

## **Report on the Activities of the Dutch-Russian Law Association (DRLA) in 2022**

Where the years 2020-2021 were overshadowed by the COVID-19 pandemic, 2022 was marked by yet another tragic event: the Russian invasion of Ukraine, which led to the first full-scale war in Europe since the Second World War. In spite of all fundamental principles of international law and international agreements to which Russia is a party, under which Ukraine's existence as a sovereign and independent state, including its territorial integrity, was recognised and guaranteed also by Russia, Russia nonetheless decided to start a war against Ukraine. Also, in clear contradiction to international law, Russia unlawfully annexed parts of Ukraine under its occupation (including the Donetsk and Luhansk *oblasti*), as it had already done before with the Crimean Peninsula in 2014.

Russia's aggression against Ukraine caused the Executive Board of our association to issue a statement, sharply condemning Russia's unlawful military actions against an independent and sovereign neighbour country shortly after the invasion, and again in 2023, a year into the war. The Executive Board is of the opinion that – in particular with a view to the DRLA's goal of promoting the rule of law – all breaches of (international) fundamental legal principles must be condemned. In the Executive Board's view, legal principles have absolute priority over geopolitical considerations, such as sphere of influence and other doctrinal concepts of international relations.

In March 2022, a joint online meeting of the Advisory Board and the Executive Board of the DRLA was held with a view to discuss the possibilities of assisting our Russian members in these dark times of war and internal oppression. The main outcome of the discussion was, first, to temporarily suspend our Russian members' obligation to pay their annual membership fee and, second, to call upon our Dutch members to sponsor the membership of Russian lawyers.

On 16 June 2022, the DRLA held its annual general meeting at which the 2021 financial report and report on its activities were discussed and approved by the members present. After the formal part, a symposium was held on the impact of the war on Russian Law. Three speakers were invited: first, Dr Anton Burkov, who discussed "The Impact of the War in Ukraine on Russian Law". The second speaker was Professor Aleksandr Muranov who gave a presentation on "The Oppressive Arbitration Reform in Russia and the War in Ukraine: Some Common Political Roots." Finally, the third speaker, Professor Valerie Sperling of Clark University, Worcester, Mass., USA, talked about "Has Russia Become a Totalitarian State Since February 2022?" The symposium was moderated by Professor William Simons of Tartu, Estonia, a much-valued member of the DRLA. After the presentations, questions were asked and a lively discussion about the impact of the war on Russian law took place.

A second (hybrid – live and online) event took place on 24 November 2022: a lecture by our member Justice Fons Orië, a retired justice of the Supreme Court of The Netherlands who also acted as a judge in the Yugoslavia Tribunal. The theme of the lecture was the 17 November The Hague District Court decision in the MH17 case and its implications.

In addition to the hybrid lecture on 24 November, the DRLA organised its first in-person social event since the COVID-19 pandemic on 29 September 2022: the ‘DRLA Drinks’ in Leiden. The event did not feature any speakers or specific content, nevertheless it was a fun and valuable experience to see some of our members in person and catch up over a drink and dinner after a long period of social distancing.

On an individual basis, several members of the DRLA participated (online) in conferences that took place in Russia, like, for instance, the conference of the Moscow based Centre for Private Law of end January 2022 devoted to the memory of Professor Aleksandr L’vovich Makovskii (Professor Ferdinand Feldbrugge, Professor William Simons and dr Wim Timmermans).

On 19 September 2022, dr Wim Timmermans, the chair of our Executive Board, participated in a discussion meeting organized by the Russia & Eastern Europe Knowledge Alliance (REKA) on behalf of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs on the review of the Dutch Government’s proposed Russia Strategy in light of the Russian aggression against Ukraine. Topic of the meeting was “Geopolitics and International Legal Order”.

Dr Timmermans also participated in an online conference under the auspices of the Russian Chamber of Commerce and Industry on Customs and International Trade, where, on 9 November 2022, he gave a presentation on the “EU Sanctions Against Russia – Recent Developments”.

The Executive Board of the DRLA,  
Leiden, 13 June 2023