Appendix B.

from 15 May 2025

Sumy State University

Interview with Alla Krasulia,Head of the Office for International Cooperation

(Translated from Ukrainian)

Form of data collection: Google Form

Strategic impact and institutional priorities

Q: How has Russia's full-scale invasion affected your university's international priorities and strategies?

A: The full-scale Russian invasion has fundamentally transformed the international priorities and strategies of Sumy State University (SumDU), giving them a new dimension — one of resilience, solidarity, and global partnership in times of crisis. The key impacts can be summarized as follows:

1. Shift from mobility to resilient partnerships

   Before 2022, academic mobility was one of the main directions of international activity. After the outbreak of war, the focus shifted to long-term strategic alliances capable of ensuring the continuity of education, research, and institutional support. As a result, SumDU is actively integrating into European university alliances (such as NEOLAiA and E³UDRES²) as an equal partner, not merely a recipient of support.

2. Internationalization as a tool for survival and development

   Internationalization ceased to be merely a tool for improving education quality — it became a mechanism for ensuring the university's viability. Through partnerships with European universities, SumDU was able to:

   • receive humanitarian and technical aid,

   • continue participating in international projects even during shelling.

3. Priority on digitalization and flexible formats

   The war forced the university to radically revise its approaches to teaching and administration. Digital transformation, COIL (Collaborative Online International Learning), blended, and remote learning became not just modernization options but essential conditions for operation.

4. Academic diplomacy

   SumDU has strengthened its presence on international platforms as a voice of Ukrainian education during wartime, participating in global forums and launching initiatives to integrate Ukrainian universities into programs like Horizon Europe, DAAD, and Erasmus+. Thus, the university has become not only a participant in the international educational space but also an active actor in academic diplomacy.

5. Focus on recovery-oriented research

   The university has increased its involvement in projects aimed at post-war recovery, including medical, digital, and psychological rehabilitation, and strengthening social resilience. This includes participation in Horizon Europe, digital rehabilitation initiatives, and mental health projects.

The full-scale war has transformed SumDU's international activity from a development tool into one of survival, resistance, and leadership. Today, the university is building partnerships based not only on exchanges but on mutual trust, solidarity, and co-creation of the future.

Q: Has the role of internationalization at your university fundamentally changed since the beginning of the war?

A: Since the beginning of the full-scale war, the role of internationalization at Sumy State University (SumDU) has undergone fundamental changes — it has transformed from a tool of academic development into a strategic mechanism of resilience, survival, and global solidarity. The university reoriented its international activity toward building equal partnerships, actively participating in European university alliances and projects, and developing digital and blended formats of cooperation. Internationalization has become a foundation for academic diplomacy, attracting humanitarian and technical support, promoting educational inclusion, and restoring the learning process under crisis conditions. Today, it is not merely a development vector but an integral part of the university's strategy for adaptation, recovery, and co-creation of the future within the European educational space.

Alternative pathways and adaptation

Q: What alternative forms of international activity (virtual mobility, online collaboration, twinning projects, international research) have been implemented at your university? How effective have they been?

A: Since the beginning of the full-scale war, Sumy State University (SumDU) has actively implemented alternative forms of international activity that have enabled the preservation of academic integrity, the continuation of research, and sustained participation in the global educational space. One of the key directions has been virtual mobility and the implementation of COIL projects (Collaborative Online International Learning) with partners from over 15 countries, providing students and faculty access to joint courses, research modules, and workshops.

Within the Erasmus+ and DAAD programs, virtual guest lectures, summer schools, and training sessions were organized, allowing the involvement of foreign experts in the educational process even under restricted mobility conditions. Twinning programs with universities in Liverpool, JAMK, Graz, and others played a significant role — offering not only mentorship and academic support but also assistance in restoring damaged infrastructure.

In parallel, SumDU intensified its participation in international research projects, particularly within Horizon Europe, Erasmus+ KA2, and COST, focusing on topics such as digital rehabilitation, mental health, education in emergencies, and open science.

All these formats proved not only effective but critically important for maintaining educational quality, supporting research capacity, and strengthening the university's international reputation during wartime.

Resilience and psychological support

Q: How has internationalization contributed to the psychological resilience of students and staff (through support networks, symbolic or material solidarity, mental health)?

A: The university's international partners — particularly from the United Kingdom, Finland, Austria, Germany, Latvia, and other countries — created support networks from the first days of the war that became sources of emotional security, a sense of inclusion, and confidence in the future. They organized online meetings, letters of solidarity, informational support, scholarships, and provided humanitarian aid, equipment for remote work, temporary employment for faculty, and opportunities to continue studies or research in a safe environment.

Participation in international initiatives focused on mental health and resilience — such as projects on digital rehabilitation and pedagogy in emergency contexts — not only opened new professional horizons but also provided tools for self-help and psychological support for

colleagues and students. Moreover, regular involvement in international online events, webinars, and joint research projects fostered a sense of normalcy, professional fulfillment, and belonging to the global academic community — which was especially important during periods of isolation, danger, and loss.

Thus, internationalization during wartime transcended its traditional academic context — becoming a space of psychological support, resilience, and human solidarity.

Q: Can you share an example of flexibility or resilience shown by your team or students in supporting international activity during the war?

A: Yes, one of the most striking examples of flexibility and resilience demonstrated by the SumDU team was the restoration of the International Cooperation Office's activities after a direct missile strike that destroyed part of the university's infrastructure, including the office premises. Despite the physical damage, our team resumed work the very next day in a remote format, using personal laptops, mobile internet, and the support of colleagues. Within a few days, online meetings with partners were organized, preparations for the submission of an Erasmus+ project were completed, and several webinars were conducted as part of a partnership with a European university alliance.

Another example is students' participation in COIL projects even during air raid alerts and power outages. Students joined online classes from bomb shelters or with the help of autonomous power sources, showing exceptional motivation, responsibility, and faith in the power of education.

International solidarity and partnerships

Q: What support has your university received from international partners or global educational networks during the war (resources, advocacy, technical assistance)?

A: Partners provided the university with laptops, multifunctional devices, power sources, and other equipment, which enabled the team to quickly resume work after the destruction of the International Cooperation Office. The university received funding for staff and student mobility, participation in conferences, and the implementation of educational and research projects. Partners actively supported SumDU on global platforms — including through publications in Science|Business, presentations at EURIE forums, and participation in joint appeals to the European Commission, calling for the integration of Ukrainian universities into the European research and education space as equal participants. SumDU joined the NEOLAiA and E^3UDRES^2 alliances as an associated partner, which provided access to a broad academic network, training sessions, joint courses, and platforms for inter-university dialogue. Through these networks, we not only receive support but also share our own experience of educational resilience in times of war.

Q: How has participation in consortia (e.g., the Alliance of Ukrainian Universities) contributed to international cooperation and collective response to the challenges of war?

Participation in alliances like NEOLAiA and E³UDRES² significantly strengthened cooperation and collective response. Through these platforms, SumDU accessed shared resources, joint projects, and solidarity. Ukrainian experiences of resistance and adaptation contributed to shaping a common European future.

Q: How have international partnerships supported physical or infrastructural resilience (humanitarian aid, equipment, campus support)?

After a missile destroyed part of the campus, including the international office, partners provided financial, humanitarian, and technical assistance: laptops, multifunctional devices, autonomous power sources, etc.

Educational and cultural diplomacy

Q: How has your university implemented cultural and educational diplomacy strategies through internationalization during the war (promotion of Ukrainian culture, international events, media participation)?

A: During the war, SumDU utilized internationalization as a tool of cultural and educational diplomacy: it organized intercultural events, promoted the Ukrainian language and culture abroad, participated in international conferences and forums (EAIE, EURIE, Science|Business), and actively showcased the university's experience in global media. Participation in the NEOLAiA and E³UDRES² alliances enhanced intercultural dialogue and contributed to amplifying the Ukrainian voice within the European academic space.

Post-war recovery planning

Q: Does your university plan for post-war recovery in the context of internationalization? What strategies are being developed to restore international partnerships and projects?

A: Yes, Sumy State University (SumDU) is actively planning post-war recovery through the lens of internationalization as one of the key drivers of sustainable development. The university views international cooperation not merely as a means of returning to pre-war levels of activity, but as an opportunity to rebuild on new foundations — digital, inclusive, resilient, and partnership-based.

Its strategic priorities include:

- Expanding participation in university alliances (such as NEOLAiA and E³UDRES²) as platforms for joint programs, research, and education;

- Restoring and developing damaged infrastructure with the support of partners (twinning programs, donor support, international reconstruction funds);

- Intensifying joint applications for Erasmus+, Horizon Europe, DAAD, and COST programs, with a focus on educational recovery, digital transformation, and mental health;

- Creating new COIL modules and virtual programs, which will remain relevant beyond the war;

- Institutional diplomacy — participating in international forums and working groups to shape a new architecture of cooperation with Ukraine.

Thus, the university sees post-war internationalization not as a return to the past, but as the construction of a new, more resilient model of international engagement — one centered on partnership, mutual support, and a shared future.

Lessons and recommendations

Q: What key lessons has your university learned about supporting internationalization in times of crisis?

A: Sumy State University (SumDU) has drawn several key lessons on sustaining internationalization during times of crisis, which have formed the foundation of its renewed international cooperation strategy:

- Internationalization is not only about mobility. In crisis conditions, virtual formats of collaboration, joint educational and research projects, and strategic alliances proved especially important in maintaining international engagement despite restrictions on physical movement.

- Strong partnerships = rapid support. Long-term, trust-based relationships with partner universities became a source of humanitarian, technical, and psychological assistance, while also opening new opportunities for faculty and students.

- Flexibility and decentralization are key to survival. The rapid transition of international activities to online formats, delegation of responsibilities across teams, and the ability to

make decisions in new circumstances ensured continuity of cooperation.

- Internationalization has a humanitarian dimension. It became a channel for solidarity, mental health support, truth-telling about the war, and a platform for cultural dialogue.

- Crisis is a space for rethinking. The university recognized the need for a new model of internationalization — one that is more resilient, digital, inclusive, and reciprocal.

These lessons have underpinned a transformation in SumDU's approach to international engagement, enabling the university not only to maintain its position but to actively shape the future within the global academic space.

Q: What recommendations would you give to other educational institutions affected by war or crisis?

A: Based on the experience of Sumy State University, the key recommendations for educational institutions facing war or deep crisis can be summarized as follows:

1. Develop resilient international partnerships before the crisis.

   Trust established during peacetime ensures rapid support in critical moments — from humanitarian aid to inclusion in recovery projects.

2. Invest in digital infrastructure and competencies.

   Preparedness for online education, virtual collaboration formats, and remote administration is essential for ensuring continuity in both academic and international activities.

3. Act transparently, swiftly, and in a coordinated manner.

   Timely decision-making, delegation of authority, and clear internal communication enable effective responses to changing circumstances.

4. Do not underestimate symbolic support.

   Initiatives such as cultural diplomacy, international meetings, forum participation, and media presence help shape the image of a resilient, open, and living university — even under fire.

5. Care for your people.

   Psychological support for students and staff, inclusion in international programs, scholarships, and short-term mobility opportunities are just as important as preserving physical infrastructure.

6. Be part of communities.

   Participation in university alliances, global networks, and joint platforms provides access to resources, amplifies the institution's voice, and creates additional paths to recovery.

Conclusion: Times of crisis are not only moments of loss, but also opportunities for reflection.

Internationalization during war can become more than a form of support — it can serve as a growth point for the university, if approached strategically, openly, and humanely.

Forms of internationalization

Q: How has the war affected the physical mobility of students and staff?

A: The war significantly restricted the physical mobility of students and faculty at Sumy State University (SumDU), but at the same time, it stimulated the emergence of new, more flexible formats of academic engagement.

For students, the main barriers included travel restrictions for men of conscription age, logistical challenges, security risks, and emotional fatigue. Despite this, some students took advantage of opportunities for temporary study abroad through Erasmus+ and twinning partnerships, as well as participated in short-term visits, summer schools, and internships supported by partner universities.

For faculty, mobility became more selective and purpose-driven — often tied to training programs, project activities, or participation in international forums. Many trips focused not only on teaching but also on sharing Ukrainian experiences, mobilizing support, and rebuilding partnerships.

The university adapted to these constraints by shifting its focus to virtual and blended mobility — particularly through COIL (Collaborative Online International Learning), online guest lectures, joint courses, and research collaborations. This allowed SumDU to maintain an international academic presence despite physical isolation.

While the war reduced the volume of physical mobility, it also catalyzed the development of alternative formats that made international engagement more accessible and inclusive.

Q: What types of virtual mobility were implemented (COIL, virtual Erasmus programs)? How effective were they compared to physical mobility?

A: During the war, Sumy State University implemented various forms of virtual mobility, including COIL projects with universities from Europe and Africa, participation in Erasmus+ virtual programs for students and faculty, as well as online lectures, webinars, and summer schools. These formats proved effective under conditions of restricted movement: they ensured access to international engagement, fostered the development of digital and intercultural competencies, and maintained the university's academic presence on the international stage. While virtual mobility cannot fully replace physical exchange, it has become a resilient and scalable tool that the university continues to integrate into its hybrid model of internationalization.

Q: How have academic programs been adapted to preserve or strengthen the international component (new English-taught programs, joint/double degrees)?

A: Thanks to partnerships with European universities, foreign lecturers are involved in academic programs, and short-term modules with international certification are being developed, aligning with the microcredentials approach.

Q: Has your university implemented elements of "Internationalization at Home" during the full-scale invasion? How exactly?

A: COIL projects, guest lectures by foreign professors, international online seminars, and certified courses were integrated into the academic programs. The university also supported the development of intercultural competence through open events and cultural exchanges. These initiatives provided students with access to high-quality international experiences without the need to travel abroad, helping to preserve the global dimension of education even during wartime.

Q: Have international research projects been preserved or expanded? Has the war affected their topic or format?

A: Yes, despite the war, Sumy State University has preserved — and even expanded — its participation in international research projects, adapting their themes and formats to the new realities. The university has continued its active involvement in programs such as Horizon Europe, Erasmus+ KA2, COST, and DAAD, focusing on areas that have become especially relevant during wartime: digital transformation of education, mental health, institutional resilience, open science, and digital rehabilitation.

The format of project implementation has also changed — most research collaboration has shifted to remote or hybrid formats, ensuring continuity of work under security constraints. At

the same time, Ukraine's wartime experience and adaptation bring unique added value to these projects, particularly in the context of studying crisis response, institutional resilience, and humanitarian relevance.

Thus, the war has not halted SumDU's international scientific cooperation — it has reoriented it toward new challenges, making the Ukrainian academic perspective an important part of the European research landscape.

Q: Which form of internationalization proved to be the most resilient at your university during the war? Which was the least resilient? Please rank the forms of internationalization in your institution from most resilient (5) to most vulnerable (1) and explain your choice.

A:

5 — Institutional partnerships: Formed the foundation for supporting other forms of internationalization, ensuring rapid assistance and continuity of cooperation.

4 — International research: Maintained and reoriented toward relevant topics such as resilience, digitalization, and mental health.

3 — Internationalization at home: Accessible, scalable, and integrated into the academic process.

2 — Virtual mobility: Effective, but dependent on technical capacity and psychological conditions.

1 — Physical mobility: The most limited due to security, logistical, and legal barriers.