying the forcibly obtained occupation loan and by paying war reparations proportional to the material damages, atrocities and plundering committed by the German war machinery».

According to the resolution of the Thessaloniki Bar Association (<http://www.nooz.gr/article/psifisma-dikigoron-gia-tis-germanikes-apozimioseis>), the German debt to Greece should include not only the forcible occupation loan and the war reparations but also the **ransoms paid by the Greek Jewish community of Thessaloniki** in an attempt to exempt its members from forced labor, as well as the **Greek archeological treasures looted** during the German occupation of Greece. It concludes as follows: *«The German Government, which often invokes the idea of a united Europe, should assume its responsibilities towards other European countries, in particular those arising from actions of the 3rd Reich during WWII».*

In the newspaper article «Initiative of German Residents of Chania» (*Eleftherotypia* 7/7/2012) one finds the following comment regarding the statement, *«reparations [to Greece] are no longer an issue»*, made

by G. Westerwelle the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Germany: *«This statement would have been nice and constructive had it originated from Greece, i.e., the victim. Coming from the victimizer, it is out of place and obscene... As long as Germany lives with the loot, as long as it refuses to assume its responsibility for the destruction caused by the 3rd Reich and its consequences, young Germans who are not responsible for the crimes of their forefathers will not be able to integrate in a 'fundamentally peaceful and trustful collaboration' and a meaningful dialogue with their European interlocutors...»*. It comes as no surprise that the German residents of Chania who signed this statement demanded *«the immediate resignation of Foreign Affairs Minister Guido Westewelle»*.

WHY SIGN THE PETITION / A BRIEF HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Deutschland über alles

Volker Kauder, a leader of the majority in the German Parliament, announced in November 2011 that “now Europe speaks German”. Since the German plan for a military occupation of Europe ended in the calamities known as the First and more importantly the Second World War, and following its demilitarization, Germany now attempts a comeback as the financial overlord of Europe. Germany “forgets” its dues, the deaths of millions of Europeans it caused, the forcible war loans, the material destruction and the pillaging it visited upon the countries it occupied. **Germany forgets that since 1945 it amassed riches at the sufferance of the USA and Europe, under the protection of the Marshall plan** and having no need to incur military expenses (in contrast to other members of NATO, including Greece, that devote a big proportion of their budget to military expenditures). Germany forgets that it was the indulgence of the victors of WWII that allowed and assisted her to recover. And rather than use the financial resources it acquired thanks to this indulgence to repay her debts, Germany flexes her financial muscle to get away with unfair trade practices. In 2003, the criteria of the Maastricht treaty were relaxed facilitating the export of German products to the periphery of the Eurozone, thus helping Germany overcome the depression of the 90s without deficit and debt increases. Isn't Germany hypocritical in its present insistence on rigid adherence to the Maastricht treaty which pushes Greece, Portugal, Ireland, Spain and Italy into depression and high unemployment? Why should the laxity or rigidity of adherence to the Maastricht treaty for fiscal convergence be dictated by the interests of Germany?

Honor, morality and hazard

“Rich” **Germany does not honor its obligations** arising from (a) the Paris and London summits which awarded war reparations to Greece and determined that their payment should be postponed till after German reunification, (b) the treaty “4+2”, which allowed German reunification and put a formal end to WWII, and (c) the loan it forcibly obtained from occupied Greece. Why should, therefore, “poor” Greece honor the memoranda of understanding signed by Greek Prime Ministers Papandreou, Samaras, etc. and according to which the more recent debt of Greece to Germany cannot be used to offset the earlier debt of Germany to Greece? Is it morally defensible to think that the debt owed by a small country to a big one is more payable than that owed by a big country to a small one? **Why should Germany and members of its political elite** (e.g. Merkel, Schäuble and Rösler) **think that the money borrowed by Greece under a peacetime agreement is more exigible than that borrowed by their forefathers at gunpoint in 1942?** Evidently, they “do not remember” the war reparations they owe to Greece just as they “do not remember” that Max Merten, an SS officer and political commander of Thessaloniki, was never imprisoned in Germany where he escaped after being sentenced in Greece to 25

years in prison for his role in deporting tens of thousands of the Jews of Thessaloniki to Auschwitz. They have similarly “forgotten” SS-Hauptsturmführer Fritz Lautenbach of the 4th SS Polizei Panzergrenadier Division who gave the order for the massacre in the village Distomo, as well as many other war criminals who escaped to Germany and were never prosecuted.

Double standards

Greece has been ridiculed and defamed with some consistency over the past several months. The most offensive of several such comments include the characterization of Greeks as lazy tax evaders by the Chancellor of Germany and the statue of Venus giving the finger on the cover of the “Focus” magazine. In fact the statistics show that the average Greek works much longer than the average German, presumably to make ends meet. And then Germans know something about tax evasion considering the fact that a German company (**Hochtief**, which runs the International Airport of Athens) is the biggest tax evader in Greece as it owes to Greece 500 million Euros in taxes since 2001. War criminals are not the only offenders aided and abetted in Germany: Mr. Christoforakos, a **Siemens** employee convicted by German courts for bribery and wanted for questioning by the Greek authorities regarding bribery and kickbacks, is still sheltered in Germany which refuses to extradite him. This is hardly surprising given the fact that Germany is not one of the 161 countries bound by the United Nations Convention against corruption (UNCAC). In fact, with the exception of the newly formed Czech Republic, **Germany is the only European country that has not signed the United Nations Convention in favor of transparency and against corruption.** Finally, the German government insists on austerity measures adopted by the European periphery, yet it fails to implement them in the Federal States of Germany. For example, the State of Berlin failed to implement more than half of the measures to which it has been committed since 2011. It is insolvent, as is the vast majority of Federal German States which only survive thanks to the transfer of funds from the remaining few, relatively rich, States. Interestingly, they refused to conform to the deficit reduction measures imposed by the German government upon countries of the euro zone. Moreover, the government of Chancellor Merkel acquiesced and agreed to underwrite their debt. Accordingly, the federal government plans to issue debt certificates in 2013, jointly with the German State governments.

Is it too early or too late?

For a very long time Germany claimed that it is “**too early**” to repay its debt to Greece because it was not unified and there was no treaty ending the war. Nowadays, one hears that it is “**too late**” for Germany to repay its debt to Greece due to the length of time that passed since 1941-1944, when it destroyed Greece and borrowed money from it at gunpoint. What exactly is the moral of such conflicting German claims? Should Greece also delay repayment of its debts hoping that they are forgotten or should Greece revise the terms under which it borrowed money and introduce new ones that its creditors should fulfill before they are repaid? At other times Germany invokes the concept of European solidarity to refuse to honor its obligations towards Greece. In a similar vein, shouldn’t Greece also forego repayment of the money it owes? Why should Greece act responsibly but Germany not?

Presently, Greece should inform the German Government that since the German debt to Greece is much bigger than the Greek debt to Germany, Greece owes nothing to Germany and, instead, Germany owes much to Greece. Moreover, in the spirit of cooperation, Greece should ask other European creditors to directly demand payment from Germany (up to the total amount that Germany owes to Greece) rather than have Greece act as an intermediary.

To conclude,

German Debt to Greece

Greece cannot stand on its feet as long as it honors its debts to others while the latter do not honor their debts to Greece. **Germany must repay its WWII-related debts to Greece NOW.**

PLEASE SIGN THE PETITION (<http://www.greece.org/blogs/wwii/>) ASKING GERMANY TO REPAY A FORCIBLY OBTAINED OCCUPATION LOAN AND WWII REPARATIONS TO GREECE.

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