



June 7, 2012

Anthony W. Marx
President, The New York Public Library
476 Fifth Avenue, Room 213
New York, NY 10018-2788

Dear Mr. Marx,

I write to you in my role as President of the Association for Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies (ASEEES, formerly AAASS). ASEEES, a nonprofit, non-political, scholarly society, is the leading private organization in the world dedicated to the advancement of knowledge about the former Soviet Union, Eurasia, and Eastern and Central Europe. ASEEES supports teaching, research, and publication relating to the peoples and territories within this area. The Slavic and Baltic and other divisions at the New York Public Library have, in turn, supported much of that research and teaching over the years. We are proud to say that the New York Public Library is now an institutional member of ASEEES.

I and fellow members of our association have been following the recent flurry of letters and articles in the press concerning the Central Library Plan to renovate the library's landmark main building at Fifth Avenue and 42nd St. Some have sent letters to you directly and many more have signed the petition now circulating on line at <http://www.change.org/petitions/president-marx-reconsider-the-350-million-plan-to-remake-nyc-s-landmark-central-library>. I am also aware of recent letters and meetings with key members of our field(s) that suggest many promising trends.

On behalf of the entire membership of ASEEES, I want to express our support for continued maintenance of the collections in our areas, including preservation, cataloguing, and "discoverability." To the extent that the bulk of materials of interest to our scholars can remain on-site, we believe this will be of the most benefit. As you state in your response of May 16, 2012 to the signatories of Joan Scott's earlier letter to you, "under any scenario, the majority of those [books now in the stacks] will remain on-site, in addition to the millions of items in archival and special collections that will stay where they are." All of this is good news for scholars.

Beyond the collections, there remains a major concern particularly for our organization in the area of staff. For several years now, my colleagues and other interested members of the public have mourned the closure of the Slavic and Baltic Division Reading Room, a space that gave legitimacy and continues to hold great nostalgic value for many. Even more important, however, is the corresponding impact of the elimination of staff support for what is one of the most important collections of Slavic research materials in the world. As you know, there has been no full-time curator since 2008. I remind you of an incident related by Scott Sherman in his November 30, 2011 article in *The Nation* when a visiting scholar was called into the closed stacks to retrieve a book because no librarian present could read Cyrillic. We commend the hiring of a part-time curator in the figure of Stephan Corrsin, who is also a member of our organization. And we are pleased to learn from other members that you and your representatives have agreed to meet with scholars in our field(s). These are, we hope, just the first steps in your strong response to a serious need.

As Sherman also points out, citing from Phyllis Dain's 1972 history of the NYPL, the very first book requested from the library stacks in 1911 was a study of Nietzsche and Tolstoy *written in Russian*. We lend our voices to the call for a firm commitment to rehire staff in the area of Slavic, East European, and

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Eurasian studies, a staff that could recognize that first-ordered book on the shelf and recommend it to your visitors from around the world. We understand that this decision might need to be made in conjunction with fundraising, and urge you to mark this as the highest priority. Furthermore, we hope that you can make the decision to preserve access to and expertise on these materials in plain sight, in a consultative and collaborative way. This legacy is too important to let wither.

Thank you for your attention.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Judith Kornblatt". The signature is written in black ink on a white background.

Judith Deutsch Kornblatt

President, ASEES

Professor and Chair, Department of Slavic Languages and Literature, University of Wisconsin-Madison