

Peace and freedom are prerequisites for any university cooperation – Statement by the Protestant University of Applied Sciences Bochum on the Russian attack on Ukraine

Russia's attack on Ukraine, a democratic and independent country, in violation of international law, cannot be justified by anything. We strongly condemn it! Our full solidarity and sympathy go to the Ukrainians who fear for their lives, defend themselves or are on the run at this moment. Our thoughts are also with all the people in this country or elsewhere who fear for their loved ones in the war zones and on the run.

The Protestant University of Applied Sciences Bochum (EvH) agrees with the statements of the German Rectors' Conference (HRK) and the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) and restricts academic exchange with the Russian Federation. Students, teachers and researchers from Germany are not to travel to Russia and are not to hold joint events with Russian partners until further notice. A planned excursion to Vologda had already been cancelled in advance in agreement with the students. For "peace and freedom are indispensable prerequisites for academic exchange and cooperation", as the joint declaration of the state and universities in NRW rightly states.¹ In concrete terms and as a consequence, it is with a heavy heart that we are largely suspending cooperation with our long-standing partners from the Russian Federation.

For more than 25 years, EvH has maintained close cooperation with Russian universities - supported by DAAD and the Erasmus programme, among others. During these years, numerous joint conferences, projects, excursions and student exchanges have taken place, friendships have been forged and even a marriage. The cooperation with the State University of Wologda arose in the context of diaconal aid projects and developed into a network of exchange about challenges and professional standards of social work. In particular, EvH understood the cooperation with Kursk State University as a sign of reconciliation, because it was there that Hitler's Germany fought the largest tank battle of the Second World War against Russia and almost every family remembers fatalities. The cooperation followed Gorbachev's idea of a common "House of Europe" of which Germany and Russia were to become a part. We still consider this idea to be correct! However, it has been apparent for some time that this vision, which could have prevented war in the heart of Europe, has failed. This was also noticeable in our cooperation. We deeply regret this!

At the same time, it is important for us to keep channels of communication open, for example about the mobility of students from Russian partner universities to Germany. Their participation in the International Study Programme 2022 in Bochum will be maintained, as long as it is possible to leave at all in this highly dynamic situation. It remains a balancing act to keep the "balance between keeping connections open and sending a clear political signal, also in the field of science"².

EvH will do its utmost to support and integrate refugee students and prospective students.³ The experiences after 2015 and the structures that have been established will help us in this. It should also be borne in mind that there are 75,000 foreign students in Ukraine, 25% of whom come from the African continent. How many people from Ukraine or third countries will come to Bochum is uncertain.

A statement by the Bochum Centre for Disability Studies (BODYS) points to the diversity and above all the different vulnerabilities of the refugees. It calls for compliance with international humanitarian

¹ From the press release of the Ministry of Culture and Science of the State of NRW dated 02.03.2022.

² From DAAD letter "" Aus DAAD-Schreiben „Klarstellung“ („Clarification“) of 01.03.2022.

³ DAAD calls for major support programme for German universities, press release of 02.03.2022.

standards in all aid, including adherence to the IASC guidelines and Article 11 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities on the inclusion of persons with disabilities in humanitarian measures.

As a university that trains social and health care professionals, we share the assessment of the German Society for Social Work (DGSA) of how "quickly relationships can be destroyed and how long and painful processes of regeneration and healing can be". We believe it is important on the one hand to "provide political practices and resources to welcome those seeking protection with an open attitude", and on the other hand to "reject all generalised resentment, hatred or discrimination towards people". Not the ethnicised origin, but the common attitude for peace is decisive, as shown by worldwide protests - also by courageous Russian students, teachers and researchers who dare to say "No to war" despite harsh repression. War, including this one, is directed against the fundamental values of freedom, democracy and above all humanity. For war presupposes the dehumanisation of the other party and creates immeasurable suffering. In these dark times, our deepest sympathy is with the people of Ukraine.

Bochum, March 03, 2022