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Press Release

Refugee Researcher from Russia to Conduct Research at the University of Mannheim

The German Research Foundation (DFG) has approved the integration of a Russian refugee researcher into the research group “Reconfiguration and Internalization of Social Structure (RISS)” for three years. For security reasons she wishes to remain anonymous. Professor Richard Trautmüller, political scientist at the University of Mannheim, is also a member of the research group, which is based at the Universities of Mannheim and Frankfurt.

It was a shock for her when Russian troops entered Ukraine on 24 February 2022. As a political scientist in Russia, she had always been critical of the political regime in her country. Nevertheless, the invasion of Ukraine came unexpectedly for her. It was immediately obvious to her that she could not stand idly by: “I have never been a public person, nor have I made political statements. But I'm a university professor. I could not help expressing my attitude to what was happening to the students, some of whom were also supporters of the official point of view.” She signed several letters of protest. And, being familiar with the dynamics of the development of political regimes, she subsequently decided to leave the country together with her husband. She did not want to live permanently in fear and have to lie. Since their flight, their worst fears have been confirmed and even exceeded: “Honest academic research in my area of interest as well as teaching, which I have been doing for more than 30 years and which I love very much, have become impossible.” In Mannheim, however, she will be able to continue her research as a member of the “RISS” research group.

When she and her husband decided to come to Germany, they received help from friends who also put them in touch with researchers in her field of expertise at the University of Mannheim. Her integration into the research project was initiated by Professor Annette Kehnel, Vice President for Student Affairs and Teaching at the University of Mannheim, and Professor Henning Hillmann, Ph.D., Vice President for Research and Early-Stage Researchers at the University of Mannheim. “The two contacted me and asked if I could help the Russian researcher because we are doing research in the same field. It was immediately clear to me that I would do so. It seemed like an obvious thing to do,” reports Professor Richard Trautmüller, co-spokesperson of the research group and holder of the Chair of Political Science and Empirical Democracy Research at the University of Mannheim. In response, he submitted a supplementary proposal to the German Research Foundation (DFG), which has now been approved. Trautmüller sees the researcher's expertise in the comparative study of

political organizations and how they adapt to social and technological change as a valuable asset for the group. “Initially, such a project had been an integral part of the RISS application. However, it was rejected by the experts, leaving a gap. Now we can close this subject-specific gap in a very targeted and optimal way. In terms of her personal experience, she also brings an important international, most notably Eastern European, perspective to the project,” explains Traunmüller.

The RISS research project focuses on the potential impact of social change: Will the socio-structural mixing of people with different group affiliations lead to more societal integration? Or is the opposite the case and identification with society will decrease? To explore the various hypotheses, the researchers combine social structural analysis and political sociology. The project started in the fall of 2021 and will be funded by the DFG for an initial period of four years. The project team is made up of researchers from sociology and political science who deal with a wide range of social issues, such as gender equality, migration, and party politics. The Mannheim branch of the research group is based at the Mannheim Centre for European Social Research (MZES). The Russian political scientist will primarily contribute her knowledge of political parties in post-Soviet states, which she acquired at her previous university and in the course of several international projects. She will also put a special focus on the distinctive characteristics of modern communication. These provide the context for the changes in the political landscape that are due to social change.

The scientist is pleased to be able to conduct unobstructed research in Mannheim and is excited about her new task: “The opportunity to participate in such a project is very inspiring. I am very grateful to the University of Mannheim, to Professor Traunmüller and his colleagues, who have agreed to let me join their team, where I can continue to do research in my area of interest.”

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