

A Word from the Dean to the Academic Community

Dear colleagues, dear members of our unique faculty community,

I am addressing you on behalf of myself and my entire collegium, including the secretary and our assistants Ms. Sobotková and Ms. Kaňková.

I feel that this moment, between night and day on Saturday, 23 December, is the first moment when I can pause, think in silence, and share some of my thoughts and feelings with you.

On Thursday at 2:50 pm, we were concluding our final pre-Christmas collegium meeting at the main building of the Faculty of Arts. Following this, some of us were about to put our concentration on the last assignments of the day or to join the Christmas carols at the Dean's Office, with the collective agreement in mind that the upcoming days would be a period of tranquility, allowing us to prioritize time with our families.

From three o'clock onwards, some of us were already ensuring the safety of our employees and students at the main building, communicating with the Czech Police, University representatives, Government officials, and others... Since then, we have been fully dedicated to working with the management of Charles University and the crisis staff they established, striving to contribute to your protection, support, gathering and dissemination of information, and the extremely difficult finding of calmness and composure in conditions more challenging than usual. We see this as our most important task at the moment, and for this reason, we have refrained from communicating with the media until now, leaving it to the

Rector and the Press Department of Charles University – we are grateful for their assistance in this matter.

As I gradually learn about your experiences in various parts of the faculty on Thursday, and even during the most intense moments of crisis management, I reflect on the indescribable nature of what you are all going through. My thoughts and my heart is with the victims, the injured, and their families and friends. I trust that, in due course, I will be able to personally convey my words of sympathy and wishes for a speedy recovery. My thoughts continue to be with all those most significantly affected by the tragedy at our faculty.

Please believe that we are not alone in this situation – we are receiving many messages of support from the management of other faculties at our university, our Association of Deans of Faculties of Arts, other university, academic, and cultural institutions, our alumni, and former employees. These words of support certainly give us all strength, but they also offer practical help. We will have somebody to rely on in the coming period.

In my letter to the academic community following the invasion of Ukraine by Russia in 2022, I expressed sincere gratitude for the numerous offers of assistance that were extended. At that time, we recognized that the need for solidarity and helping hands would not be immediate, but rather in the months (and unfortunately, as this case revealed, years) to follow. We are now aware that a similar scenario awaits us in the current situation. The full impact of experience from the last few days, both psychologically and practically, will manifest in the initial months of the new year. During this time, our strength and readiness to support each other will serve as the pillars for our rejuvenation: the restoration of our beautiful main building, the revival of our hope and faith in the essence of an academic community that seeks education and dialogue with open minds and open doors for all interested individuals from our ranks and the public.

There is one thing that does not need rejuvenation: our identity as a genuine community that stands together. Believe me, in my role as Dean, I have repeatedly witnessed our unity and commitment to our academic ideals and each other, even in the face of diverse opinions. This challenging moment serves as the strongest testament to that unity.

Thursday's events have affected us all, so I have a few requests for you in the days and weeks ahead:

Please prioritize yourself and your health: take advantage of the support from your loved ones, and do not hesitate to accept the assistance we are preparing and offering you in close collaboration with the Management of Charles University.

Please trust us that we are proceeding in close coordination with the Charles University crisis staff and university management, as well as with the Police of the Czech Republic. We will choose practical and informative steps that we can implement at the moment, for which we have permission and which are (already) feasible for various reasons. Our priority is to be as helpful as possible.

Please keep us updated on your needs and questions. The primary contact channels remain to be those provided by Charles University on <https://cuni.cz/UK-1.html>. Any questions or inquiries about immediate actions at our faculty level that you bring to our attention through these channels are gradually being addressed and will be taken into consideration in our response. You may also use other common communication channels, such as work emails, Teams chats, and work phones, to share your concerns with us. We kindly ask for your understanding, as there may be delays in our responses depending on the priority of each task.

Details outlining the steps to be taken after the New Year and the subsequent course of action will be provided after the completion of the current initial phase of crisis management,

when we are addressing more immediate matters, such as the retrieval of your personal belongings.

Dear colleagues, in the past few hours, I have found myself reflecting repeatedly on the faculty's wish of a Happy New Year for 2024, which we sent to you on Monday, on the quote by the Rector Emeritus of Charles University, Radim Palouš, an alumnus and teacher of our faculty, whose birth anniversary we will commemorate next year. The motto – „To be ready means to keep an open mind“ – takes on profound significance as we reach the end of this week. Mons. Tomáš Halík, in his sermon during yesterday's ecumenical prayer at the The Roman-Catholic Academic Parish of Prague, urged us all to remain open to faith, hope, and love even in and through this dark moment. My thoughts and spirit are with each and every one of you. In the days to come, the Dean's Collegium and I are committed to doing everything within our collective power so that, with faith and hope for healing, we can soon return as an academic community to fulfilling the mission we hold dear.

With respect and best wishes,

Eva Lehečková