

Professor Jaba Samushia, General Director,
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cc: Mikheil Chkhenkeli,
Minister of Education and Science of Georgia
pr@mes.gov.ge

22 September 2022

Dear Prof. Samushia:

We the undersigned have served as outside evaluators of grant proposals submitted to the Shota Rustaveli National Science Foundation of Georgia. Many of us have participated in this process in previous years, including last year's competition, which was administered by the European Science Foundation (ESF).

Earlier this year, thirteen projects submitted in 2021, which we and our colleagues evaluated, were awarded funding by the Rustaveli Foundation. The recipients of these grants were, however, refused access to their research funds on purely procedural grounds by a newly-formed "directorate" of the Georgian National Museum (GNM) system. This directorate comprises the general director of the GNM, Prof. David Lortkipanidze, who supported funding the 13 projects, and four newly-appointed members — of which only one is a professional historical or social scientist — who voted against him. Although most of the grants were eventually allowed access to funding, in the face of protests by Georgian and foreign researchers, one remains blocked.

We also note with concern the dismissals and demotions of dozens of staff members at the Janashia Museum of Georgia and the Amiranashvili Museum of Fine Arts, and obstruction in the issuance of permits to archaeological expeditions.

The majority of the researchers who were dismissed from the GNM had been awarded grants from the Rustaveli Foundation. It is important to note that these scholars have been unable to carry out the research specified in the grant proposals, due to denial of access to Museum collections. Even though the dismissed scientists wrote an official letter to the GNM directorate requesting the right to enter the collections to continue their research, they still have not received a response. The Georgian National Museum is a public entity, and therefore, any Georgian citizen has the right to enter the GNM collections for the purposes of conducting scholarly research.

Our participation in the proposal-review process is motivated by our firm belief that Georgian research in the natural, social and historical sciences should be assessed according to the same standards as those obtaining in Europe, the Americas and elsewhere; and that decisions regarding the funding of projects and the employment of researchers should be based on the merits of the projects and individuals concerned, rather than their political loyalties or opinions on government policies.

In view of the above-mentioned events, among others that have occurred since the appointment of the new minister of culture last year, we will closely follow the fate of the grant proposals we will evaluate in the upcoming Rustaveli Foundation competition, and in general, the situation of our colleagues at the various institutions of the Georgian National Museum system.

Sincerely,

Kevin Tuite, professor of anthropology, Université de Montréal

Florian Mühlfried, professor of anthropology, Ilia State University

Paul Manning, Professor of Anthropology, Trent University, Canada

Antony Eastmond, Professor of Art History, Courtauld Institute of Art, University of London

Donald Rayfield, Emeritus Professor of Russian and Georgian, Queen Mary University of London

Emma Loosley Leeming, Professor of Middle Eastern and Caucasian Christianities, University of Exeter

Prof. Paolo Biagi PhD, FSA (Hon), Senior Researcher, Department of Asian and North African Studies, Ca' Foscari University

Mathijs Pelkmans; Professor; London School of Economics and Political Science

Rebecca Gould, Professor, University of Birmingham

Prof. Dr. Jost Gippert, Cluster of Excellence "Understanding Written Artefacts", Centre for the Study of Manuscript Cultures, University of Hamburg

Dr. Dominik Gutmeyr-Schnur, FWF-Fellow, Center for Near Eastern Studies, UCLA

György Geréby, associate professor, director Source Language Teaching Group, Mediaeval Studies Department, Central European University PU

Alice C. Harris, Professor Emerita, University of Massachusetts Amherst

apl Prof. Dr. Annegret Plontke-Luening, Friedrich Schiller University of Jena

Prof. Dr. B. Outtier, Universidad San Damaso, Madrid

Winfried Boeder, Emeritus Professor of Linguistics, University of Oldenburg

Ivan Foletti, head of the Center for Early Medieval Studies, Masaryk University, Brno

PD Dr. Susanne Fehlings, Social and Cultural Anthropology Department, Goethe University
Frankfurt am Main

Ioana Chitoran, Professor of linguistics, Université Paris Cité, France

Michael Daniel, School of Linguistics (HSE University) / Collegium de Lyon (Université de
Lyon)