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Attacked at the War's Start, Ukrainian U. Relocates, Perseveres—for the Second Time

By Theresa Defino

The university in the eastern Ukrainian city of Severodonetsk was shelled Feb. 24—the first day Russian forces invaded. The attack destroyed most of the research enterprise of Volodymyr Dahl East Ukrainian National University's home campus, which was relocated and rebuilt following a previous Russian bombardment just eight years earlier.

But, under the direction of Rector Olga Porkuian, who also lost her house in the recent invasion, the university has continued to hold classes online and in a trio of cities to which it evacuated some thousands of staff, students and residents—a massive and dangerous undertaking.

As Porkuian explained during a recent meeting of the Federal Demonstration Partnership, Volodymyr Dahl East Ukrainian National University was founded in 1920 in Luhansk, the center of the easternmost region of Ukraine.^[1] Following the meeting, Porkuian provided RRC additional information via email about the academic and living situation facing university staff and students during this crisis.

They are not safe.

After escaping from Severodonetsk to Kamianets-Podilskyi, Dnipro and Kyiv, those cities remain under attack or are occupied. “Yesterday, October 10, it was very dangerous here and in Dnipro city,” Porkuian wrote to RRC from Kyiv, where she said “most of the leaders of the university are located. Fortunately, none of my colleagues were hurt. Today the situation is quieter but it is still not good.” Kamenetz-Podolsky, she said that day, was “much safer” but also had a smaller number of evacuees.

They are suffering.

“Truly speaking it is a really very difficult time for our university now. We are forced to rent premises for work, and buy computers and other equipment. It all happened as a result of war actions, because our campus is destroyed, the city is occupied, and laboratories were looted,” Porkuian told RRC. “Most of our students are residents of the occupied territories and, therefore, are also in a difficult financial situation. [Those who] left, like all university staff, [left] with a minimum of things. They and their parents are deprived of their usual sources of income as only a very small part of the business was evacuated and continue to survive on safe territories.”

They are carrying on.

“We all continue to work, although it is difficult in the face of daily shelling,” Porkuian said in an email, adding, “I am also in touch with rectors of other universities.”

Now the fall period with online courses and students has begun. “If there are problems with communication, we reschedule classes for another time, but we try to conduct them on the time according to the timetable. Most of the lecturers and professors are now in Kyiv,” Porkuian said.

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