

Neujahrsempfang 2023

Grußwort – Allgemeiner Studierendenausschuss (AStA), Pascal Kienast | Transkript

Dear guests,

The General Students' Committee of the University of Potsdam is pleased to be part of the New Year's Reception again this year, and we wish you a Happy New Year 2023 from the student community. What kind of year was 2022? After we thought we were slowly getting a grip on the Corona pandemic, the next major catastrophe was already upon us all, with Russia's barbaric invasion of Ukraine in violation of international law.

I can still remember the surreal feeling of waking up in this new world on the morning of February 24, the initial confusion about what to do next, and of course the emergence of an incredible willingness to help and solidarity of all students for Ukraine. I would like to thank the Slavic Studies Student Council in particular, which has collected donations in this extreme situation, and also organized an extensive series of events on the war and thus give Ukrainians a voice here on campus.

But this melancholy did not end there: soon we in the student body also felt the full force of the massive economic upheavals resulting from this war of aggression. However, the fact that, even before the hefty price increases, more than a third of all students were at acute risk of poverty seemed to attract very little interest. In the end, the only concrete and timely relief for students was the nine-euro ticket. Even though the nine-euro ticket certainly provided many fond memories during the summer months of last year, we would like to emphasize that it is an outrage how much we at the General Students' Committee were left alone with the reimbursement. In the end, a few volunteer students, including myself, had to organize the payment of 1.5 million euros to 20,000 students spontaneously, in their free time, in addition to their studies, part-time jobs and other activities. The fact that this somehow worked out in the end was in no way a matter of course. In any case, we would have liked to have seen more support from the state and federal government, but they preferred to withdraw.

This withdrawal of the state is apparently a phenomenon that we can also see in many other aspects. Of course, it is understandable that, in times of economic crisis, the state budget can no longer cover all of its anticipated projects. But the fact that plans were made at the Griebnitzsee campus to put buildings 2 and 3 and the student dormitories in the hands of a billionaire without a concrete plan and - even more seriously - without involving the students, has irritated us greatly. Now that the plans have become public, the backroom deal with the state government has turned into an open offer from the Hasso Plattner Foundation to the students and the university; this is a positive step in the right direction. After all, despite Hasso Plattner's seemingly selfless commitment, we should reflect on what a massive position of power a single billionaire can buy with this. The survey we launched last week among students regarding Plattner's offer showed that the country should not make itself artificially small in order to save money.

Already, more than 1,000 students have indicated that they are critical of the buyout by the foundation and would prefer to reject the offer under the current conditions. The big difference between students at HPI and the rest of the university is also particularly striking. While the majority of students at HPI support the offer, the majority of the rest of the students reject it. This increasing polarization among students causes us great concern. It is the opposite of what we believe a university should stand for.

The importance of universities cannot be underestimated, especially at the current time, when we as a society urgently need to usher in a social and ecological transformation in order to still somehow confront the climate crisis. This is not just about educating a workforce; here at the University of Potsdam, it is about tackling the great challenges facing humanity. That's exactly why it would be a disaster if we don't manage to get along well on campus and instead get tangled up in internal conflicts. We all have to pull together, we all have to clearly oppose any form of discrimination, we should always keep the social situation of students and employees in mind, and finally, we should take it for granted that we should not invite fascists from the political party, Alternative for Germany.

I am confident that we will tackle all of this together in this new year and that we can make this university a better place, step by step.

On that note, thank you to everyone who has supported us, and I wish you all a Happy New Year 2023.