

IYSSE delegate addresses Humboldt University student parliament

“Failure to defend freedom of expression would have dire consequences”

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Dear fellow students,

At the last student parliament meeting, we postponed a decision on our motion, because the issue of “Münkler-Watch” had just emerged. Recent weeks have confirmed the importance of this development.

I want to emphasize that what is at stake is a fundamental issue: the right to freedom of expression at Humboldt University and beyond.

We begin our resolution by emphatically rejecting the vicious attacks launched by the media and by teachers at our university against “Münkler-Watch.” This raises the question: What happened exactly? What had “Münkler-Watch” done?

In the resolution, we state: “Students have done nothing other than document and criticize the political and academic positions of a professor.” In other words, they have made use of their right to freedom of expression!

In recent weeks, there has been a heated debate on this issue in the media and at the university, led by professors and the university administration. I will give some examples of the campaign against the students:

* In the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Sonntagszeitung*, Friederike Haupt linked students to terrorists and bombers, a point that has already been sharply rejected by the Department of History, Education and Gender Studies in its own statement in defense of the right of students to free expression.

* In *Die Zeit*, Münkler argued in similar fashion, accusing students of carrying out “asymmetric warfare” and comparing criticism of him to “anti-Semitic structures.”

* In *Be linercomment* *iZeitung* University President Olbertz declared that the threat to freedom of expression no longer came from an authoritarian state, but rather from students.

* Jörg Baberowski, Chair of East European History, told the *Tagesspiegel* that such “spinners” should be banned and prosecuted.

We have a situation, therefore, where students who criticize their professors for their militaristic standpoints are termed terrorists and compared to anti-Semites. They should be expelled from the university and turned over to the police. This is the state of affairs!

“Münkler-Watch” has been attacked for its anonymity. In this context, it is important to emphasize that the right to freedom of expression includes the right to anonymity. This has been confirmed by the German supreme court. We write in our resolution:

In 2009, the Federal Court ruled that “the obligation to identify oneself with regard to a particular opinion” is not consistent with the Basic Law. Such an obligation would carry “the danger of individuals refraining from expressing their opinions due to fear of reprisals or other negative consequences.”

If one examines the response to the criticisms made by the IYSSE of various professors, it is clear that the anonymity of “Münkler-Watch” is well founded.

The university administration has tried to deny us rooms for public events. Two statements—one from the Department of History, the other on the web site of the Excellence Initiative—call upon students to not tolerate the IYSSE’s views on the premises of Humboldt University and to oppose the IYSSE. A statement by

the Excellence Initiative refers to a “smear campaign” that we allegedly carried out, without providing a shred of evidence.

Finally, a fellow student who ran on the IYSSE slate in the student parliament elections was approached by her professor regarding her political affiliation. He then questioned whether he could continue to oversee her master’s thesis.

This is the background to the campaign against “Münkler-Watch.”

The question is: How can one explain such a violent reaction?

To answer this question, one has to examine what professors Münkler and Baberowski are up to. There is a direct connection between their work at the university and their political activity.

Herfried Münkler, for example, sits on the advisory board of the Federal College for Security Studies. He openly advocates rewriting history to reflect current foreign policy requirements.

In an interview with the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* early last year, he said: “It is barely possible to conduct a responsible policy in Europe based on the notion: We are to blame for everything.” In his opinion, it is necessary to rewrite history, and to this end, he uses his position and his reputation as a professor.

Baberowski says explicitly that it was Stalin’s generals who forced the Wehrmacht to conduct a war of annihilation. He works closely with the Bundeswehr.

In the last few months, it has become increasingly clear that this political line—rewriting history in order to justify a new foreign policy—has failed to resonate with the population and has been increasingly criticized by students. This has been made abundantly clear by the example of “Münkler-Watch.”

It is also evident that such militaristic conceptions are incompatible with democratic norms. Therefore, all criticism is to be suppressed.

This brings us to the central question today, which we will decide here: should our university remain a seat of scholarship and criticism?

Nobody is calling for the censoring of Münkler or Baberowski. That is not the case. But if discussion is not possible at this university, then we really have to speak of a conformist university.

It is therefore essential that this resolution be adopted today to make clear we are defending the basic

democratic rights of students.

I want to point out once again: the resolution does not require that one agrees with the statements made by “Münkler-Watch” or the policy of the IYSSE. It’s about the fundamental question—whether or not scholarly criticism is possible at Humboldt University.

In light of the reactions to “Münkler-Watch,” this question is posed here with particular sharpness. The decision we make here today will ultimately establish a precedent for the defense of freedom of expression at other universities.

Everyone must be aware today, in our function as the political representatives of students at Humboldt University, we have a responsibility to defend the basic right of students to freely express themselves. Professors have attacked this fundamental right in their statements, or have kept silent.

If we were to reject a resolution in defense of students, it would be a devastating blow. It would be an invitation to professors to continue their attacks. Students expect us to stand up for their basic rights.

Today we are holding the first student parliament sitting since the emergence of the dispute over “Münkler-Watch.” There would be dire consequences if the student parliament failed to explicitly defend freedom of expression. Therefore, I call on all those eligible to vote for the motion.

One should have no illusions: a negative attitude on such a basic question means denying freedom of expression at Humboldt University, which would trigger the next round of attacks on students.



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