

Statement on the Report of the Evaluation Commission

ZOIS is delighted with the positive assessment of its work and thanks the members and guests of the Evaluation Commission for the constructive discussions in the course of its first evaluation. Thanks are also due to ZOIS's Academic Advisory Board, which supported us in the preparation of the evaluation. The Report underlines that in the five years since its foundation, ZOIS has managed to become a visible and innovative player in East European studies at national and, increasingly, international level. It highlights ZOIS's contribution to the analysis of social dynamics in countries and regions that had previously received less attention in German and international research on Eastern Europe (e.g. Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, the South Caucasus, Central Asia) as well as its overall 'very good to excellent' academic publications.

In addition, ZOIS is gratified by the extremely positive appraisal of its strategy of combining empirical basic social science research on Eastern Europe with the communication of research findings to the political arena, the media and the general public.

The Commission's recommendations in the area of **research** encourage ZOIS to continue to address the question of how existing research topics and research clusters can be consolidated in the coming years. At the same time, researchers should not be deprived of the opportunity to explore new topics, including those that cut across research clusters, in order to be able to react flexibly to the dynamic developments in Eastern Europe. In accordance with the Commission's recommendations, this can also be done through the kind of thematic adjustments to individual research clusters that have already been made in the past. For example, in order to take account of a field of research that had previously received little attention, the research cluster on Conflict Dynamics was expanded at an early stage to include a focus on Border Regions. And the research cluster on Migration quickly integrated the topic of Diversity. Likewise, in 2022, the research cluster on Youth was expanded to include the dimension of generational change. This brought questions of political socialisation into focus, which also opened up comparative perspectives. The research cluster Societies between Stability and Change came into being with the founding of ZOIS and is thus still larger and broader in scope than the other four research clusters, which developed more gradually. It has frequently served as an incubator for cross-cutting research projects (e.g. on the protests in Belarus), but, as the Commission rightly notes, needs to be streamlined in ZOIS's consolidation phase. In the medium term, the goal is to make the five research clusters roughly comparable in terms of their researcher positions and third-party funded projects. The heads of the research clusters already engage in regular institutionalised discussions about key questions and projects in each research cluster. This serves to further enhance the profile of the clusters and spur their dynamic development. With regard to the role of ZOIS's Director, we share the Commission's view that the Director should continue to be active in research and therefore would like to be able to fill the position of head of research cluster for the research cluster the Director has led on an interim basis.

The Commission's recommendations on ZOIS's thematic orientation are somewhat contradictory. It proposes that the institute broadens the range of topics covered while also arguing for a reduction in the number of research clusters and projects. From our point of view, the definition of five research clusters at the time of ZOIS's foundation has proven its worth. The Commission recommends focusing more on certain countries in East Central Europe and also doing more research on Russia, including military policy. ZOIS is already conducting a lot of research on Poland, and the Baltic states and Southeast Europe are also included in ongoing research projects. The staffing plan, our capacities for implementing externally funded projects and our endeavour to achieve thematic coherence as an institute limit our scope for thematic expansion, which would require in-depth knowledge of the

countries in question and their languages. Research on Russia is likely to remain difficult in the longer term. Nevertheless, since 2022 we have been endeavouring in several projects to study 'Russia outside Russia', i.e. we are increasingly focusing on migration from Russia.

We agree with the recommendations to intensify and **further expand cooperation** with universities and non-university research institutes. In doing so, we strive to establish and expand cooperations beyond the Berlin-Brandenburg area highlighted in the report. Synergy effects, for example in the area of security policy, can be harnessed by cooperating with institutions with a complementary research profile to ZOIS. Moreover, an intensification of our cooperation with universities, particularly where the supervision of PhDs is concerned, can generate important new impulses for supporting young researchers. At the same time, ZOIS strives – in line with the Commission's recommendations and to the extent its finances allow – to offer young researchers opportunities for further training, for example in the area of career planning.

With regard to research communication, we gladly take up the Commission's suggestion to orient our press and public relations work increasingly to a more international audience. We also welcome the proposal to strengthen communications in the political arena. In our view, however, additional staff capacity is a prerequisite for this expansion. We are happy to take up the Commission's proposal to further expand our existing networks in the field of research communication.

The Commission recommends more strategic planning of **research communication** and regular monitoring of the existing formats. Target groups and customised measures have been formulated in a detailed Communications Concept, and we are constantly working to expand and further systematise our monitoring processes.

The Commission's comments and proposals on the **governance** of the Institute and on the interaction between the gGmbH (Institute) and the Foundation take up a lot of space in the Report. The central question here is how the scientific independence of the Institute can be guaranteed.

ZOIS agrees with the Commission that scientific independence is an invaluable asset and therefore of utmost importance for any research institute. However, it does not share the Commission's concerns that the funding body exerts influence on ZOIS's academic work. At no time since the founding of ZOIS has this happened, either directly or by way of decisions to that effect by the Foundation Board, where the funding body has, admittedly, very extensive powers.

ZOIS thanks the Commission for its intensive reflections on the governance of ZOIS, which have focused in particular on the responsibilities and rights of the Foundation and the gGmbH as well as their respective bodies, the Foundation Board and the Academic Advisory Board. These reflections will give valuable impetus to the process of unbundling and restructuring the Foundation and the gGmbH, which is already under way.

We were very pleased with the Commission's strong recommendation to establish a **Fellowship Programme** at ZOIS. We share the view that such a programme will increase ZOIS's international visibility and make a significant contribution to the further expansion of cooperations with other research institutions. ZOIS will continue its efforts to obtain secured funding for the programme. If successful, it will follow the Commission's recommendations to integrate fellows into research and research communication activities at ZOIS and to engage in alumni work, something we consider to be integral to networking.

ZOIS is appreciative of the fact that the Commission also considers the lack of **access to relevant electronic resources** to be inadequate. ZOIS continues to strive to ensure permanent access to the

necessary resources for all researchers at ZOIS, for example through a cooperation agreement to that effect with a university.

For the sake of clarity, it should be pointed out here that of the 32 academic positions mentioned in the report, 13 are for student assistants.

Overall, we take encouragement from the praise and constructive suggestions we have received in this evaluation and see it as an important step in the consolidation phase that ZOIS is now entering.

Berlin, March 2023