

Germany Freezes Upgrade of Scientific Cooperation with Georgia

By Liza Mchedlidze

The German Federal Ministry of Education and Research has suspended plans to enhance scientific cooperation with Georgia, German Ambassador Peter Fischer announced today, February 26. The decision impacts student mobility programs, research collaborations, and Georgia's involvement in EU-funded educational initiatives.

Fischer highlighted the significance of the freeze, noting that many Georgians who studied at German universities, often with German scholarships, would feel the loss. The suspension follows concerns over "Georgia's curbs on academic freedom and the halt of EU accession," he stated.

Despite the freeze, existing German financial support for education in Georgia, amounting to nearly one million euros, remains unaffected. The DAAD scholarships, which primarily support graduates, doctoral candidates, and post-graduate students, are also not impacted at this stage. However, Fischer warned that "Germany is monitoring and reviewing all aspects of relationships with Georgia with regret."

Georgian Education Minister Aleksandre Tsuladze responded to Fischer's remarks, stating that the decision does not impact any existing pro-



grams and applies only to a future cooperation project that had not yet begun. He emphasized that exchange programs, joint research projects, and scholarship opportunities remain unaffected. According to Tsuladze, the German ambassador's statement misrepresents the situation, as it refers only to discussions between the two ministries that were still in the preparatory stage.

Tsuladze also questioned the timing of the announcement, pointing out that the decision was based on a letter from the German education minister dated February 20 — the minister's last working day before leaving office. He expressed surprise that such a decision was made at the last moment, claiming it was intended to leave an unclear legacy for the incoming German government and create unnecessary tension in relations between the two countries.

The minister reiterated that there is no threat to ongoing German-Georgian educational collaborations and insisted that the suspension of discussions on future cooperation should not be misinterpreted as a broader shift in academic relations. He reassured that projects such as the DAAD scholarships would continue without interruption and that Georgia remains committed to maintaining strong educational ties with Germany.

UK Reduces Cooperation with Georgian Government Over Use of Force

By Liza Mchedlidze



During a debate in the House of Commons, UK Minister of State for Europe Stephen Doughty expressed concern over the use of force against peaceful demonstrators in Georgia. He condemned the actions of the Georgian authorities and outlined the UK's response, which includes reducing cooperation with the ruling Georgian Dream party.

"I am deeply concerned about the use of force by the Georgian authorities against peaceful demonstrators and journalists, which is completely unacceptable. In response, we have suspended aid to the Georgian government, restricted defence cooperation and reduced our engagement with the Georgian Dream. We have imposed visa bans and sanctions on those responsible for the violence and continue to work to support civil society and the media," Doughty stated.

The discussion also touched on potential sanctions against Bidzina Ivanishvili, the founder of Georgian Dream, whose assets are held in the UK and overseas territories. When asked whether the UK would join its allies in freezing Ivanishvili's assets, Doughty declined to comment in advance, stating that such discussions would weaken the impact of any future sanctions.

"In cooperation with the US, the UK has imposed sanctions against the Home Secretary and Deputy Home Secretary, as well as three police officers responsible for the violence. As we continue to closely monitor the situation in Georgia, we are not commenting on potential sanctions, as this would dilute their impact," he added.

The News in Brief

PREPARED BY MESSENGER STAFF

Zourabichvili Publishes Plan for New Elections

In a recent post on social media, Georgia's fifth President, Salome Zourabichvili, outlined a comprehensive plan for new elections aimed at improving the

democratic process in the country. The plan includes several key steps to ensure fair, transparent, and inclusive elections.

According to the information shared by Zourabichvili, the plan begins with the establishment of conditions necessary for free and fair elections. This will involve creating a level playing field where all political forces can participate without hindrances. The next step in her plan focuses on preparing an "army" of election

commissions and observers, ensuring that elections are monitored closely at every level.

Zourabichvili emphasized the importance of protecting the new elections from fraud and to address this, she highlighted the role of international partners in providing support and oversight, which would help mitigate any risks of electoral malpractice.

Another crucial element of her plan is coordination between various political forces.

Zourabichvili believes that open dialogue and cooperation are essential to maintaining political stability and trust during the election process.

The plan also features a unified election program Georgian Charter. This program lays out several key priorities, including the release of political prisoners, the repeal of a controversial Russian law, and the restoration of a fair judicial system.

Freedom House Report: Georgia's Democracy Score Declines

Georgia's political rights at 21 out of 40 and civil liberties at 34 out of 60. While the country continues to hold regular, competi-

government remains a concern, and media freedom is under threat due to intimidation and pressure against journalists.



According to the latest report by the international organization Freedom House, Georgia remains classified as a "partly free" country, with a score of 55 out of 100 — a three-point drop from the previous year.

Freedom House assessed

elections and maintains an active media and civil society, significant challenges persist.

The report highlights ongoing oligarchic influence in political processes, noting that opposition figures frequently face physical attacks. Corruption within the

Additionally, Freedom House points to widespread election-related violence, stating that security forces in Georgia, along with those in ten other countries, employed disproportionate force against protesters.

Infographic titled 'გეგმა ახალი არჩევნები' (Plan for New Elections) with 5 numbered points in Georgian.

Russian war against Ukraine: Europol establishes Target Group on Sanctions

Europol, the EU's Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation, has established a dedicated Target Group on Sanctions within its European Financial and Economic Crime Centre (EFECC). The Group will serve as a central hub for sanction-related investigations.

This initiative will improve the tracking of illicit financial flows and asset seizures, ensuring a more coordinated response to sanctions evasion.

EFECC has already provided extensive analytical and operational support, cross-checking



intelligence against Europol's databases and coordinating efforts between law enforcement agencies, customs authorities, asset recovery offices and financial intelligence units.

The investigations on sanctions circumvention are implemented as part of 'Operation OSCAR'. Launched on 11 April 2022, Operation OSCAR was established by Europol to strengthen financial investigations into assets linked to sanctioned individuals and entities following Russia's invasion of Ukraine. A total of 44 partners, including Eurojust and Frontex, are actively involved. By facilitating intelligence exchange, supporting financial investigations and enhancing international cooperation, Operation OSCAR enforces EU sanctions and combats financial crime.

To date, Europol has received more than 300 operational contributions in over 90 separate investigations developed as part of the operation.

(euneighbourseast.eu)

Weather

Thursday, February 27

Day Partly Cloudy

High: 3°C

Night Clear

Low: -4°C

Friday, February 28

Day Clear

High: 6°C

Night Partly Cloudy

Low: -3°C

published by The Messenger

43, Chovelidze st., Tbilisi, 0108, Georgia

Founded by Prof. Zaza Gachechiladze

Tamar Gachechiladze Publisher

Mob.: +995 599 565621; +995 577 760000 E-mail: messenger@messenger.com.ge http://www.messenger.com.ge/

Nino Metreveli Commercial Director

Mariam Mchedlidze Editor-in-Chief

Khatuna Gogichaishvili Layout Designer, Photographer

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