

28 October 2024**German Association for East European Studies declared an "extremist organisation" in Russia – HRK: "New low point in academic relations"**

The President of the German Rectors' Conference (HRK), Prof Dr Walter Rosenthal, has criticised the Russian Ministry of Justice's decision to classify the German Association for East European Studies (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Osteuropakunde; DGO) – an interdisciplinary academic society – as "extremist". He noted that this marks a new low point in already severely restricted Russian-German academic relations, because every DGO member travelling to Russia is now potentially threatened with arbitrary criminalisation and prosecution. In addition, any exchange, even private, between DGO members and Russian academics could jeopardise their safety.

"Since the beginning of the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine, institutional academic cooperation between Germany and Russia has been suspended. This is regrettable, but right. Personal contacts between scientists from both countries are still possible in principle – not least in order to support the remnants of a value-based, liberal academia and civil society in Russia. The Russian regime is apparently increasingly taking measures against this. The majority of DGO members are members of universities. The HRK has therefore informed its member universities in a circular letter about the unjustified classification of the DGO as an 'extremist organisation' and the resulting dangers," said HRK President Walter Rosenthal today.

Under Russian law, mere membership of and cooperation with the DGO are now criminal offences punishable by prison sentences of up to twelve years. "This is confirmed by a DGO-commissioned report on the legal practice of Russian law enforcement agencies and the Russian judiciary to date," Rosenthal continued. In view of the serious consequences for members of the DGO and their cooperation partners, the HRK asks its members to raise awareness among all university members in order to protect them from possible dangers and reprisals.

"The actions of the Russian Federation fit seamlessly into the enemy image that has been built up for years, which is intended to make cross-border contacts difficult or impossible, including in academia. The recently publicised hacker attack on the DGO, behind which Russian state actors are suspected, is also a threat," said the HRK President. He added that the intention behind this is to sustainably hinder and prevent scientifically based knowledge about Russia, its history, society, economy, culture and politics.

Background:

On 25 July 2024, the DGO, along with 54 other Russian and foreign organisations, was designated a "structural subdivision" of a so-called Anti-Russian separatist movement. This construct itself was created by the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation following an application by the Russian Ministry of Justice and classified as an extremist organisation and banned back in June.

The declaration of the DGO as an "undesirable organisation" in March of this year already held out the prospect of drastic penalties, particularly for Russian nationals, in the event of cooperation with members of the DGO, participation in events or publication in the journal "Osteuropa".

With the new classification of the DGO in the category of "extremist organisation", the penalty can be considerably extended. A legal opinion commissioned by the DGO recently confirmed a corresponding legal practice and the resulting potential danger.