

Appeal of the Committee for Literary Studies of the Polish Academy of Sciences in view of the possible consequences of the Russian aggression against Ukraine

Warsaw, 1 March 2022

We condemn strongly and unanimously the Russian military assault on Ukraine. There is no justification for the Kremlin's aggressive actions against the Ukrainian people and state.

To the best of our ability, we are committed to providing immediate assistance to Ukrainians, both in Poland and in Ukraine. However, we also see the need to take long-term action. It is with concern and anxiety that we think about the possible consequences of the Russian attack on Ukraine for the functioning of Ukrainian universities and for academics, especially those in the field of humanities.

In this nightmare of war instigated by the Kremlin, we are on the side of the free Ukraine. Our hope is that the Ukrainians will finally put an end to this aggression. May this happen as soon as possible. However, if we take a sober look at the situation, we must unfortunately consider that the invasion may end in occupation or in the imposition of a regime in Ukraine that collaborates with the Kremlin. If that happens, then Russia will proceed not only with the exploitation of Ukraine's economy and raw materials, but also with intensive, aggressive russification, and this russification will certainly hit the universities, especially the humanities.

The Ukrainian humanists with whom we are in contact strongly emphasise that they cannot imagine working at universities that would be turned into instruments of Russification, and they intend to leave such universities and then, if possible, emigrate to one of the free countries.

We therefore think that it is important and very necessary to create a space in Poland where Ukrainian scholars could temporarily continue their work – research and teaching. In our opinion, Polish universities should help in creating this space.

We firmly believe that Ukraine will finally prevail and repulse the Kremlin's aggression. However, if the war were to be prolonged, we

ought to create in Poland outposts of free Ukrainian universities and allow them to operate here. This would hardly be a great sacrifice on our part – a few lecture rooms, basic social security, a handful of teaching posts. This will not bankrupt our budgets.

In the case of full-scale military occupation or Ukraine's vassalization by Russia, the humanities in Ukraine will find themselves in a very difficult position. They will urgently need our help. We strongly believe that a joint project by a few universities in Poland (for instance those headed by scholars of literature) could secure an organizational framework which would allow Ukrainian academics (particularly those in the humanities) to continue their didactic and research activities in exile.

We do not propose to incorporate Ukrainian scholars and students into our system of education. What we would like to offer instead is the possibility of an autonomous space, which is crucial for Ukrainian students and lecturers. It is also important to build a sense of common purpose, thus showing that together we are trying to create conditions under which Ukrainian academics might temporarily continue their research and didactic activities in a country where no war is raging.

Realistically speaking, the above-mentioned outposts of Ukrainian universities might start to operate in Poland no earlier than October. At the same time, an early assessment of the situation as well as preliminary preparations should begin at once. We must make it absolutely clear to Ukrainian students and teachers that, in the case of a prolonged war, we will not leave them alone.

Today more than ever we must assure the Ukrainian nation that they are part of Europe and the free world. Literary and cultural studies with their societal resonance appears to be the best means to achieve this aim, also because the kind of humanities we engage in is not only effective but also relatively inexpensive. We need a library, a lecture room, a blank piece of paper, perhaps one computer with an internet connection – we have all of these things and we could easily share them.

A free Ukraine is also our business, that is why all of us are engaged in an effort to help the Ukrainians. Also as academics we should take the responsibility for providing real help to our colleagues in Ukraine. This

has human, ethical, but also geopolitical significance. Keeping Ukraine in the orbit of European culture is a matter of our own security, both in Poland and Europe since a prolonged war or occupation of Ukraine is hardly the worst possible scenario.

We know that projects aimed at helping Ukrainian researchers and students are already under way at many Polish universities. That help we must is absolutely clear to most of us. That is why we are appealing to others in a coordinated joint effort to create a safe space for Ukrainian scholarly activities and academic education, especially in the field of the humanities. We know it will be difficult, but it is our belief that creating an interacademic network with a view to supporting Ukrainian academics and students is within our capabilities, and that we should do our utmost to make it happen.

The Committee on Literary Studies of the Polish Academy of Sciences has convened a team which could look into the structural, legal, and financial aspects of implementing the idea of creating an Ukrainian academy in exile, supported by a network of Polish universities. We will be grateful for all help. You can contact us at: wsztechnica.ua@gmail.com.

We have also decided to submit the nomination of Serhiy Zhadan for the Nobel Prize. He is among the most eminent Ukrainian poets and prose writers, and his works are translated into many languages; in our opinion, he is fully deserving of the Nobel Prize. His poetic voice has been very important for the Ukrainian people over the years. To a large extent, a free Ukraine thinks and speaks with his words, and listens to them attentively. Today the poet is in his home town of Kharkov. And he is fighting.

On behalf of the Committee for Literary Studies of the Polish Academy of Sciences

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