

Correspondence

Scientific diplomacy keeps reason alight in dark times

International scientific cooperation was crucial in maintaining relations between antagonistic parties during the cold war. Now, during Russia's brutal invasion of Ukraine, we should not withdraw from such informal ('track II') diplomacy, but strengthen it. Research collaboration for the global good transcends nationalism.

This philosophy was recognized by US president Lyndon Johnson and Soviet premier Alexey Kosygin when they met in 1967 to establish the International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis in Laxenburg, Austria. It is also embedded in the statutes and constitutions of the institutions that we lead and represent. Such international scientific bodies and networks work over many years to build bridges between nations and communities to address matters of common concern, and to make global progress towards a better future for all. They are especially important at times when political relations falter, as now.

Abandoning the founding principles of track II scientific-diplomacy institutions would cause irreparable harm to their reputations, with little prospect of recovering the gains made over decades. Once an institution loses its standing as a neutral broker and facilitator, it is gone forever. This is the time to send firm and unambiguous messages about inappropriate actions, yet remain reasoned, principled, diplomatic and strategic about recovery in the aftermath of the war.

Therefore, we wish to express dismay at the severing of scientific ties in some quarters (see, for example, go.nature.com/3xiubvj). We emphasize that ongoing

collaboration involving Russian scientists and those from other parts of the world serves the purposes of peace and understanding. Much of this research involves topics of global concern, key to the sustainability agenda, including basic physical sciences, agronomy, climatology, public health, renewable energy and physiology. Of course, collaboration should cease in any areas where there would be direct military consequences or implications. These areas are few, in our experience.

As we sadly face a new era in which relationships between powerful countries are strained, science again has a crucial role in forging trust. There are urgent efforts to assist refugee scientists and students (see, for example, go.nature.com/3ls7erf, go.nature.com/3rk47uf, go.nature.com/365buk4 and go.nature.com/3vcipqb), and the international community must help Ukraine to rebuild its scientific system when the war ends. Beyond that, we hope to open a conversation about establishing a global fund to assist distressed scientific communities around the globe and build strong international networks of support and cooperation.

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*On behalf of 4 correspondents. See go.nature.com/3veyoht

Fuel, food and fertilizer shortage will hit biodiversity and climate

As well as the humanitarian catastrophe it is inflicting, Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February is disrupting global flows of vital commodities such as fuel, food and fertilizer. This will affect biodiversity and the environment far beyond the war zones, with implications for sustainability and well-being worldwide.

Shortages and soaring prices of wheat, barley and maize have prompted European Union countries to consider growing crops on land currently left uncultivated (see go.nature.com/3llwvnx). Brazil aims to extract fertilizers such as potassium salts in biodiverse Indigenous lands in the Amazon (see go.nature.com/3j7riv3). Skyrocketing prices for oil and gas have triggered calls for increased fossil-fuel extraction, undermining commitments made at last year's COP26 climate summit. These moves would further harm biodiversity and undo long-standing conservation and climate-mitigation efforts.

The parties to the United Nations Convention on Biodiversity should expand the post-2020 biodiversity framework at this year's conference in Kunming, China, to hold aggressors accountable for the impact of war on biodiversity and the environment globally, and for the cost of restoration.

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Brexit: delays worry diaspora researchers

We write on behalf of the UK-based European diaspora organizations of Portuguese, Spanish, Polish, Italian and Dutch researchers. We argue that the European Union and the United Kingdom must mitigate the negative effects of Britain's exit from the EU on scientific progress and promote a thriving cross-border research community. This could be done through an open and inclusive European Research Area, for example (see <https://stick-to-science.eu>).

The association of the United Kingdom with EU programmes agreed in December 2020 provided hope that the nation would retain access to the EU's flagship research programmes. This included opportunities to lead European projects with fewer bureaucratic hurdles and without extra costs. However, ongoing negotiations with the European Commission and delays in signing the final agreement are refuelling earlier concerns (M. Pinto da Costa *et al. Nature* 572, 312; 2019).

Although the United Kingdom was one of the top three recipients of starting grants from the European Research Council (ERC) in the past two calls, many of its ERC grantees are now leaving the country (see go.nature.com/3jlsutn). The United Kingdom's withdrawal from the Erasmus+ programme to support the education and training of young people in Europe, and its new immigration system, could further damage its international research enterprise.

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