

Victims, Their Organizations and the Struggle over the Memory of Suffering

Call for Articles

The second half of the twentieth century saw a shift in the concept of victimhood in post-socialist and post-conflict countries. While victims are often seen through the lens of trauma and passivity, there is now increased focus on their active role in transitional justice and social mobilization. Victims and their organizations have played an important role in democratic transition and public history and emerged as powerful political and social groups that secured some of their main goals, such as compensations, rehabilitations, redress and acknowledgment. Representatives of victim associations (particularly former political prisoners and their descendants), have also become “guardians of memory”, sharing their experiences while defending their group’s or association’s image. Their goal is not only to integrate the history of state socialist dictatorship victims into broader political and national history, but to enforce their version of the past as the dominant narrative as well.

The thematic block of *Soudobé dějiny / Czech Journal of Contemporary History* (No. 3/2025) will focus on victim associations in post-socialist and post-conflict countries (East-Central, Southeast and Southern Europe) and their role after 1989. It wants to explore their goals, the activities they used to gain recognition and redress, and their influence on collective memory, politics, and democratization of society. For example, we ask ourselves the following questions:

1. How do the victims define themselves and how does this definition become part of their identity? Do they define themselves as victims, or as heroes and fighters against the communist dictatorship?
2. What means did the victim organizations use to achieve their goals of compensation, redress and recognition?
3. What role did the victim organizations play in the democratization process and how did they change the way societies understand justice, memory and reconciliation?
4. In what ways do victim organizations seek to institutionalize a specific narrative of the past and thus promote their collective memory and interpretation of history in the political and educational process?
5. How did the victim narrative evolve, to what extent and why was it polarized? And how was the polarized narrative and value system transferred to society and how successful has it been? Why do some members of victim organizations cooperate with politicians from extremist right-wing parties?



We welcome articles and essays by historians, as well as by experts in the field of sociology, anthropology, cultural studies and other social science disciplines. **The deadline for submission of manuscripts in English, in the range of 5,000 to 15,000 words, is 31 January 2025.** Manuscripts should be submitted via our webpage. *Soudobé dějiny / Czech Journal of Contemporary History* is indexed in Scopus, ERIH PLUS, CEEOL and CrossRef. It is published by the Institute of Contemporary History of the Czech Academy of Sciences.
Contact: sd@usd.cas.cz