

# DAAD Reaffirms the Importance of Academic Exchange for Cooperation with Russia and Eastern Europe

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## University collaboration as a means of "soft diplomacy"

Bonn, 25 June 2014. The recent political conflict with Russia and Ukraine indicates how completely views diverge when it comes to matters of politics, history and the future of Europe. With its ability to establish common ground in tense situations, academic exchange is an important and often underrated instrument of "soft diplomacy". The German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) introduces a new strategy for Russia and Eastern Europe, with which it aims to continue strengthening civil dialogue in the future.

"Especially in times of political friction, the task of academic exchange as part of foreign cultural and educational policy is to bolster dialogue, encourage mutual understanding and contribute to solving conflicts," explains DAAD President Prof. Margret Wintermantel. The twelve countries in the region "Russia, Eastern Partnership, Central Asia" with over 280 million inhabitants to the east of the EU (Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia and the countries of Central Asia) offer great potential for scientific and economic cooperation.

As it determines its future funding policies, the DAAD aims to offer programmes which cater more specifically to individual

countries, carry out more multilateral projects and more strongly integrate the higher education priorities of the partner countries into joint university collaborations. Against the backdrop of reform and funding measures to strengthen the Russian higher education system, the DAAD sees significant opportunities for university cooperation with Germany.

### **Background**

For many years the DAAD has intensively promoted academic exchange with the countries of the former Soviet Union. Following the political transformation of Eastern Europe almost 25 years ago, academic exchange underwent massive expansion to include the previously isolated countries behind the Iron Curtain. In 1989, the DAAD's "Special Programme Soviet Union" enabled the first 100 students from the Soviet Union to study in Germany on scholarship. Since then, Germany, Russia and other countries of Eastern Europe have maintained a vibrant exchange of students and scholars who collaborate in a wide array of joint degree programmes, research projects and research institutes. Every year, the DAAD supports some 8,700 university students and staff from countries in this region through individual scholarships or university collaborations which finance study and research visits at German universities.

In addition to its branch offices in Moscow, St. Petersburg and Novosibirsk, the DAAD opened a fourth office in Kazan, Russia last March. The DAAD is also represented in other cities throughout the region, e.g. in Almaty, Baku, Bishkek, Dushanbe, Erivan, Kiev, Minsk, Riga, Tashkent and Tiflis.

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