

**Inaugural Speech of the New President of IDS, Stefano Aloe
Nagoya, Japan, 25 August 2023**

Dear Friends and Colleagues!

It is an incredible honor to become president of IDS. In these complex and tragic times, it is both an honor and a burden. Dostoevsky's name is being used and quoted by many, often inappropriately, but this is almost inevitable, for Dostoevsky is an icon and powerful symbol of modernity. One of the most powerful of our era.

Our task as philologists and Dostoevsky specialists from around the world, members of IDS, is to study our writer's legacy in a scholarly manner, and to exchange opinions, ideas, and methods of analysis. To share our cultural backgrounds, traditions, approaches. Our FMD is a Russian writer, and he is also more than that – he is a writer and thinker of global significance.

To think about this in the midst of a brutal war is by no means simple. Each of us has our own opinion about what is happening; each of us feels emotional, moral, rational, and often personal, everyday pain and worry on account of the ongoing situation. Four years ago in Boston, passports didn't matter to us; we lived in a friendly world, and today the countries we belong to are either friends or not friends with each other. Incredible, and yet so it is.

My personal position is known to many, and is in no way a secret, as I have repeatedly expressed it publicly since the very first days of the war. It can be briefly summarized as follows: I call what is happening an act of aggression on the part of the Russian Federation towards Ukraine; I consider this action a tragic mistake, yielding terrible disasters not only for the population of Ukraine, but also for the inhabitants of Russia and the whole world.

But I realize that the personal opinion of the president cannot and should not be the general position of the Society. There are differing opinions, and complicating factors that prevent many from expressing themselves freely. As a community of esteemed and mutually respectful colleagues and scholars, we have an obligation to seek dialogue, to trust in the power of dialogue instead of rallying for or against a particular position.

This need for dialogue should not be confused with easy ways out; we are not talking about moral relativism here, as if all positions were equally valid; we won't say that everyone is equally right, or that no one is. But there is a common right to an opinion, and a common interest in understanding other people's opinions. This is the Dostoevskian way!

Dostoevsky's teaching is to give sincere attention to the views of others, to

strive for humanism and mutual understanding, to embrace doubt as a principle of thought, while retaining firmness in one's own moral convictions...

I would like to follow the example of Carol Apollonio, who was a wonderful president: she was always able, in these difficult years, to find helpful ground for dialogue and fair compromise between different points of view, which was far from easy... I think Carol succeeded not only because of her brilliant aptitude and honest soul, but also because of the teachings of Dostoevsky, and a profound awareness of the history and spirit of our Society.

We should not forget how and when the IDS was born. The history of IDS is its DNA. The idea was first discussed in 1968 in Prague, at the Congress of Slavists, and was realized in 1971 with the cooperation of outstanding Dostoevsky scholars from different countries, under the conditions of the Cold War. The founders of IDS were mostly Russian emigrants and Western Russianists. But regardless of the affiliations of most of the Society's founders, the constant in its history has been a wise, gradual, continual, patient endeavor to create connections, to maintain contact and cooperation, to make peace; in other words, to build bridges for the future, for those times when it will be possible again to live in peace and harmony.

The founders of IDS were proven right. When the Cold War ended, the IDS was already a Society not only of Western but also of Soviet Dostoevsky scholars, to the mutual enrichment of all. There was room for everyone, various ideological positions notwithstanding. The Society heralded peace. So will it be for our future, and soon, we hope.

Dostoevsky belongs to no one; he belongs to everyone and to all. None of us has the right to impose our own exclusive and unambiguous Dostoevsky on others. All of us have the right to offer our reasoned opinions, our scholarly analyses, our conclusions about the writer, about his work and ideas, for cooperative discussion, argument, growth, and mutual enrichment.

Not in Dostoevsky's name, but with the help of his genius and legacy, we will, with our International Dostoevsky Society, continue the great endeavor of unraveling the mystery of the Human Being.

Stefano ALOE