

THE HANSA: position paper on the war against Ukraine

05.03.2022

Background

On 24.02.2022, Russia launched an unjustified war of aggression against Ukraine. Belarusian armed forces are also involved in the hostilities on the territory of Ukraine.

THE HANSA has 17 member cities in Russia and two in Belarus. There are currently no member cities in Ukraine, but several cities with a Hanseatic connection expressed their interest in membership through the Ukrainian Hanseatic Association at the end of 2021. Due to the war, these efforts were abruptly interrupted.

On 01.03.2022, President Jan Lindenau published a statement on behalf of the Board on the war against Ukraine. The statement emphasised the condemnation of the war and solidarity with Ukraine, but also the need to remain in dialogue with the Russian cities. This statement led to a number of feedbacks and questions on how to deal with the Russian (and Belarusian) member cities in concrete terms: While some cities welcome the declaration, for others it does not go far enough. The demands go as far as the immediate exclusion of the Russian members from THE HANSA.

Since its re-founding in 1980, THE HANSA has not only been about contacts between Hanseatic cities, but also about relations and friendships between the people in these cities. Exchange and understanding away from big politics have always been the strength of THE HANSA and were so even in times of the Cold War. These relationships should not now be lightly put at risk. At the same time, however, the concerns of other member cities, e.g. in the Baltic States, which also see their existence threatened by Russian aggression, must be taken into account.

Putin's war is also an attack on the self-image of THE HANSA in its commitment to a peaceful and united Europe. It is therefore not feasible at present to actively involve official representatives of Russian and Belarusian city administrations in the cooperation within the association of cities. On the other hand, the bridges of diplomacy and communication, also as moral support for European-oriented citizens in the Hanseatic cities, may not be completely torn down. They are also suffering of this senseless war of their president. We hope for their protest.

Dealing with the current situation

Dialogue is a means of peace. Therefore, communication with our Hanseatic cities in Russia and Belarus must not be completely broken off. The cities remain members of the Hanseatic League.

Representatives of Russian Hanseatic cities are released from official functions, including in the Board, until further notice. The assumption of new official roles or functions by



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representatives of Russian or Belarusian Hanseatic cities is currently not possible. Delegations from these cities can currently not participate in the International Hanseatic Day.

Active participation in project and working groups will be suspended until further notice, but communication will not be broken off. Monetary and in-kind contributions or payments from project funding to Russian project partners are also suspended until further notice due to Russia's military aggression against Ukraine. Any participation of THE HANSA in activities or events of Russian and Belarusian cities is suspended.

These measures are not directed against the people in the Russian Hanseatic cities, but against the Russian president who is bringing immeasurable suffering to Ukraine and destroying peace in Europe. The Union of Cities values the personal contacts and relationships with people from the Hanseatic cities in Russia that have developed over the years. These individual contacts should continue to be maintained. Cooperation on an official level will only be possible again when peace prevails. THE HANSA supports any efforts in the Hanseatic cities in Russia to work for peace.

It is currently difficult to contact the Russian and Belarusian Hanseatic cities. The cities will be informed about the decision of the Board through the available communication channels.