

International Conference

Forgotten Aspects of Germany's Historic Responsibility – German Occupation in Southeast Europe During World War II

Date: 14 – 16 November 2025

Conference Language: English

About

On the occasion of the 80th anniversary of the end of World War II and shortly before the 85th anniversary of the German invasion into the former Kingdom of Yugoslavia and Greece, the conference aims to shed light on and to commemorate German crimes and atrocities in Southeast Europe – with a focus on the Kingdom of Yugoslavia – during World War II. We want to make visible lesser-known facts about German responsibility in this context and to identify research gaps.



ATTENTION

The conference will take place under Chatham House Rule in order to facilitate an unrestricted and open exchange of views and ideas. At a meeting held under the Chatham House Rule, anyone who comes to the meeting is free to use information from the discussion but is not allowed to reveal who made any comment. It aims to increase openness of discussion.

15:00

Welcome / Introduction

Manuel Sarrazin, President, Southeast Europe Association

Dr. Niels von Redecker, Head of Western Balkans Department, German Federal Foreign Office

15:30 – 16:30

Keynote and Discussion: Southeast Europe in the Context of Nazi Germany's Warfare Objectives

Keynote:

Prof. em. Milan Ristović, Belgrade

"From a Supplementary 'Informal Empire' to the 'German New Order in Southeastern Europe' (1941-1945)"

Moderation:

Manuel Sarrazin, President, Southeast Europe Association

Guiding Questions:

- Which role did Southeast Europe (and the Kingdom of Yugoslavia as well as Greece) play in the military planning and ambitions of Nazi Germany?
- Which objectives did Nazi Germany try to achieve through the attack on and the occupation of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia (e.g. strategic position, control of resources)?
- Which role did Germany's ally, Italy, play in this regard?

17:00 – 18:30

PANEL 1: Characteristics of Occupation in the Nazi-controlled Areas in Yugoslavia and Greece – PART I: Administration, Occupation Law, Military Objectives

Panelists:

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Kornelija Ajlec, Associate Professor, Head of the Department of History, Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana

"Models of Nazi Occupation and Administrative Incorporation in Slovenia: The Upper Carniola and Styria, 1941–1945"

Dr. Martina Bitunjac, Research Associate, Moses Mendelssohn Center for European-Jewish Studies, University of Potsdam

"Facets of the Ustaša State's Collaboration with Nazi Germany"

Dr. Rade Ristanović, Senior Research Associate, Institute for Contemporary History, Belgrade, Serbia

"Serbia in the Nazi Grip: Key Aspects and Specificities of the Occupation System in Serbia During the Second World War"

Chair:

Prof. Dr. Stefan Rohdewald, Professor, Chair of Eastern and South Eastern European History, University of Leipzig

Guiding Questions:

- How was the situation in the Nazi-controlled areas and are the models of occupation comparable between Yugoslavia and Greece?
- Who performed/administrated the occupation (e.g., military administration / RSHA / civil authorities)?
- What did the occupation law (Besatzungsrecht) look like, also compared to other occupied areas in Europe?
- How did the occupation regimes by Germany, Italy, the Independent State of Croatia (NDH) and Bulgaria differ from each other? What was Germany's responsibility for and involvement in its allies' occupation regimes?
- What were the reasons/motives for the rigor and cruelty in the occupied areas and which role did the occupied areas play in the overall warfare and Germany's plan to remodel Europe?

SATURDAY, 15 NOVEMBER 2025

09:00 – 10:30

PANEL 1: Characteristics of Occupation in the Nazi-controlled areas – PART II: Civilian Suffering, Exploitation, Survival Strategies

Panelists:

Assoc. Prof. Paolo Fonzi, Department of Social Sciences, University of Naples "Federico II"
"A Triple Occupation: Which Role did the Interaction between Different Occupation Powers Play in Occupied Greece?"

Dr. Monika Kokalj Kočvar, Museum Councilor National Museum of Contemporary History of Slovenia
"Civilian Population in the Slovenian Occupied Territory 1941 – 1945"

Dr. Aleksandar Stojanović, Principal Research Fellow, Institute for Recent History of Serbia, Belgrade, Serbia
"Education, Culture, and Art in Nazi-Occupied Serbia: Constructing a 'New Serbia' "

Dr. Krinka Vidaković Petrov, Director, Memorial Center Staro Sajmište, Belgrade, Serbia
"The Sajmište Camps in Belgrade: The Background of Civilian Atrocities"

Chair:

Prof. Dr. Nicole Immig, Chair of South-Eastern European History, Justus-Liebig-University of Gießen, Germany

Guiding Questions:

- To what extent was the civilian population of the different areas subject to expulsion, displacements, and atrocities?
- What were characteristics of the occupation in terms of exploitation of material and human resources (a.o., forced labor, expropriation, business interests), also compared to other occupied areas in Europe?
- Which role did cultural aspects (such as education, religion, art) play under the occupation regime?
- What were strategies of survival and/or adaptation of the civilian population?

11:00 – 12:15

PANEL 2: Holocaust and Genocide of Roma and Other Minorities

Dr. Lovro Kralj, Director for Holocaust and Genocide Research in Southeast Europe, University of Rijeka

"Fascism and the Holocaust in Southeast Europe: Entanglements, Agency and Memory"

Dr. Milovan Pissari, Research Fellow, Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory, University of Belgrade

"Racial Persecutions in German Occupied Serbia"

Dr. Marija Vulesica, Alfred Landecker Lecturer, Researcher, Humboldt-University, Berlin

"German Actors and the Holocaust in the NDH"

Chair:

Thomas Porena, Doctoral Candidate, Humboldt University Berlin

Guiding Questions:

- What were characteristics of the holocaust in the occupied territories in Southeast Europe? How was it organized and executed?
- What were characteristics of the Genocide of Roma and other minority groups under German occupation? What were characteristics of the holocaust in the occupied territories in Southeast Europe? How was it organized and executed?

14:30 – 15:45

PANEL 3: Annihilation of "Serbs" as Objective of German Belligerence and Occupation?

Dr. Goran Hutinec, Assistant Professor, History department, Zagreb University

"'...too much tolerance can only create trouble.' German Influence on Ustaša Mass Violence against Serbs in the Independent State of Croatia"

Dr. Milan Koljanin, Head of the Department for Collection and Professional Processing of Materials, Research, Library and Archives Memorial Center Staro Sajmište

"Nazi Germany and the "Serbian Question"

Dr. Milutin Živković, Senior Research Associate, Institute for Contemporary History, Belgrade

"(Un)willing Collaborators - Muslims from Serbia and Montenegro in the German Armed Forces and Crimes against Serbs (1941–1945)"

Chair:

Dr. Sabine Rutar, Research Associate, Leibniz Institute for East and Southeast European Studies (IOS), Regensburg

Guiding Questions:

- Ethnic Serbs were in absolute numbers the largest group of victims of the German occupation in Southeast Europe. What was Berlin's approach towards the Serbs?
- What were the aims of the German approach towards the Serb population?

16:15 – 17:30

PANEL 4: Resistance and German Anti-Partisan Warfare

Dr. Gaj Trifković, (University of Sarajevo)

“Hundred for One: German Reprisal Policies in Occupied Yugoslavia”

Dr. Klaus Schmider, Senior Lecturer, War Studies Department of the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst, UK

“35 Axis Divisions? Quantifying the Contribution of the People’s Liberation Army to the Allied War Effort in 1943/44”

Dr. Franziska Anna Zaugg, Lecturer at the Department of Contemporary History, University of Fribourg

“Partisan Warfare and Counter-Insurgency in the Border Regions of Kosovo, Sandžak, and Macedonia (1941-1944)”

Chair:

Doris Akrap, Journalist and Editor, taz (die tageszeitung), Berlin

Guiding Questions:

- Which significance did resistance movements and partisans play in military operations of the allies in general?
- How was the anti-partisan warfare organized within Nazi Germany? Which command structure prevailed? Who gave the legal basics and the orders for war crimes like hostage killing? To what extent was the central German government in Berlin informed and involved into war crimes in not German-controlled territories?
- Who was responsible for the war crimes committed within internationally coordinated warfare of the axis (e.g., against the partisans)?
- How to juridically assess the anti-partisan measures of Nazi Germany?

19:30 – 21:00

„Who Remembers Walter?” – A Conversation on Memory Cultures and Historical Narratives

Speakers:

Elma Hašimbegović, Director, History Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Sarajevo

Dr. Nicolas Moll, Independent Researcher, crossborder factory, Sarajevo

Moderation:

Dr. Dirk Auer, Journalist, Berlin

09:00 – 10:15

PANEL 5: German History of Reception – Commemoration, Dealing with the Past and Oblivion

Panelists:

Dr. Ulrich Baumann, Deputy Director, Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe, Berlin
“Profitable Denial – Twice and Thrice over: Yugoslavia and Greece in the Blind Spot of German Cultures of Remembrance from 1949 to 2000”

Prof. Dr. Marie-Janine Calic, Professor for East and Southeast European History, Ludwigs-Maximilian-University, Munich
“Confronting German War Crimes in the Balkans: From Denial to Reconciliation”

Dr. Charalampos (Babis) Karpouchtsis, Director of Civic Education, Democratic Resilience Center, Helmut-Schmidt-Universität, Hamburg
“Reconciliation without Public Memory? Between ‘Crete Bridge’ and Vacations on Crete”

Chair:

Jun.-Prof. Dr. Željana Tunić, Associate Professor of Slavic Cultural Studies, MLU Halle-Wittenberg, Leipzig

Guiding Questions:

- To what extent was/is the region involved and represented in the German culture of commemoration?
- Which political gestures/apologies to the countries of the region have been made or are lacking?
- What about reparations and individual compensations to the region?
- To what extent were the responsible generals/individuals for war crimes in Southeast Europe identified and punished (a.o. at the Nuremberg Trials)?
- To what extent was Germany’s post-war policy towards Southeast Europe shaped by individuals with “Nazi past”?

10:45 – 11:45

PANEL 6: Facing our own History - Continuities after World War II within the Southeast Europe Association

Panelists:

Prof. Dr. Alexander Korb, Arolsen Archives
“The Southeast Europe Association (SOG) and its Troubled Past”

Michael Martens, Correspondent for Southeast Europe, Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (FAZ)
“Biographies between National Socialism and Post-War Germany – the Case of Rudolf Vogel”

Chair:

Dr. Gregor Mayer, Southeast Europe Correspondent, Deutsche Presse Agentur (dpa)

Guiding Questions:

- To what extent were were criminals/Nazis involved in the work of the Southeast Europe Association after its foundation in 1952?
- How did the Southeast Europe Association deal with this legacy and how should it deal with it in the future?

End of the Conference

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