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Kolomiets Maria Vsevolodovna, student,
Peter the Great St. Petersburg Polytechnic University (SPbPU)

COVERAGE OF THE ISSUE OF RESTITUTION OF CULTURAL VALUES IN THE MASS MEDIA OF THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF GERMANY

Abstract. The article examines the restitution of cultural values in Germany and its coverage in the media. The importance of restitution as a mechanism for restoring historical justice is emphasized. Based on an analysis of publications in FAZ, Süddeutsche Zeitung, Die Zeit, and Der Spiegel over a five-year period, it can be concluded that the issue is gaining increasing importance in the public consciousness and that the media are striving to present an objective view of the restitution process.

Keywords: Restitution, cultural values, the Federal Republic of Germany, mass media, World War II, museums.

The term "restitution" (from Latin "restitutio") refers to the international legal system. The concept means the return in kind of property (things) unlawfully seized and removed by one of the warring states from the territory of another state that was its military adversary. Restitution represents one of the forms of material damage compensation, as it is aimed at restoring the factual situation (status quo) "which would have existed if the unlawful act had not been committed."

The institute of restitution in the Federal Republic of Germany appeared after the end of World War II.

The relevance of this article is due to the significance of the problem of restitution of cultural property for the culture and society of Germany. In the post-war period, countless art objects were removed from German soil by the victorious powers. Currently, the issue of restitution of cultural property concerns not only politicians and cultural figures, but also broad segments of society. German politicians and cultural workers are actively working to return lost luxury items and simplify this procedure.

The purpose of this article is to analyze the media coverage of cultural values in the Federal Republic of Germany.

The following methods were used in the work: description, systemic method, statistical method, conceptual method. Within the framework of this study, online versions of the following newspapers and magazines were analyzed: Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, Süddeutsche Zeitung, Die Zeit, Der Spiegel for the last 5 years, from 2020 to 2025, for the presence of articles related to the problem of restitution of cultural property.

World War II left an indelible mark on world history. During the years of military operations, the Nazis seized and destroyed a large number of cultural assets: castles, libraries, museums, and private collections, particularly those belonging to Jews, were looted. The Nazi special unit ERR (Einsatzstab Reichsleiter Rosenberg) collected hundreds of thousands of works of art and millions of books stolen from Jews and other victims. After the end of World War II, Germans began to conduct thorough work on the return of luxury items: over 50 years, several public institutions were established in Germany that actively engaged in the distribution of art objects and the search for their rightful owners. Despite the work done, German archives and cultural institutions still hold art objects whose provenance has not yet been established. Detailed information about the location of the objects is not published in open sources: documents and acts testifying to the origin of works of art are kept in the federal archive in Koblenz and in the archives of the federal states. It is known that approximately 200 paintings confiscated by the Nazis, including works by Paul Klee, are held in Bavarian private collections and the Alte Pinakothek museum in Munich.

Max Beckmann and Pablo Picasso, as well as several paintings from the collection of Jewish art dealer Alfred Flechtheim.

Mass media are an integral part of modern society and have a significant impact on the lives of every person. The illumination of the problem of restitution of cultural property stolen during World War II calls for citizens to pay even more attention to the issue of returning cultural objects, as moral and ethical aspects related to the restoration of historical justice are being raised.

Over the past 5 years, a large number of various articles have been published on the topic: "Restitution of Cultural Property in the Federal Republic of Germany." The results are presented in Table 1. The table shows the number of articles published between 2020 and 2025. A total of 1320 articles were published. It should be noted that Table 1 shows the number of articles for the 6 months of 2025. It should be noted that the newspapers Süddeutsche Zeitung and Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung published significantly more material compared to other media outlets. This is because these sources are popular not only in Germany but also in other countries.

Table 1

	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Der Spiegel	9	31	9	19	14	6
Süddeutsche Zeitung	40	122	78	62	52	8
Die Zeit	9	16	16	23	12	4
FAZ	89	151	135	175	146	74

Chart 1 clearly shows how the number of publications changes over time.

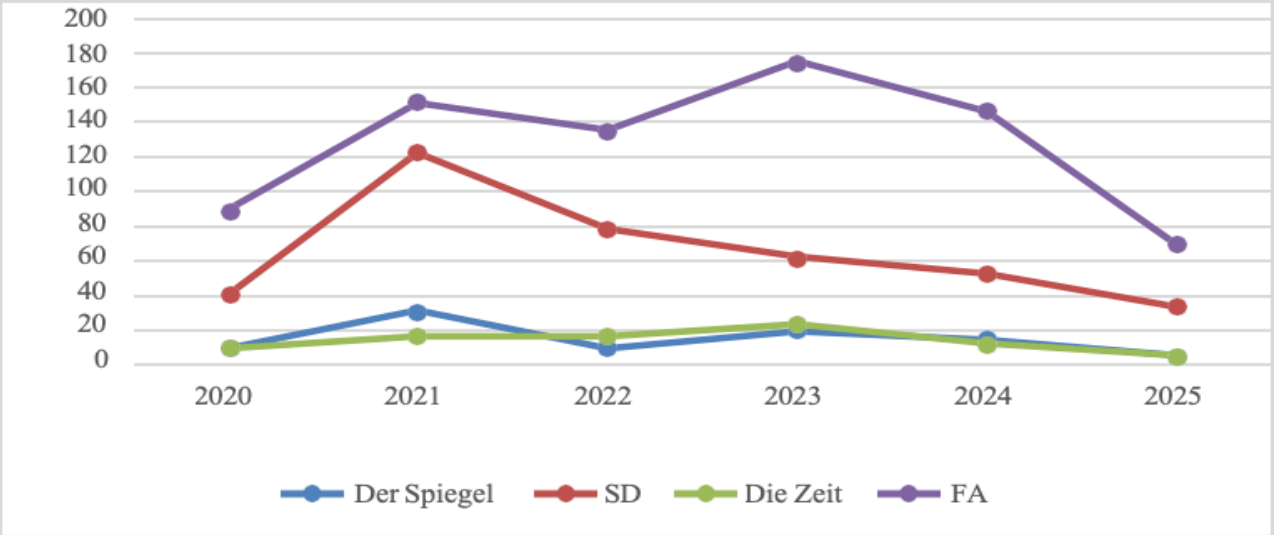

Chart 1

Graph 1 shows that the largest number of articles were published in 2021. In 2021, German media widely covered the authorities' decision to solidify new powers for the Advisory Commission on the Return of Cultural Property Confiscated as a Result of Nazi Persecution, particularly Jewish property. The review of powers is related to a long-standing dispute between Bavarian authorities and the heirs of Jewish collector Paul von Mendelssohn-Bartholdy over the return of Pablo Picasso's 1903 painting "Portrait of Madame Soler." This dispute is still the subject of articles in 2025, for example, the Süddeutsche Zeitung article *"NS-Raubkunst in Bayern: Museumsethik oder Recht?" ("Nazi-looted art in Bavaria: museum ethics or law?"):* "Among the prominent artworks that have been disputed for years are, among others, the painting"„Madame Soler“by Pablo Picasso, but also works by Max

Beckmann and Paul Klee.» **(**„Among the outstanding works of art that have been discussed for years disputes, – Pablo Picasso's painting "Madame Soler", as well as works by Max Beckmann and Paul Klee»)

Upon closer examination of the publications, it is noticeable that the issue of restitution of cultural property is illuminated from different angles. News is published in the media about the return of works of art to their rightful owners, for example, the Süddeutsche Zeitung article "*Sächsische Bibliotheken geben NS-Raubgut zurück" ("Saxon Libraries Return Nazi Looted Property")* discusses the return of 36 volumes from the collection of the Jewish writer Raoul Fernand Jellinek-Mercedes from Saxony as part of the restitution of Nazi property from 14 German libraries and archives. Later, all books can be officially purchased for collections from libraries in Germany. Similar articles emphasize the importance of conducting more thorough research into the origin of works of art.

German media are closely following court cases related to the restitution of cultural property: they cover the arguments of the parties, expert opinions, and court decisions, as well as discuss issues of statutes of limitations and the burden of proof. For example, the Der Spiegel article *"Familie verliert ihr in der Nazizeit gekauftes Grundstück" ("Family loses its property bought during the Nazi era")* describes the decision of the Federal Administrative Court of Germany: the court ruled that the family must return the property to the heirs of the former owners. It is worth noting that the article reveals moral and legal aspects: even 85 years after military events, restitution lawsuits can be concluded. A Similar Case emphasizes the moral and historical responsibility of the state and society towards the victims of Nazism.

It is important to note that the German media demonstrate an awareness of the problem of restitution of cultural property and strive for objective and comprehensive coverage of this topic. Federal publications try to cover this topic from various angles, publishing not only news but also analytical materials, interviews with experts, and articles highlighting legal and ethical aspects.

The main emphasis is placed on key subtopics such as restitution of confiscated property, the role of museums and archives, and court proceedings. These questions are of particular importance to Germany, given its historical responsibility and its commitment to ensuring justice in its relations with the heirs of cultural objects.

Federal publications such as Süddeutsche Zeitung, Frankfurter Allgemeine

Zeitung, Der Spiegel, and Die Zeit play a central role in shaping public opinion and providing information on this topic.

Thus, the information space in Germany regarding the restitution of cultural property is characterized by multifacetedness and a commitment to preserving cultural identity. German media strive to reflect the importance of Germany acknowledging its historical responsibility, promoting a fair resolution of restitution cases, and strengthening international cooperation in this area.

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