

**DISCONTINUING THE**  
**COLLABORATIONS WITH**  
**ISRAELI ACADEMIC**  
**INSTITUTIONS AND**  
**GOVERNMENT AGENCIES**

UPDATE ON THE DECISION TAKEN BY GHENT  
UNIVERSITY ON 31 MAY 2024

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# **1 GHENT UNIVERSITY'S HUMAN RIGHTS POLICY**

Ghent University's human rights policy states that there will be no collaboration at the institutional level with organisations involved in serious human rights violations (art. 5 §2 [Regulations concerning Human Rights Policy and Dual-Use Research](#)). However, given the academic freedom enjoyed by researchers, Ghent University researchers can still collaborate at the individual level. Individual collaborations are collaborations that do not require a cooperation agreement to be signed by Ghent University (art. 1). These include co-publications, guest lectures, etc.

Collaboration agreements contain a human rights clause to allow for the termination of a collaboration when one of the parties is involved in a serious or systematic violation of human rights (Art. 8 §1). The clause is not included in agreements where Ghent University has no room to negotiate the terms of the agreement, as is the case with Horizon Grant Agreements or Erasmus+ Grant Agreements (art. 9 §1).

The Committee on Human Rights Policy and Dual-Use Research assesses whether a collaboration is in line with the human rights policy and advises the rector.

## **2 INVOLVEMENT IN HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS BY ISRAELI PARTNERS**

In [January](#), [March](#) and [May](#) 2024, the International Court of Justice ruled that Israel's actions in the Gaza Strip may amount to genocide. In [July 2024](#), the same International Court of Justice issued an advisory opinion stating that Israel's occupation of the Palestinian territories since 1967 and the subsequent establishment of Israeli settlements and exploitation of natural resources are illegal under international law, that Israel must pay full reparations to the Palestinian people for the damage caused by the occupation, and that the policy violates the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination.

Ghent University's Committee on Human Rights Policy found that there is a high degree of intertwining between many of the Israeli academic institutions with whom it cooperates, on the one hand, and the Israeli government, Israeli army and/or Israeli security services, on the other. For example, academic institutions develop technology for Israeli security services, including the army, which is later used for human rights violations, universities provide specific training for the army and security services, and there is close cooperation with Israeli defence companies. Therefore, collaborations with these academic institutions are considered problematic in light of Ghent University's human rights policy.

## **3 DECISION TAKEN BY GHENT UNIVERSITY**

In view of the above, Ghent University decided [on 31 May 2024](#), based on the [advice of the Committee on Human Rights Policy](#), to discontinue the ongoing institutional collaborations with Israeli government institutions and Israeli academic institutions. This was done on a case-by-case basis, assessing each partner's intertwining with the Israeli government and army. The result of the case-by-case approach is that certain collaborations with Israeli companies are considered non-problematic and can therefore be continued. This case-by-case approach implies that certain collaborations with Israeli entities could be considered in line with Ghent University's Human Rights Policy, and could therefore be continued. In

addition, Ghent University would advocate through appropriate channels to suspend Israel's participation in European research and education programmes.

More specifically, the Committee advised to discontinue ongoing collaborations with the organisations listed below.

#### Israeli governmental institution

- Agricultural Research Organisation - Volcani Centre
- Kishon Drainage and River Authority
- Israel Oceanographic and Limnological Research
- Migal Galilee Research Institute (besides establishing that it is a governmental institution, the institution also aims to develop illegally occupied territory)

#### Close collaboration with Israeli security services, including the army, and the Israeli defence industry

- Ben-Gurion University of the Negev
- Holon Institute of Technology
- University of Haifa
- Tel Aviv University
- Weizmann Institute of Science

## **4 CONCRETE CONSEQUENCES**

Ghent University cooperates with the aforementioned organisations in 12 (Horizon) research projects and in 1 (Erasmus+) educational collaboration. In each of these collaborations, the necessary steps are taken to terminate the collaboration with the Israeli partner concerned. This is done with the utmost care for the researchers and promoters involved at Ghent University, and taking into account the contractual obligations.

## **5 STATE OF PLAY OF DISCONTINUING THE COLLABORATIONS**

### **5.1 June 2024**

In early June, the Ghent University researchers involved were informed that Ghent University would take the necessary steps to discontinue their collaboration with the Israeli partner. The researchers were free to inform their partners in the consortium about this decision.

On 20 June, the European Commission responded by letter to [a question from the Flemish Interuniversity Council \(VLIR\)](#) as to whether the participation of Israeli entities in Horizon Europe could be reconsidered, given the rulings of the International Court of Justice and Israel's military actions. The response indicated that the European Commission would not take any general measures towards Israeli entities. It was also clarified that if one wished to remove a partner from a consortium, a specific application must be submitted for each project and the funding agency would assess the application on a case-by-case basis.

## 5.2 July 2024

Ghent University also raised the question regarding Israel's participation in Horizon Europe through other diplomatic channels, as the [Association Agreement between Israel and the European Union](#) states that relations between the parties are based on respect for human rights. The reply received by Ghent University on 5 July 2024 indicated that our efforts would not lead to Israel's exclusion from Horizon Europe, at least in the short term.

After it became clear that no general measures could be expected from the European Commission with regard to Israeli partners, Ghent University informed the coordinators (the partner leading the Horizon or Erasmus+ consortium) of all projects of the decision to discontinue the collaborations with the relevant Israeli governmental institutions and academic institutions and the fact that this decision would have a direct impact on the consortium.

For 2 of the 13 consortia, it was decided that no termination procedure would be initiated due to the fact that the project already ends on 31 December 2024. This is because it is not feasible to complete the termination procedure before this date.

The Ghent University researchers involved in the consortia that are to be discontinued were asked on 17 July 2024 to provide all relevant information to enable Ghent University to prepare a request for a change of the consortium by 31 August 2024. This information is necessary because Ghent University has to submit a well-motivated request to discontinue the participation to the consortium coordinator and to the European Commission.

The following information was requested:

- The goal of the project
- Ghent University's tasks in the consortium
- The Israeli partner's tasks in the consortium
- The interrelationship between Ghent University, the Israeli partner and the other consortium partners:
  - Who depends on the tasks and background (e.g. IP) of Ghent University and the Israeli partner?
  - The role of Ghent University and the Israeli partner in the consortium?
  - The significance of Ghent University's contribution to the project?
  - The significance of the Israeli partner's contribution to the project?
- The state of play of the project:
  - What tasks does Ghent University still need to perform?
  - What tasks does the Israeli partner still need to perform?
  - Can it be estimated whether an extension of the project might be requested and, if so, for how many months?
- The entities, in or outside the consortium, that can take over the tasks of Ghent University and the Israeli partner in the project.
- The Executive Agency overseeing the project from the side of the European Commission.
- An overview (including the form, such as actual costs/lump sum) and status of the funding of (a) the project, (b) Ghent University, and (c) the Israeli partner.
- The possible consequences of a termination of the collaboration (further research or further valorisation that are compromised; the Ghent University researcher involved going to another university; PhD students unable to complete their degree due to lack of data).

### 5.3 September and October 2024

On the basis of the data provided, an analysis has been carried out for each project to identify the various possible scenarios. The letters to the coordinators of the European consortia have been finalised. The [Grant Agreement](#) stipulates that a partner can request a consortium change, but also stipulates that the consortium must agree to this change. Moreover, the consortium coordinator must then submit a request to change the consortium to the European Commission, which takes the final decision regarding the consortium change. It is therefore important to stress that Ghent University cannot take this final decision itself: both the consortium and the European Commission will have to take decisions regarding the consortium change. On the other hand, it is important to emphasise that Ghent University takes (and will take) all possible steps to end the collaboration.

The Ghent University principal researchers involved in the projects will be given the opportunity to provide feedback on the draft letters.

Other European academic institutions that announced they were discontinuing collaborations with Israeli organisations were also contacted, so that lessons could be learned from the steps they had or had not taken.

It is expected that certain consortia can be changed more easily - and thus more quickly - i.e. when project partners are less dependent on each other's work (e.g. MSCA collaborations).

It is not possible to provide a specific timing on when all consortia will be changed, as Ghent University is reliant on third parties (both consortium partners and the European Commission) and much depends on how smoothly the discussions and negotiations move forward.

Regarding the educational collaboration European Master of Law and Economics (EMLE), discussions regarding the continued participation of the Israeli partner in the consortium have already taken place within the Erasmus+ consortium. In September, the consortium decided to put the participation of the Israeli partner on hold. Thus, no more collaboration is possible between the Israeli partner and the other consortium partners. This means that students taking part in the EMLE can no longer take classes at the Israeli university, that Ghent University will not award a joint degree, and therefore the collaboration with the university has de facto been frozen.

The rector subsequently sought the advice of the Committee on Human Rights Policy, and more specifically asked whether the changes made to the EMLE consortium were sufficient in light of the advice given by the Committee on 30 May 2024. The Committee issued a positive advice, pointing out the concrete steps that were taken and the impact of the decision to discontinue institutional collaborations with Israeli governmental institutions and universities that were not in line with Ghent University's human rights policy. The Committee did point out that if the consortium were to change the status of the Israeli partner again in the future, Ghent University reserves the right to re-evaluate its participation in the consortium. The rector followed the advice of the Committee on Human Rights Policy and decided that the changes made to the EMLE consortium were sufficient. The rector also called for further action to change the consortia of the research projects Ghent University is part of.

## **6 ANNEX: OVERVIEW OF THE COLLABORATIONS TO BE DISCONTINUED**

### **INTENSE**

Particle physics experiments at the high intensity frontier, from new physics to spin-offs

1/01/2019 - 31/12/2024

Tel Aviv University

### **Fish-AI**

Developing an Artificial Intestine for the sustainable farming of healthy fish

1/04/2019 - 31/12/2024

Israel Oceanographic and Limnological Research

### **MERLIN**

Mainstreaming Ecological Restoration of freshwater-related ecosystems in a Landscape context:

INnovation, upscaling and transformation

1/10/2021 - 30/09/2025

Kishon Drainage and River Authority

Tel Aviv University

### **HoloRuminant**

Understanding microbiomes of the ruminant holobiont

1/10/2021 - 30/09/2026

Agricultural Research Organisation - Volcani Centre

Ben-Gurion University of the Negev

### **EUREMAP**

European Research Infrastructure for Marine Bioprospecting

1/01/2024 - 31/12/2026

Tel Aviv University

### **OneAquaHealth**

Protecting urban aquatic ecosystems to promote One Health

1/01/2023 - 31/12/2026

Holon Institute of Technology

### **OSTEONET**

In vitro 3D cell models of healthy and OSTEOpathological ageing bone tissue for implantation and drug testing in a multidisciplinary NETwork

1/01/2023 - 31/12/2026

Tel Aviv University

### **ScaleAgData**

ScaleAgData

1/01/2023 - 31/12/2026

Migal Galilee Research Institute

### **TClock4AD**

Targeting Circadian Clock Dysfunction in Alzheimer's Disease

1/03/2023 - 28/02/2027

Tel Aviv University

**BETTER4U**

Preventing obesity through Biologically and bEhaviorally Tailored inTERventions for you

1/11/2023 - 31/10/2027

Weizmann Institute of Science

**SOB4ES**

Integrating SOil Biodiversity to Ecosystem Services: testing cost-effectiveness of Soil Biodiversity indicators and the provision of soil biodiversity-based Ecosystem Services to build better land management solutions that effectively implement the EU Soil Strategy

1/06/2023 - 31/05/2028

Agricultural Research Organisation - Volcani Centre

**WHEATWATCHER**

Safe Wheat Agriculture Towards Sustainable Health: Innovative Sensing Techniques, and Holistic Spectroscopy Traceability for Improved Soil, plant Health and safe wheat grain

1/10/2024 - 30/09/2028

Tel Aviv University

Weizmann Institute of Science

**EMLE**

European Master of Law and Economics

01/09/2022 - 31/10/2028

University of Haifa