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**“ACADEMIC FREEDOM REVISITED”**

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**Opening Address**

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First of all, dear guests of our Academy, dear co-organisers from the New Institute and the Wissenschaftskolleg, dear Julia von Blumenthal, dear Oliver Günther,

first of all, one might ask oneself, why a public panel and a workshop on the topic of “Academic Freedom Revisited” are carried out in Berlin and at the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences and Humanities of all places. Certainly, an interdisciplinary group is working here at this Academy on the topic of “Changes in Universities and their Social Environment: Consequences for Academic Freedom?” under the leadership of Uwe Schimank and Mitchell Ash; the colleagues investigate the effects of the multiple changes in German universities and their social environment on academic freedom in research and teaching. They are also asking whether the concept and handling of academic freedom itself has evolved in the course of such changes. But in times of digital communication, all members of the working group could be connected and we could meet on seemingly neutral ground in Switzerland, on Monte Verità, the Mountain of Truth, for example, or in the Villa Vigoni, to name a slightly more suitable conference venue for our topic.

However, I am very glad that we have not gathered in an idyllic place, but here in the centre of Berlin – because it is indeed a place speaking vividly for our topic. This became very clear to me again two months ago, when the American Secretary of State Antony Blinken spoke in the hall in which we are currently meeting, and which is named in honour of Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz. Blinken spoke shortly before the criminal war of aggression against Ukraine was begun by the Russian Federation, but he spoke under the impression of this imminent attack. And Blinken was recognisably impressed by the bullet holes in the walls of this room, which were made by Soviet soldiers, which means: also by Ukrainian soldiers. As a sign of victory, they emptied their machine guns’ cartridges into the walls of the cashier’s hall of the then Prussian State Bank after the capture of the Reichstag on 30 April 1945 and the surrender of the last German troops in Berlin on 2 May. It is not without significance for our event that it were either soldiers of the First Ukrainian Front under Marshal Ivan Konev or the First Byelorussian Front under Marshal Georgy Zhukov to whom we owe the bullet holes in our walls, signalling the triumph over Hitler’s Germany – at that time, Ukrainian and Byelorussian soldiers were still fighting together against a brutal dictator who had unleashed criminal wars of aggression. In recent weeks and months, these bullet holes have become important to me, because they remind us that in this country, freedom of science has already been lost in a dictatorship. And even more precisely: in this Academy, the freedom of science has already been lost once, as we are not only the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences and Humanities, but also the former Prussian Academy of Sciences. The epitome of the deep fall of scientific freedom in this country, in this city, at this institution, is probably Albert Einstein’s resignation from the Academy, which the Nobel laureate handed in after the Academy’s secretary accused him of having “participated in the atrocious agitation in France and America” against Hitler’s first cabinet in January 1933. Yet there are also other shameful signs, such as the forced resignation of all remaining Jewish members in 1938 or the planning by members of this Academy to exterminate the Ukrainian population and colonise the country

with German settlers after 1940, financed by the German Research Foundation. It is therefore good that the bullet holes in these walls remind us that this institution carries these wounds with it to this day.

I am talking here – by the way – about only one collapse of scientific freedom in our country, although we should talk about a second one in the twentieth century. The Academy of Sciences of the GDR also resided in this building – but, as is well known, the comparison of systems is such a difficult field that one should not try to plow the field in a welcome address.

However, as a museum of the fatal consequences of the collapse of academic freedom in Germany, the BBAW would be a possible venue, but not yet self-evident. It only becomes obvious as a venue, if we take history as an occasion for “lessons learned” or at least as a process of “lessons learned”. But what can we learn from the history of the collapse of academic freedom in this country in the twentieth century for our own questions today? Our approach, if I see it correctly, is characterised by a very precise focus on legal frameworks in different countries, changes at universities, mechanisms of subtle pressure and so on. So what can we learn?

First of all, in my perception the question of the *institutional* independence of our academic institutions is of central importance, especially in the confusing landscape of academic and political advice in our different European countries. It seems to me that in this country, after a phase of energetic insistence on this independence, it has fallen somewhat into the background. You may live comfortably with rising state control of academic institutions in a democratic state with an intact legal and institutional framework, but woe betide us if this framework begins to topple. France will be voting next Sunday, and we are not the only ones watching our neighbour to the west with bated breath.

Secondly, I believe that the question of *financial* independence and thus of adequate basic funding for universities and other scientific institutions is of central importance. Once more, too much dependence on the thematic agendas of other actors is highly dangerous.

And finally, to mention a third learning experience from the history of German institutions and thus also of this institution: Independence of academic institutions and thus their freedom can be secured if the value of autonomy and freedom of scholarship may be learned in *academic education* and is not denied by the set-up of the institutions. If a strictly hierarchical institution teaches junior academics to perform menial tasks for the “grand professors”, to copy documents, to put up curtains in private flats or to serve petit fours at private invitations (I am compiling a few highlights from my years as an assistant in Tübingen ...), then one cannot be sure that courageous fighters for academic freedom and autonomy of the academic institutions will be produced by such a system. In this respect, a change in the culture of science in favour of young academics, which the Volkswagen Foundation under its Secretary General Wilhelm Krull stood for (and continues to stand for), is essential for our topic and also for the debate currently happening under the hashtag “I am Hanna” here in Germany.

By naming the chairman of our senate, Wilhelm Krull, I am already in the process of mentioning those to whom I would like to express my gratitude: It has been a real pleasure to plan this workshop with Barbara Stollberg-Rilinger and Daniel Schönplüg from the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin and with Wilhelm Krull from the New Institute and with Roland Römhildt from the BBAW, and I am now very much looking forward to the panel discussion. I am deeply grateful to the lawyer, writer and journalist Max Steinbeis for not only running the Verfassungsblog, which many of us hold in high esteem, but also for enlightening us through texts of various kinds. Today I thank him especially for moderating our opening panel. I would like to extend a warm welcome to all those of you not yet mentioned and I wish us all a very stimulating evening!