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SHOTA RUSTAVELI NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION OF GEORGIA
INTERNATIONALIZATION STRATEGY

CONNECTING GEORGIAN SCIENCE TO THE WORLD

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GENERAL OBJECTIVES

Over the past 20 years, the higher education system of Georgia has undergone a significant transformation. The country has undertaken a number of reforms aimed at transforming the post-soviet education system and creating a new system in order to come in line with rapidly changing global demands and become competitive internationally. Since Georgia's independence (after 1991), the development of science, has slowed down significantly, due to the collapse of the existing system and the slow development of the new science management system. Georgia is in the low level of research funding group of countries. In fact, funding research in Georgia is very low. Recent years Georgia gradually increases R&D expenditure from 0.08 % in 2013 to 0.32% in 2021 of GDP.

Shota Rustaveli National Science Foundation of Georgia was established in 2010 and the main goal of the organization is to develop science in Georgia. In this context, the internationalization of scientific collaborations is an important component in the evaluation criteria for almost all grant programs. Besides, SRNSFG implements several programs to enhance the internationalization of Georgian science:

- Call for Joint Research Programme of the SRNSFG and the University of Oxford - Georgian Studies Research Programme.
- SRNSFG and Forschungszentrum - Joint Programme for Master and PhD Students.
- Joint call of the French National Center for Scientific Research and SRNSFG – International Programme for Scientific Cooperation.
- Call for supporting Georgian Scientists' participation in the EU framework programme for Research and Innovation "Horizon 2020".
- Scholarship Program of SRNSFG and German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD).
- Joint call for proposals by the SRNSFG and the Scientific and Technological Research Council of Turkey (TUBITAK).
- International Programs for scientific cooperation of The National Center for Scientific Research of France (CNRS) and SRNSFG.
- Joint Call of SRNSFG and National Research Council of Italy (CNR).
- Research with participation of compatriots residing abroad (DI).
- Joint call of SRNSFG and Science and Technology Center in Ukraine (STCU) in the frame of Targeted Research and Development Initiatives (TRDI) Program.
- Programs for mobility and international scientific collaboration.

Currently, existing challenges within the Georgian scientific landscape have a significant impact on the future development of international collaborations. Georgian young scientists are less active in scientific grant competitions. Applicants who have defended their dissertation in the last 7 years are eligible to participate in the Young Scientists Research Funding Competition of SRNSFG. According to the National Statistics Office of Georgia, the total number of young scientists who obtained doctoral academic degree in 2014-2020 is 2933, however, only one thousand applicants participated at the Young Scientists Research Funding Call in 2021-2022. Therefore, one central objective is to attract and integrate younger researchers into science.

STRATEGY

SUPPORTING KEY POLICIES OF EU-GEORGIA COOPERATION AND ASSOCIATION AGREEMENT

On December 7, 2021, the European Commission and Georgia have signed the agreement granting Georgia the association status to Horizon Europe, the EU's research and innovation programme (2021-2027). Georgian researchers, innovators, and research entities can participate in the €95.5 billion programme, under the same conditions as entities from the EU Member States. It is necessary to implement the appropriate strategy and action plan to use these opportunities. Accordingly, the promoting Georgian Researchers in Horizon Europe is the key direction of SRNSFG internationalization strategy and action plan.

Description of objectives

Deepening the integration of Georgia in the European Research Area is essential for the development of Georgian research potential. In this context, the objectives are:

- To develop SRNSFG policy by considering Commission's plan for a new ERA based on excellence.
- To strengthen the mobility of Georgian researchers and scientific groups by announcing special grant calls and funding the mobility component.
- To participate in Horizon Europe grant calls/Institutional engagement of SRNSFG
- To foster the uptake of European research policy developments in the national agenda setting and to promote relevant initiatives (e.g. ERA, Missions, Partnerships, Green Deal, etc.).
- To engage in mutual learning processes with European partner organizations and to adopt best practice in research policy and management.
- To make Georgian programmes, equivalent to the Horizon Europe, accessible for the EU relevant scientific and research units (reciprocity principle).
- To open opportunities for the Georgian research community to participate in European programmes and consortia as well as to support a sustainable development of the capacity and capability of the Georgian research system.
- To develop the national support organization for Georgian participation in European Programmes ("Georgian Horizon Europe Office").
- To deeper connect Black Sea societies through a bridge of new knowledge, technologies and services.

POTENTIAL ACTIVITY AREAS:

- To foster Georgian participation in Horizon EU Missions, Partnerships.
- To elaborate new mobility schemes for Georgian researchers.
- To enhance the capacity of Georgian Horizon Europe Office (e.g. Trainings, exchange platforms, matchmaking events etc.).
- To identify new specific activity areas for SRNSFG in the context of Horizon Europe and design new project proposal for Horizon Europe grant calls.
- To adjust regulatory documents by following reciprocity principle.
- To foster collaboration with the Black Sea region countries, by the means of Fostering Blue Growth Initiative for Black Sea Research and Innovation (e.g. Via joint conferences, agreements, joint calls).
- To disseminate targeted information among Georgian researchers and innovators regarding EU funding programs

via appropriate communication platforms.

- To organize and participate in the specific targeted trainings, workshops, webinars and other related capacity building activities for Georgian ncps.
- To engage with relevant Georgian stakeholders and to deliberate implementation of ERA Policy Agenda (e.g. Edification of different target groups, building of thematic platforms etc.).
- To allocate budget and to join actively Horizon Europe Partnerships (to join EU consortia).
- To mobilize financial resources to ensure Georgia's involvement in different. Partnership schemes and initiatives as well as to facilitate maximum connection and linkage of the Georgian R&D landscape with the EU research and innovation area.
- To actively take part in EU funded NCP initiatives, to build up networks and to exchange ideas in specific research area.
- To choose Horizon Europe topics and type of action relevant for the Georgian researchers' community.
- To train in proposal writing and to assist Georgian partners in the search of suitable international research organisations for building a consortium (e.g. Advices concerning data bases, exchange platforms and events).
- To strengthen the exchange between contact points of the EU funding programmes where Georgia is involved (including the Ministry and NCP office).
- To initiate information campaigns and awareness raising meetings for Georgian scholars.
- To assist the establishment of a strong NCP network at national level.
- To actively support Georgian NCP network by actively participating in events, roundtables, discussions, workshops and other initiated activities.

FOSTERING INTERNATIONAL MOBILITY AND JOINT RESEARCH

DESCRIPTION OF OBJECTIVES:

The goal of SRNSFG towards international networking is to improve the professional development of researchers, to accelerate the process of scientific discovery through the exchange of research results and ideas and to prepare and enable researchers for multi-team international collaborations. SRNSFG's funding programs seek to support researchers by providing them different mobility opportunities for their further career and research development.

SUPPORTING MOBILITY

With the aim of boosting Georgian scientists' capacities, SRNSFG in collaboration with relevant stakeholders will elaborate mobility programs for various Georgian researchers' academic levels.

JOINT RESEARCH PROGRAMMES

Cooperation between Georgian and international funds with the aim to support joint research activities (incl. mobility) of Georgian researchers and their counterparts abroad will be strengthened and the establishment of new collaboration groups with selected partners will be encouraged. In this way, the integration of Georgian research in the global research ecosystem is fostered.

POTENTIAL ACTIVITY AREAS

SRNSFG aims to support existing bilateral cooperations and to identify new partner organizations on the international level. The establishment of new collaboration schemes includes the preparation of concepts based on a bottom-up process (exchange with the target group regarding their needs), the implementation of a pilot phase and the evaluation for the following programs:

- Mobility programs with appropriate duration for different career stages.
- Joint research programmes with partner organization abroad.
- Networking grants (incl. Conference grants).

Furthermore, SRNSFG will expand opportunities of Georgian research community to participate in joint international research activities by providing trainings and advice for suitable calls.

DEVELOPING THE NETWORK OF PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS

DESCRIPTION OF OBJECTIVES

A strong international partnership has the potential to lead the ground for new research networks and collaborations. It will give the chance to widening the opportunities for international collaboration of Georgian scientists. By mutual learning, best practice exchange, SRNSFG will enhance its capacity and gain organizational development (e.g. better exchange with the international community, access to international infrastructures like databases etc.).

One of the objectives of SRNSFG is to collaborate with partner organizations, which offer opportunity to implement joint policy development, mutual learning, joint research, fellowships, internships, Georgian studies and other areas of mutual interest.

POTENTIAL ACTIVITY AREAS

- To initiate new cooperation initiatives in R&I, e.g. New mobility programs, joint research programs.
- To be engaged in foreign policy activities: In addition, to being a science funding organization, one of the Foundation's objectives research policy developments. In this regard, SRNSFG aims to promote the strengthening of the scientific policy dialogue with the countries of the region in accordance with the Black Sea Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda (SRIA) in the formulation of maritime policies and programs. As research and innovation are the key of sustainable and ecologically clean "blue" growth, creating network and cooperating with Black sea regions countries science foundations is highly important aspect for SRNSFG. Supporting the development of Black Sea research in the format of regional cooperation will be a contributing factor to the implementation of the SRIA.
- Furthermore, SRNSFG aims at enhancing the involvement in the activities of International Science and Technology Center (ISTC) (e.g. Via governing boards, conferences).

PROMOTING OPEN SCIENCE

DESCRIPTION OF OBJECTIVES

Open Science has the potential of making the scientific process more transparent and inclusive. It has a crucial role for science, technology and innovation, to address gaps in a more effective manner and to enable a broad access to science by researchers as well as the society.

Open Science is defined as an inclusive construct that combines various movements and practices aiming to make multilingual scientific knowledge openly available, accessible and reusable for everyone, to increase scientific collaborations, sharing of information for the benefits of science and society, and to open the processes of scientific knowledge creation, evaluation and communication to societal actors beyond the traditional scientific community.

Output of research activities generated using public resources should be made available to the public free of charge.

The policy of Open Science represents one of the priorities of the European Union. The financial supporting programmes of research and innovation of Open Science are based on an established standard, which is oriented to the progress of quality, effectiveness and outcomes of the research. The spread of new knowledge is the main goal of the Open Science, for which European Union carries out the range of activities with the aim of accessibility to the scientific

production (research, innovation), including: Promotion of the accessibility to the scientific research and R&I data; assistance of the academic community, entrepreneurial and public sector, and citizens' involvement in the process of creating research and innovations.

ELEMENTS OF OPEN SCIENCE ARE:

- Existence of Open data based on Fair Principle.
- The implementation of European Open Science Cloud.
- Setting new generation measurement (indicator based).
- Scientific communication based on Open Science principals.
- Assistance of scientific carrier based on Open Science principals.
- The protection safety, reliability and reproducibility standards.
- Capacity building of researchers to adapt to the Open Science principals.
- To promote citizen science.

Georgia is actively collaborating with the European Open Science Cloud and directly involved in the process of the elaboration of Open Science policy and the creation of Open Science Cloud, which is the one of mandatory precondition of Georgia's scientific society integration in European Research Area.

POTENTIAL ACTIVITY AREAS:

- Promoting the involvement of representatives of the scientific-research and wider university community (including academic, administrative staff and students) in the development of the national policy of Open Science bottom-up approach) and the European Open Science Cloud and the implementation of the action plan (2023-2030).
- Integrating Open Science into the funding programmes of the Foundation, including the principle of Open Science as one of the criteria for evaluating grant projects, promotion of grant projects based on the principles of Open Science; development and implementation of a mechanism for encouraging research associated with the European Open Science Cloud.
- Developing and implementing calls supporting Open Science within the framework of the Open Science promotion programmes.
- Promoting the creation, processing, gathering and open access to searchable, accessible, interoperable and reusable scientific materials (research data, research results, publications, etc.).
- Promoting the activities of European Open Science Cloud supporting communities in higher educational and scientific research institutions.
- To raise awareness on Open Science principles among the scientific communities by appropriate means (trainings, conference, lectures).
- Promotion of commercialization of research and databases based on the principles of Open Science.
- Support of publications of Georgian scientists in scientific journals compatible with the European Open Science Cloud.
- Support of international cooperation within the framework of Open Science.
- Cooperation with European Open Science Cloud National Supervisory Board and Open Science Support Groups and facilitating their activities.
- To participate in the establishment of the monitoring of Open Science.
- To participate in the creation of a national platform of Open Science and to encourage relevant activities.

- Supporting initiatives in the direction of integration of Georgian scientific research infrastructure with European Open Science Cloud.
- Promoting the development of citizen science within the framework of the Open Science Support Program.

IMPROVE CONNECTION OF RESEARCHERS & INDUSTRY

DESCRIPTION OF OBJECTIVES

- **Strengthen cooperation between science and business with international partners by the means of Networks/Brokerage**

As main research funding organization, Foundation shall assume the responsibility to facilitate the networking with international partners. In this regard SRNSFG will actively disseminate information about the open/forthcoming calls (under Horizon Europe, other EU calls), various funding instruments and partnership initiatives among Georgian scientists, researchers and innovators to foster inter-sectoral cooperation.

- **Transfer: Strengthening the support structures at university level for cooperation and technology transfer with international partners**

- SRNSFG will play a key networking role between academia and the innovative sectors with suitable international partners

- SRNSFG will sign the agreement with the Universities to support technology transfer units by active promotion and participation in relevant events dedicated on innovation development.

- SRNSFG will assist in the formal procedures including obtaining endorsement letters, participation in policy dialogues and etc.

- **Funding instruments: To adjust and develop funding instruments to reach out to the international science and business community**

- Reciprocity principle will be enhanced that would enable foreign partners from academia as well as industry to participate in Georgian calls and follow EU funding initiatives.

- **Funding instruments: To fully exploit funding instruments of the EU (e.g. Horizon Europe, Erasmus+, European Universities Activities)**

- The Foundation is committed to collect information about and participate in relevant calls, which enhance science business linkage.

- SRNSFG has a keen interest to connect relevant business companies and consortia. With the aim to follow association agreement, Georgian scientific organizations are fully entitled to participate in EU calls as well as Euraxess Georgia Network that will promote Georgian individual scholars to access relevant calls and career development possibilities.

POTENTIAL ACTIVITY AREAS

Strengthen cooperation between science and business with international partners

- **Initiate and organize brokerage events at national level.**

- To raise awareness among Georgian scientific communities and private sector with regard of possible collaboration perspectives at national and international level.

- To disseminate information about potential international partners.

- **Find suitable international (funding) partners (best members of the EU or associated).**
 - To apply for targeted partnership requests – offer for participation in consortia with the aim to jointly implement R&D projects.
- Find suitable brokerage events at international level.
 - To boost the chance of networking with international partners.
- **Mobilize the Georgian research and innovation community via regularly sharing relevant information regarding possible participation in international brokerage events.**
 - To encourage Georgian research units to actively engage in the international cooperation.
- **Funding the participation in brokerage events at international level, e.g. EEN, EC.**
 - To provide travel costs for motivated stakeholders from academia and private sector to take part in brokerage events abroad.
- **Organize bilateral brokerage events with one selected international partner responsible for technology transfer and innovation.**
 - As funding organization to take initiative as one of the key players in terms of networking between local and foreign partners.
- **To set up a national platform for relevant political, science and business stakeholders (e.g. funding organizations, chamber of commerce, NCP, research institutes, service offices and other business companies..) to share knowledge on different national and international developments as well as collaboration possibilities between academia and the private sectors.**
- **To incentivize the setting up of national platform; to engage relevant organizations in Georgia and boost inter-connectivity.**

ENHANCING SCIENCE DIPLOMACY BY ENGAGING GEORGIAN DIASPORA FOR THE COUNTRY'S SCIENCE ECOSYSTEM DEVELOPMENT

DESCRIPTION OF OBJECTIVES

Many of Georgian researchers performing abroad are playing an important role for development of science diplomacy as a soft power to connect nations and creating good will on which diplomatic relations can be built. Due to their endeavours, scientific bridges are being built, that serve as the pathways for joint research activities of scientists in Georgia and the diaspora. In this way, Georgian science is able to tap the potential of renowned Georgian scientists abroad to foster the development of the science system in Georgia.

Some of Georgian researchers represent science diplomats as they make every effort to foster communication among people and scientific communities and make valuable contribution to the development of science diplomacy fruitful relations between Georgia and partner countries abroad.

One of the objectives of the Foundation is to create many possibilities of connections with Georgian scientific diaspora with the aim to use their intellectual potential for country's science ecosystem development, with following aims:

- To share the best practice in research and research policy
- To create sustainable connections between the Georgian diaspora and Georgian policy makers as well as the Georgian research and innovation communities for mutual benefit
- To stimulate the internationalization process with support of science diplomacy
- To create new bridges for potential collaborations among nations
- To support European values and principles in the R&D collaboration (e.g., research ethics)
- Potential activity areas
- To announce special target call for research with the participation of compatriots residing abroad to establish close, professional relations between Georgian scientific staff and successful compatriot-scientists working in foreign scientific and research centers and to use their scientific potential and experience.
- To disseminate information about SRNSFG grant calls as they are eligible and accessible for diaspora.
- To create virtual network with the aim to disseminate information, share knowledge, get recommendations and best practice.
- To organize conferences, roundtables, seminars within the virtual network.
- To train (supported by European partners) the Georgian research and innovation community as well as Georgian policymakers and diplomats how to use science diplomacy tools.

TAKING FORWARD THE PLAN

GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS

The implementation of the strategy will be conducted in close coordination between SRNSFG and the MoES at the top management level. Overall responsibility at SRNSFG rests with the Head of the International Relations and Fundraising Office. For each pillar of the strategy an individual working group will be set up, consisting of participants from the relevant departments at SRNSFG plus representatives from external stakeholders if appropriate.

MONITORING ARRANGEMENTS

The progress in implementing the strategy will be assessed at regular intervals, at least once a year with a report to the top management.