

LETTER OF SUPPORT BY IASSA

The European University at Saint Petersburg is one of the leading institutions in education and research in the field of Arctic Social Sciences and Humanities in the Russian Federation. It participates lively in the closely integrated network of international scholarship on the Arctic. Scholars of the European University are active members of the International Arctic Social Sciences Association, and the University is a member of the University of the Arctic. The scientific output of the European University is outstanding in quality and its record of accomplishment of high-ranking publications top-ranked inside Russia. The Russian Ministry of Education and Science acknowledged this in the yearly “research activities” index based on the number of publications, citations, lecturers with postgraduate degrees and the amount of revenues from research activities, where the European University at Saint Petersburg holds the leadership in Russia.

We are deeply concerned by recent news that the university might be closed down after numerous inspections by the authorities and attempts to withdraw its teaching license. Beside technical shortcomings, which seem to be easily correctable, the authorities put into question the scientific competence and expertise of the teaching staff of the EUSP. This is all the more worrying before the background of attacks at the EUSP in the press that appear to be political motivated and attempt to curtail academic freedom and introduce political censorship in scientific research. We are also worried about the fact that that the threat to deprive the University of its building is used as another measure to put the existence of one of Russia’s best research and education institutions under question.

Such attacks on the university do not only undermine its leading work in higher education, but also the ability to carry out high quality research in the social sciences and humanities. The motivation to establish such international networks and associations like IASSA lies in the insight that we can meet future challenges in the Arctic region and gain a sustainable and peaceful development only in international cooperation. Therefore, to promote international scientific collaboration and fight isolationist tendencies are at the very core of the national interests of the Arctic states including Russia.

The European University retains its scientific collaboration under the above mentioned difficult conditions, which make it almost impossible to attract international funding for research. We consider this a threat on the free exchange of knowledge and on academic freedom, from which our Russian colleagues and Russia as a whole only benefit. We express our support for the university and the academic public in Russia in their attempt to continue academic work and education in the spirit of freedom of thought, speech and education. We would like to ask the authorities and responsible decision makers to secure access to national as well as international funding for scholars in public as well as private educational and research institutions in Russia. We sincerely hope to see the EUSP exonerated of all legal charges able to continue their educational and scholarly work and thus contributing to the great achievements and traditions of the social sciences and humanities in Russia.

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