

IYSSE spokesperson files formal complaint against Humboldt University president Sabine Kunst

Sven Wurm
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Sven Wurm, a deputy in the student parliament at Berlin's Humboldt University for the International Youth and Students for Social Equality, filed a disciplinary complaint against Humboldt University president Sabine Kunst. It was sent to Berlin's Mayor, Michael Müller, and state secretary for scholarship and research, Steffen Krach, on Monday.

To the Mayor of Berlin and the state secretary for scholarship and research

Dear Mr. Müller and Mr. Krach,

As a deputy of the student parliament and a student of history at Humboldt University, I hereby file a disciplinary complaint against university president Sabine Kunst. In a session of the academic senate at Humboldt University, Ms. Kunst supported a physical attack by the right-wing extremist professor Jörg Baberowski on me and took no action to ensure a safe environment for students and the autonomous student representative body. She even refused to rule on a disciplinary complaint filed against Baberowski.

I informed Ms. Kunst on 5 February, 2020, that Mr. Prof. Dr. Jörg Baberowski physically assaulted me and made vulgar threats on the campus of Humboldt University. When I caught him removing and destroying election placards for the IYSSE's student parliament election campaign, which were displayed on a blackboard in accordance with regulations, he struck my phone from my hand and said threateningly, "Should I smack you in the face?" All of this is documented in a video that I made available to Ms. Kunst.

Due to this interference with the autonomy of the student administration and the criminal behaviour

towards me, I filed a formal complaint against Baberowski with Ms. Kunst and demanded that she clearly condemn his act of violence. When I addressed her about it on February 11, she dismissed me and said she would not comment. However, at the meeting of the academic senate the same day, she stated that Baberowski's attack on me and his destruction of the election placards were "understandable in a human sense."

To this day, she has refused to rule on the disciplinary complaint, which is a violation of article 17 of Germany's Basic Law. In response to my valid complaint, I have neither received confirmation of receipt nor information about the review process, much less a decision. On the contrary, as described above, Ms. Kunst has refused to comment.

This is made all the more grave by the fact that Baberowski attempted, by means of property damage, bodily harm, and intimidation, to stop students campaigning for their list for the student election.

Ms. Kunst ignored my complaint as well as an official letter from the student election board on February 16, 2020, which called on university management to use its legal authority to take action against Baberowski's interference with the election. A majority decision of the student parliament from 18 June, 2020, was also ignored. The decision condemned the "serious and violent interference into this year's election," and called on the presidium to "end its support for the right-wing extremist professor and hold Baberowski to account."

With her blatant defence of professorial violence against students, Ms. Kunst made clear that she has no concern for the wellbeing of her students or any interest

in creating a safe environment for political discussion and scholarly debate. Instead, she functions as a political actor who wishes to suppress all criticism of far-right teaching content and positions.

Baberowski is one of the most well known right-wing extremist academics. In 2015, he founded the “Baberowski salon” (Die Zeit), where anyone with a reputation among the far-right meets at least twice a year. He regularly agitates against refugees, campaigns for brutal wars, and trivialises the crimes of the Nazis.

In January last year, Baberowski repeated in an interview with the conservative daily FAZ the main lie of Holocaust deniers, that Hitler “did not want to know anything about Auschwitz.” He did so with the aim of justifying his previous statement that Hitler was “not vicious.” The trivialisation of Nazi crimes runs like a red thread through his academic scholarship.

The fact that this right-wing extremist ideologist has now started marching around campus like a far-right activist, destroying student election advertising and physically attacking students is also the responsibility of university president Sabine Kunst. She has supported for years and defended the right-wing extremist structures that have emerged in Baberowski’s department of Eastern European history.

Already over four years ago, when I informed Kunst on February 12, 2017 that Baberowski issued a vulgar threat against me during an official lecture and urged students to disrupt IYSSE meetings, she defended the far-right professor and described “attacks in the media” against him as “unacceptable.” When Baberowski began insulting and threatening other professors at Humboldt University because they criticised a right-wing petition, Kunst supported him.

Then in December 2018, around two dozen right-wing extremists followed a call made by Baberowski to disrupt an IYSSE meeting at Humboldt University. The Alternative for Germany (AfD) functionaries who were present interrupted the speakers, threatened participants, and attempted to sing the German National Anthem. While the student parliament unanimously condemned this far-right attack on a student event at HU, Kunst once again refused to take a position on these actions.

When Baberowski insulted the two academic senators Bafta Sarbo and Juliane Ziegler on his Facebook page as “incredibly stupid” and “left-wing extremists”

because they opposed his proposal to create a centre for research on dictatorships, Ms. Kunst again refused to rule on a disciplinary complaint from the two students, let alone take any action against Baberowski.

Finally, at the end of last year, I informed Ms. Kunst that a close colleague of Baberowski had been a well-known neo-Nazi in Hannover during his youth. He participated, among other things, in a demonstration with right-wing extremist terrorists against the Wehrmacht Exhibition. The university responded with a one-liner stating that they do not speak publicly about employees’ personal details. Ms. Kunst did absolutely nothing to protect the students from such lecturers.

There is no harmless explanation for this chronology of events. Ms. Kunst has time and time again systematically covered up Baberowski’s verbal and physical attacks on students, and suppressed necessary criticism of the right-wing extremist professor. She therefore bears responsibility for the climate of intimidation aimed at preventing students from criticising the right-wing opinions of professors. This is incompatible with a democratic university.

On June 29, the next election takes place for the student parliament. Students must have the right to campaign for their lists without intimidation and threats, and advocate their positions. I therefore call upon you to immediately review my complaint, ensure that the elections are held without disruptions, and initiate disciplinary measures against Ms. Kunst and Mr. Baberowski.

Yours sincerely,
Sven Wurm



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