

An open letter from scientists of Ukraine and diaspora

One year had passed since the Russian Federation launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine. The war is becoming long-lasting and even more brutal. Now is the time to reassess the role of Russian science in supporting the war and strengthen the resistance to Kremlin's regime on the science front.

The full-scale war unleashed by the Russian Federation against Ukraine will soon enter its second year. With the help of allies around the world, donated military equipment, and provided humanitarian aid, as well as imposed economic and financial sanctions against the aggressor, Ukrainians have managed to withstand the initial attack and liberate large swathes of its territory. We are thankful to all countries, political leaders, and ordinary citizens who have taken the side of Ukraine and extended their helping hand!

What is happening in Ukraine is not just the largest war in Europe since the end of World War II. There is clear evidence of genocide perpetrated against the Ukrainians. The General Prosecutor's Office of Ukraine is investigating tens of thousands of war crimes and crimes against humanity (see links to original sources in¹). Towns of Bucha, Irpin, and Izium have become symbols of torture and mass executions of civilians.² At the end of December 2022, the United Nations organization³ officially verified the killings of about 7,000 civilians. This number includes more than 400 children.

There is a growing worldwide demand for establishing an international court to convict war criminals,¹ following the precedence set at the end World War II in Nuremberg. In November 2022, the European Commission announced that the European Union would work to establish a special court to investigate and prosecute Russia for the crime of aggression.⁴ At the same time, the Russian ruling elites remain determined to destroy Ukraine as an independent state. Particularly painful for Ukrainians is the fact that opinion polls conducted periodically among ordinary Russians show that an absolute majority, namely 74%,⁵ support the war in Ukraine.

When it comes to science and education, the Russian Federation is making every effort to destroy them by bombing museums, schools, universities, laboratories, and scientific infrastructure.^{6,7} Many Ukrainian scientists have already been killed,⁸ others were forced to emigrate. The state's ability to support research has sharply decreased.⁹ A large number of countries launched programs to support scientists who stayed in Ukraine and those who have been forced to flee from Russian bombs and missiles. There are no limits to our gratitude for these efforts! But, unfortunately, this help cannot solve the problem and rather mitigates the consequences of the Russian invasion. The root cause lies in the Kremlin's terroristic regime and its weaponization of so many functions of normal human life. In particular, we are talking about science.

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/War_crimes_in_the_2022_Russian_invasion_of_Ukraine

² <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2022/12/un-report-details-summary-executions-civilians-russian-troops-northern>

³ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/news/2022/12/ukraine-civilian-casualty-update-26-december-2022>

⁴ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/11/30/eu-russia-ukraine-tribunal-war-crimes/>

⁵ <https://www.understandingwar.org/background/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-december-3>

⁶ <https://www.science.org/content/article/hero-city-crippled-russian-attacks-ukraine-s-science-hotbed-refuses-give>

⁷ <https://www.science.org/content/article/out-ashes-near-chornobyl-war-scarred-town-plans-nuclear-research-revival>

⁸ <https://www.science.org/content/article/ukraine-s-mounting-death-toll-includes-growing-number-researchers>

⁹ <https://svit-kpi-ua.translate.google.com/2022/11/15/українська-наука-виклики-війни-потре/> (English Translation)

Science is not beyond politics, scientific sanctions are needed

It is often said that "science is beyond politics" and "science has no borders". In the current circumstances, it is impossible to agree with these idealized statements. As a scientific community, we would like to emphasize the concealed but significant role of Russian science in this terrible war.

First, science is especially important as the war has become protracted,¹⁰ and Russia is launching a massive campaign to keep its military-industrial complex up to the task. This effort is based on the newest scientific advances. Science is the backbone of technology, and without technology, it is impossible to produce advanced weaponry. A highly qualified workforce for military technology efforts is being trained at universities and research laboratories. ***In times of war, science itself becomes a weapon.***

Second, let's not forget that modern warfare is not just a war on the battlefield: it is as much a ***war for people's hearts and minds***. In that, the media component of science plays a very important role. Every new article showing an affiliation from Russian Federation, and every scientific presentation made "under the Russian flag" demonstrates that, despite its military aggression, Russia is still an accepted member of the international community. It provides a patina of normalcy and implied acceptance of the death and destruction being inflicted upon Ukraine and its citizens. But in truth, Russia is trying to destroy international law and bring back the rule of the strongest into the modern world. For Russian leaders, science is nothing more than a powerful tool used to achieve this goal.¹¹ Immediately after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the Russian Union of Rectors signed a joint statement of full support for President Putin and all his actions.¹²

Thus, ***scientific sanctions are as appropriate and necessary as the economic sanctions*** that have been put in place by a coalition of nations committed to peace. Scientific sanctions should be implemented by the democratic forces of the free world to curb the growing aggression.

We firmly believe that similar to how Olympic athletes are banned to compete under the Russian flag, scientists affiliated with research centers in Russian Federation should not be allowed to participate in the fora that support the world-wide exchange of ideas and information. This embargo would apply to scientific publications, participation in international conferences, research programs, etc. – all forms of scientific activity. Acknowledgments of support from state grants awarded by Russian Federation should also be banned because they legitimize the regime responsible for the war and innumerable people killed, tortured, raped, deported, and displaced. Such bans will be fully consistent with the resolutions of the European Union¹³ and the Congress of the United States of America.¹⁴

Since the first days of the Russian invasion, scholars in Ukraine and abroad have been calling on the international community to impose sanctions on Russian science.^{15,16,17} Many such regulations have been made at the legislative level of the European Union and national levels.^{15,18,19,20} In some cases, conference organizers have banned speakers affiliated with the Russian Federation and Belarus. A prominent example is the uncompromising approach of the Federation of European Biochemical Societies,²¹ the European Magnetism Association,²² and the largest European magnetism conference

¹⁰ <https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20221216-putin-planning-for-a-long-war-in-ukraine-nato-chief>

¹¹ <https://ria.ru/20230208/putin-1850583456.html> (English Translation)

¹² <https://rsr-online.ru/news/2022/3/4/obrashenie-rossijskogo-soyuz-a-rektorov/>

¹³ https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/RC-9-2022-0482_EN.html

¹⁴ <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/senate-resolution/623/text>

¹⁵ <http://anvsu.org.ua/2023/02/> (English Translation)

¹⁶ <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/blog/russian-universities-must-suffer-tougher-sanctions>

¹⁷ <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-022-00601-w>

¹⁸ https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_22_1544

¹⁹ <https://www.bmbf.de/bmbf/shareddocs/kurzmeldungen/de/2022/03/weitere-zusammenarbeit-mit-russland-belarus.html>

²⁰ <https://serwisy.gazetaprawna.pl/edukacja/artykuly/8387053,polskie-uczelnie-zawieszaja-wspolprace-naukowa-z-rosja.html>

²¹ <https://www.febs.org/news/further-statement-from-febs-on-the-russia-ukraine-war/>

²² <https://magnetism.eu/news/185/38-news.htm>

– the Joint European Magnetic Symposium.²³ The first steps to boycott Russian science have already been taken by leading scientific publishers.²⁴ Some journals have refused to consider submissions with an author of any nationality based at a Russian Federation institution.²⁵ We are convinced that these practices should be spread, and sanctions against Russian science should be strengthened.

We appeal to journal editorial boards, conference organizers, and general academic leadership to:

- not accept scientific publications affiliated with Russian Federation institutions and/or funding agencies to scientific journals and conference proceedings;
- terminate all subscriptions of institutions in Russian Federation to scientific literature;
- ban access of Russian Federation institutions to international research infrastructure, including scientific equipment and scientific databases;
- ban on sales of scientific equipment and supplies to Russian Federation;
- deprive Russian Federation scientific organizations and their affiliates of access to any international research funding.

Everyone's contribution is important

Political processes in society are usually inert. It often takes time for governments to take decisive steps. In such situations, a bottom-up approach can be a good complement. Right now, responsible scientists (including you!) have an opportunity to join their efforts and contribute to a speedy end of this bloody war and a victory over the aggressor. There are many actions that will have an impact:

- if you receive an article with a Russian Federation affiliation or grant acknowledgment for review, you can refuse to review it. Please refer to this open letter and feel free to explain your decision by an unwillingness to normalize the image of the aggressor country;
- you can avoid joint publications with and any visits to Russian academic institutions. Do not let your credentials support the Russian regime;
- if you witness a scientific talk by a Russian Federation-affiliated organization at an international conference, you can demonstratively leave the room. Politicians and athletes from different countries have repeatedly done that during Russian presentations at international venues;

We write this letter in a time of war – a time when people have to take sides and be either cold or hot. Staying neutral regarding an unprovoked war of aggression can be viewed as tacitly supporting the aggressor. Someday the war will end. And, in the time of peace, scientific cooperation with Russia can be restored. However, peace will become possible only after the complete withdrawal of Russian occupation forces from the entire internationally recognized territory of Ukraine, the cessation of hostilities, and a fundamental change in Russian policy towards coexistence with other nations and respect for fundamental human rights and freedoms. Only then will scientific collaboration work to solve the global problems of humanity, and only then will scientific achievements serve exclusively peaceful purposes, as Nobel laureates called for immediately after the outbreak of the war.²⁶ But, until then, everyone will be forced by the current circumstances to decide how to react to the ongoing struggle. The actions we suggest are directed against the institutions of the aggressor. We sincerely urge you to consider them and contribute to the fight against war and terror.

If you support this letter, you can sign [here](#).

You can see the full list of people who support the letter [here](#).

²³ <https://jems2022.pl>

²⁴ <https://mailchi.mp/4851e2a74119/joint-publisher-statement>

²⁵ <https://www.sciencedirect.com/journal/journal-of-molecular-structure/about/announcements>

²⁶ <https://www.mpg.de/peace-declaration-nobel-prize-laureates>

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