

Summary of the Announcement for the Scientific Meeting "The Balkan States during World War Two (1939-1945)"

Title of the Announcement: Balkan Volunteers in the Wehrmacht and the SS

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The subject of my announcement for the scientific meeting will be a summary of my ongoing doctorate titled: *Hitler's Balkan "Trojan Horse": Balkan Volunteers in the Wehrmacht and the SS*. The main focus of my research is the study of the phenomenon of armed collaborationism in Greece, Albania and Yugoslavia during the period 1941-1945. A phenomenon containing wide, complex and multidimensional aspects with far-reaching ramifications that marked indelibly the history of the Balkans. Since the beginning of the Axis occupation, Germany, Italy and Bulgaria attempted – in varying degrees – to enlist local sympathizers to their cause from all social spectrum for purposes of political administration as well as active military duty (garrison and frontline troops). Although, according to Nazi ideology, the Balkan nations were outside the sphere of "Aryan" races, the incentives of saving "precious German blood" – as Alexander Löhr (Commander-in-Chief of Army Group Southeast) had remarked – and the need to release troops for other more important fronts, forced the Third Reich to intensify the efforts of recruiting Balkan "legionnaires" in both branches of the German Army (Heer and Waffen-SS) as the tide of war started to turn against Germany, especially after the Axis debacles in Stalingrad and North Africa during late 1942-early 1943.

Apart from the purely military aspect (establishment of volunteer formations, participation in anti-partisan operations, evaluation of their operational performance), I will also elaborate the political, ethno-religious and social background of the whole endeavor, as well as the – often – ambiguous relations between the Axis patrons and the volunteering collaborators, in an attempt to provide a wider approach to this complex historical phenomenon.