CASIB
Central Asia Sustainable Innovation Bureau

EDITION# 01 | October 2026

CASIB NEWSLETTER



CASIB INSIGHTS

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Foreword



Dr Peter Liebelt

Head of the Representative Office of Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg in Kazakhstan
CASIB Project Office
Almaty, 2026

Dear Readers,

It is my pleasure to welcome you to the first edition of the CASIB Newsletter.

Scientific cooperation between Germany and Central Asia has continued to intensify in recent years and has expanded significantly in thematic breadth. New partnerships have emerged, existing collaborations have deepened, and the shared commitment to research and innovation is reflected in numerous initiatives and joint projects. As the Representative Office of Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg in Kazakhstan and CASIB project office, we actively support this dynamic development by fostering exchange, connecting institutions, and accompanying collaborative endeavours.

In this issue, we look back at key milestones of 2026. High-level meetings, international conferences, new funding opportunities and cooperative research projects show how closely our partners work together to address scientific and societal challenges. Each activity underscores the growing importance of German–Central Asian cooperation and the strong mutual interest in building sustainable research structures.

I am particularly pleased that two new projects from the BMFTR's Funding Module 9 (aimed at strengthening joint international research structures) have been launched this year: ExSoil, which focuses on establishing a competence network for soil protection, and KLINU, which develops a research and coordination framework to study, preserve and sustainably utilise fruit genetic resources in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. Both projects address major challenges related to climate change and aim to contribute to climate-adapted, sustainable land use and, ultimately, to food security in the region and beyond.

Through these initiatives, the German Federal Ministry for Research, Technology and Space (BMFTR) makes an important contribution to strengthening the strategic partnership between Germany and the countries of Central Asia. Earlier this year, Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg, together with the CASIB office, organised the first German Higher Education and Science Forum Central Asia (DHWZ) in Halle. During the forum the five ambassadors (representing the science ministries of the Central Asian states) and the BMFTR State Secretary, Dr Marcus Pleyer, signed a memorandum to strengthen cooperation in research.

With this newsletter, we aim to provide a platform that highlights key developments, showcases successful collaborations, and informs our partners about new opportunities in Germany and Central Asia. Each edition will focus on one of the Central Asian countries and explore a current research topic relevant to the country and the region.

I wish you an engaging read and look forward to continuing to expand our cooperation together.

About CASIB

The Central Asia Sustainable Innovation Bureau (CASIB) serves as a bridge between Germany and Central Asia, connecting research institutions, universities, innovation organisations and companies to foster international cooperation in research, higher education and innovation. CASIB was established in 2019 as a project office of Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg with the support of the Federal Ministry of Research, Technology and Space. Since its establishment, CASIB has been headed by Dr Peter Liebelt. The two staff members, Assiya Sagymbay and Raushan Amanzholova, complete the CASIB team.

CASIB focuses on building sustainable international networks in research and innovation and on improving access to research resources and scientific infrastructure across Central Asia. By connecting researchers, institutions and partners, CASIB supports international cooperation and raises the visibility of German research and innovation in the region. CASIB continuously monitors developments in science and innovation across Central Asia and keeps its partners informed about emerging trends, funding opportunities and new initiatives. The bureau facilitates networking, promotes German-funded programmes, supports academic exchange and capacity building, and helps strengthen the visibility of joint research projects. CASIB also provides regional support to the German Federal Ministry for Research, Technology and Space (BMFTR) and the DLR Project Management Agency.



Assiya Sagymbay
Project assistant



Raushan Amanzholova
Project assistant

What CASIB does

1  Strengthens scientific cooperation between Germany and Central Asia.	2  Develops the German Higher Education and Research Hub Central Asia at MLU.	3  Provides regional support for BMFTR and the DLR Project Management Agency.	4  Monitors science, research and innovation trends across Central Asia.
5  Supports universities, research institutes and companies in building international partnerships.	6  Connects German-funded research and innovation projects across the region.	7  Coordinates academic exchange, capacity building and knowledge transfer.	8  Promotes German-funded research and increases the visibility of project results.

Major Events & Milestones

The first half of 2026 brought new partnerships, international events and opportunities for German–Central Asian research cooperation. Through conferences, workshops and institutional exchanges, CASIB continued to bring researchers and organisations together, support new collaborations and strengthen scientific links between Germany and Central Asia.

First German Higher Education and Science Forum Central Asia



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For three days in February 2026, Halle (Saale) became a lively meeting point for science, higher education and international cooperation. More than 225 representatives from universities, research institutions, government bodies and funding organisations came together at the First German Higher Education and Science Forum Central Asia at the German National Academy of Sciences Leopoldina.

Organised by Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg together with CASIB and supported by the German Federal Ministry for Research, Technology and Space (BMFTR), the forum provided a space for both formal discussions and informal exchange, helping participants connect and explore new opportunities for cooperation. Panel discussions, workshops and funding sessions opened the floor to new joint research initiatives, academic mobility, knowledge exchange and new formats for German–Central Asian cooperation. Funding organisations such as BMFTR, DFG and DAAD also introduced funding opportunities to help turn promising ideas into concrete projects.

One of the most significant moments of the forum was the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding on research-policy cooperation. The participation of German representatives and the five Central Asian ambassadors underlined the event's political significance and the shared commitment to strengthening long-term scientific cooperation.



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The forum was more than a meeting of institutions and researchers. It was an opportunity for people from across the region to connect, exchange ideas and build new partnerships. Researchers met potential partners, young scientists discovered new opportunities, and institutions began conversations that may grow into future collaborations. The DHWZ, which will be held annually, is intended to serve as a platform for continuous exchange on current developments, challenges and perspectives in scientific cooperation with the countries of Central Asia.

CASIB at the Regional Summit 2026 in Astana



© Regional Ecological Summit

How can research help Central Asia respond to environmental challenges and support sustainable development? This question brought experts, policymakers and academics together in Astana for the Regional Summit on 24 April 2026, creating a space to exchange ideas and discuss opportunities for regional cooperation.

Among them were Dr. Peter Liebelt (CASIB) and Patricia Romanowsky (BMFTR), who contributed to the session “The Role of the Academic and Scientific Community in Shaping Regional Climate Solutions.” The focus was on finding practical solutions and on how universities, research institutions and governments can work together by combining knowledge, technology and experience from across the region to address climate change. A central theme was Green Central Asia — not simply as an initiative, but as a platform connecting countries around shared environmental concerns. It offers space for dialogue, scientific exchange and cooperation on challenges that do not stop at national borders.



© Regional Ecological Summit

The conversation continued beyond the summit. During a meeting with Kazakhstan’s Minister of Science and Higher Education, Sayasat Nurbek, Dr. Peter Liebelt and Patricia Romanowsky explored how Kazakhstan and Germany could strengthen cooperation in technology, environmental innovation and joint research.

The exchange reflected a wider trend in German–Kazakh relations: moving from individual projects toward more connected research and innovation partnerships. With climate and sustainability high on the agenda, science is increasingly becoming a bridge between policy, technology and long-term regional development.



Sayasat Nurbek
Minister of Science and Higher Education
Republic of Kazakhstan

The Central Asia Sustainable Innovation Bureau (CASIB) reflects an exceptionally active period of Germany–Kazakhstan scientific diplomacy throughout the first half of 2026. As an important platform for the BMFTR and DLR Project Management Agency, CASIB’s activities highlight several milestones that directly contribute to Kazakhstan’s research and innovation priorities.”

International Conference on Mountains, Climate and Health in Central Asia



© CASIB

In Central Asia, mountains are vital sources of water, biodiversity and livelihoods, but they are also highly exposed to climate change. These issues were at the centre of the International Conference on Mountains, Climate and Health, held in Bishkek on 18–19 June 2026 and organised by the University of Central Asia (UCA). The conference brought together experts and senior representatives, including the Vice Ministers of Environment of Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan and Prince Aly Muhammad Aga Khan of the Aga Khan Development Network. CASIB and the Federal Ministry for Research, Technology and Space (BMFTR) also took part at this event.

The discussions underlined the need for stronger regional and international cooperation to address environmental risks and support sustainable development in mountain regions. The conference also highlighted the value of interdisciplinary research and closer links between science and policy in responding to shared challenges across Central Asia.

In this thematic context, the Central Asian Institute for Applied Geosciences (CAIAG) stands out as a key German–Central Asian research centre for monitoring, analysing and managing natural hazards in the regionThrough its long-standing partnership with the GFZ — German Research Centre for Geosciences, CAIAG combines regional knowledge with international scientific expertise. It provides data, early-warning expertise and research that support climate resilience and disaster preparedness in mountain regions. Its role as a trusted regional hub makes it a cornerstone for future joint initiatives in environmental risk management and applied geosciences.

High-Level Kazakhstan-Germany Science Cooperation Meeting in Brussels



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On 25 June 2026, CASIB took part in a high-level meeting with Kazakhstan's Minister of Science and Higher Education, Sayasat Nurbek, during the delegation visit led by President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev. The meeting highlighted Kazakhstan's efforts to strengthen scientific cooperation with Europe, including its interest in association with Horizon Europe.

Kazakhstan's association with the EU's Horizon Europe programme could create better funding opportunities for joint research projects and further strengthen links between European and Central Asian research communities. The growing number of successful research collaborations supported by BMFTR and DFG in the region also provides a strong basis for closer cooperation.

A key outcome of the meeting was the signing of a Letter of Intent between the MLU Representative Office and Astana Hub, a major technology and innovation ecosystem in Kazakhstan. The agreement creates a framework for exploring new partnerships in artificial intelligence, digitalisation, climate research and the green transition, linking academic cooperation with Kazakhstan's rapidly developing innovation ecosystem.

DFG and BMFTR Research Funding: Information Session at KBTU



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CASIB organised its first information session on DFG and BMFTR research funding opportunities at the Kazakhstan-British Technical University (KBTU) in Almaty. The current framework announcement of the Federal Ministry for Research, Technology and Space (BMFTR) for Central Asia, as well as the DFG's Networking for Research Initiative, has generated strong interest in joint projects. With this event, we aim to help clarify key questions — from finding suitable partners in Germany to addressing issues related to project proposal submission

The session moved beyond general funding information and focused on the practical side of proposal development: how to structure an application, what reviewers expect, how international cooperation can strengthen a project and which common mistakes can reduce the chances of success.

German experts shared their own experience of preparing competitive proposals. Prof. Dr. Ahmad Hamidov guided participants through the key stages of developing and submitting a DFG application, while Prof. Dr. Hans-Peter Grossart and Prof. Dr. Georgiy Kirillin highlighted the elements that can make a research proposal more convincing, focused and internationally competitive.

The event created a valuable platform for researchers interested in international collaboration and opened new opportunities for future joint projects between Kazakhstan and Germany.



Prof. Dr. rer. agr. Ahmad Hamidov

Project coordinator of DFG-Funded Research Project
Research Area 3: Agricultural Landscape Systems
Leibniz Centre for Agricultural Landscape Research (ZALF)



Prof. Dr. Hans-Peter Grossart

Project coordinator of DFG-Funded Research Project
Head of Department 3: Plankton and Microbial Ecology
Research Group Leader, Aquatic Microbial Ecology
Professor of Aquatic Microbial Ecology and Functional Biodiversity
Leibniz Institute of Freshwater Ecology and Inland Fisheries (IGB)



Dr. rer. nat. Georgiy Kirillin

Project coordinator of DFG-Funded Research Project
Head of Research Group
Department of Ecohydrology and Biogeochemistry
Leibniz Institute of Freshwater Ecology and Inland Fisheries (IGB)

Insights from BMFTR-Funded Projects

AGRI-CA Call: Strengthening Agricultural Research Cooperation with Central Asia



A new funding opportunity is opening doors for a more connected generation of researchers across Germany and Central Asia. With the AGRI-CA programme, the Federal Ministry for Research, Technology and Space (BMFTR) is supporting long-term scientific cooperation between German institutions and partners from at least three Central Asian countries.

AGRI-CA focuses on fields that are rapidly reshaping the future of agriculture, including artificial intelligence, biotechnology, digital technologies and sustainable farming. Funding is available both for the first stages of networking and exploration, and for the establishment of international junior research structures that can develop into durable research partnerships.

The programme offers a chance to connect young scientists, institutions and ideas across borders — and to create research teams capable of addressing some of the most important agricultural and sustainability challenges facing Cent-ral Asia.

The next application deadline for Module 9 (establishment of international sustainable junior research structures in the field of agricultural research) — is 31 May 2028

Kick-Off Meeting of the ExSoil Project at the National Academy of Sciences in Almaty

Healthy soils are the foundation of food security, resilient landscapes and sustainable development. In March 2026, ExSoil was launched as a new BMFTR-funded initiative to explore these connections. The project is coordinated by Prof. Dr. Georg Guggenberger and Dr. Olga Shibistova from the Institute of Earth System Sciences at Leibniz University Hannover.

Over the next three years ExSoil will bring together leading research and educational institutions from Central Asia and Mongolia to create a Central Asian Soil Competence Network. The ambition goes beyond individual projects: the network is designed to connect expertise, infrastructure and people, while strengthening long-term cooperation in soil-health research, education and knowledge exchange.

ExSoil will focus on five closely linked areas: education, capacity building, scientific and technological innovation, economic efficiency and ecosystem services, and the integration of soil science into modern land management. Together, these themes reflect a broader shift toward treating soils not simply as an agricultural resource but as a key component of climate resilience, environmental protection and sustainable land use.

For young researchers, the network is expected to open new opportunities for training, mobility and access to modern research infrastructure. For universities and research institutions it offers a chance to strengthen international visibility and develop shared scientific approaches adapted to the specific conditions of Central Asia and Mongolia.

Another important goal is to develop regional soil-health indicators and encourage their practical use in agriculture, land management and environmental policy. In this way, ExSoil aims to bring scientific knowledge closer to real decision-making process.



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ExSoil Summer School on Soil Health

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As part of the ExSoil project, a Summer School on Soil Health was organised by the Institute of Earth System Sciences at Leibniz University Hannover, led by Prof. Dr. Georg Guggenberger and Dr. Olga Shibistova, with support from the Institute of Geosciences and Geography at Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg.

The programme began at S. Seifullin Kazakh Agrotechnical University in Astana and continued with hands-on field training at the A.I. Barayev Scientific-Production Center for Grain Farming in Shortandy.

Focusing on the impacts of climate change and soil degradation processes in the steppe zone of Northern Kazakhstan, the Summer School provided early-career researchers with advanced knowledge and practical experience in soil science and sustainable land management. It also strengthened scientific exchange and long-term research cooperation between Germany and Central Asia.



Project Coordinator:

Prof. Dr. Georg Guggenberger

Senator of the German Research Foundation (DFG);
Director of Section Soil Sciences,
Institute of Earth System Sciences, Leibniz University Hannover



Project co-coordinator:

Dr. Olga Shibistova

Senior Researcher Leibniz University Hannover
Institute of Earth System Sciences



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Conserving Fruit Genetic Resources for Climate-Resilient Agriculture in Central Asia

Across Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, fruit genetic resources are more than a part of agricultural heritage — they may also hold important answers to the challenges of a changing climate. This is where KLINU project comes in.

Running from January 2026 to June 2028, the project brings together research institutions, industry partners and civil society to strengthen cooperation around the conservation and sustainable use of fruit genetic resources.Implemented by the Julius Kühn Institute (JKI) and the Leibniz Institute of Agricultural Development in Transition Economies (IAMO), KLINU is working to build stronger coordination structures in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. Improve access to existing research and genetic-resource data, The project aims to establish a research structure for the development, conservation and sustainable use of fruit genetic resources in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, linking various stakeholders from science and industry as well as various NGOs. To this end, the first step is to cooperate with two newly founded institutes for the protection of ecosystems and biodiversity in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan as national coordination centres.

What makes the project especially relevant is the link it creates between biodiversity conservation and future-oriented agriculture. By bringing genetic resources, scientific expertise and regional networks together, KLINU helps turn biodiversity into a practical foundation for adaptation.

Expected outcomes include the establishment of national coordination centres in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, stronger networking among research, industry and civil society, and improved access to international research networks and funding opportunities. The project will also support the exchange of knowledge and expertise and facilitate the joint development and sustainable use of fruit genetic resources.



Project Coordinator:

Prof. Dr. Henryk Flachowsky

Head of Institute / Institute for Breeding Research on Fruit Crops Julius Kühn Institute (JKI), Germany

Focus on: Kazakhstan Strengthens Science-Driven Innovation

Kazakhstan is changing the way science and innovation contribute to the economy. Research is no longer just about papers and laboratory results. The goal is to turn ideas into new technologies, useful products, practical business solutions, and real benefits for society [1,2].

This approach is part of Kazakhstan's National Development Plan until 2029. The country wants science and innovation to play a stronger role in economic growth. By 2029 Kazakhstan aims to increase R&D spending to 1% of GDP and bring more private investment into applied research and commercialization [1].

One important step has been the transfer of innovation policy to the Ministry of Science and Higher Education. This gives universities, research institutes and scientists a more central role in shaping the country's innovation system [2].

Kazakhstan has also created a new Council for Innovation Development called the Innovation Headquarters. It brings together ministries, regional authorities, researchers, development institutions and businesses. The goal is to make innovation more coordinated and help promising ideas move faster from research to practical use [3].

Commercialization remains one of the key challenges. Good research does not always easily reach the market. To close this gap, new support mechanisms are being developed for applied research and technology development, including projects at TRL 4–6 — the stage where technologies are tested, improved and prepared for wider use [2].

Kazakhstan is also strengthening its research infrastructure. The country now has more than 300 scientific laboratories and over 60 commercialization centres. New R&D tax incentives and the creation of a science endowment fund are intended to make research funding more stable and diverse [2].

Digital tools are becoming part of this new system as well. Through the E-Lab platform, researchers and businesses can find information about laboratories, scientific equipment and available research infrastructure. This makes it easier to see what resources already exist and where cooperation is possible [4].

Another important change is the closer connection between science and industry. Through Science & Technology Sessions, companies can bring real technological problems directly to researchers. This helps scientists work on practical challenges and creates new opportunities for joint projects and business co-financing [2, 3].

The innovation ecosystem is also growing beyond universities. Astana Hub, science parks, commercialization centres, technology companies and the Alem AI International Artificial Intelligence Center are increasingly becoming part of the same network. Together they connect researchers, startups, businesses and investors [2].

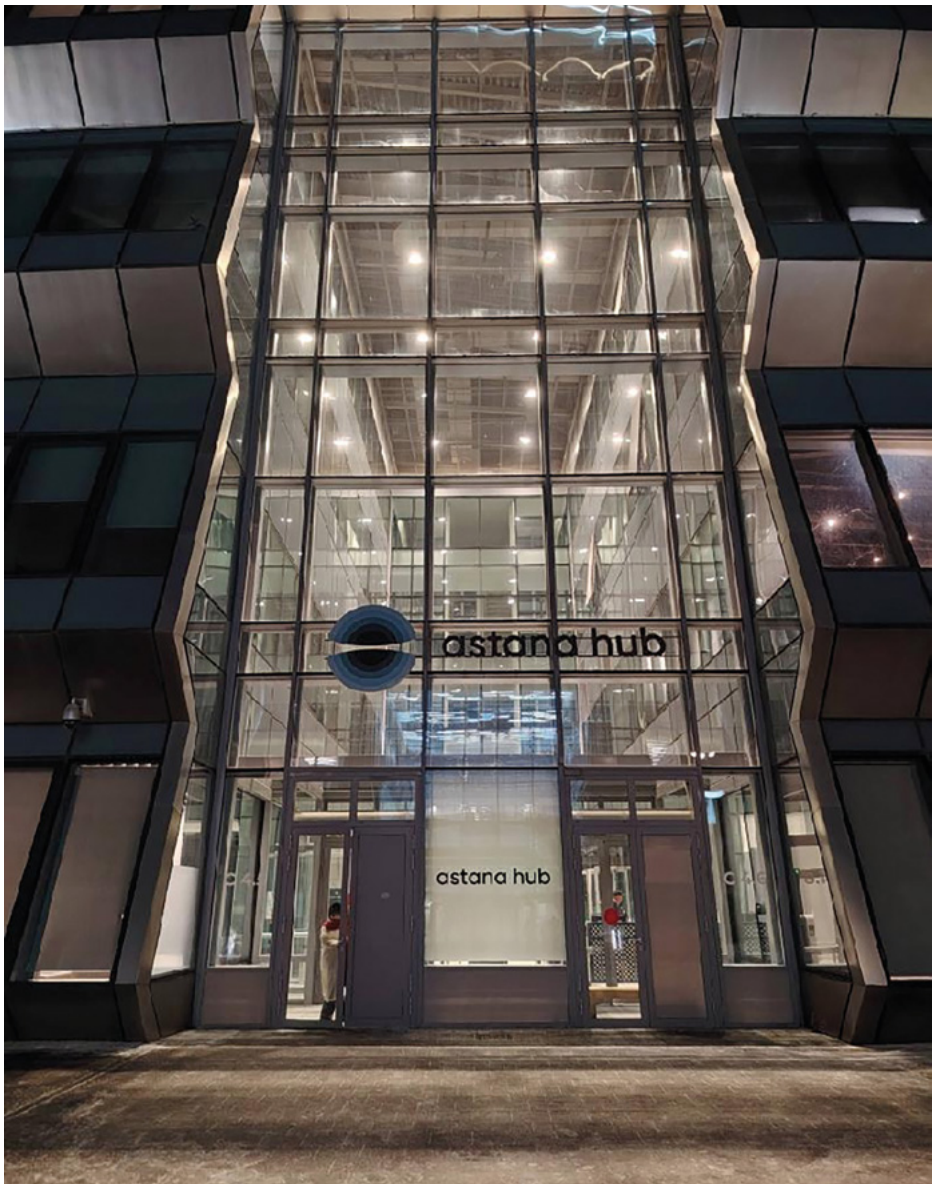
Kazakhstan's regions are expected to become more active too. Instead of following one model everywhere, different regions can develop their own innovation strengths based on local industries, universities and scientific expertise. Universities can become important partners for regional business and a source of new DeepTech solutions. [1, 2]

International cooperation will also remain important. Partnerships with foreign universities and research centres can bring new knowledge, technologies and experience to Kazakhstan, especially in areas such as environmental monitoring, digital technologies, advanced materials and sustainable development [1, 2].

The next stage will include a new Concept for Innovation Development and new innovation KPIs

for ministries and regional authorities for 2026–2030. The aim is to make innovation policy more coordinated, practical and measurable [2, 3].

The overall direction is clear: Kazakhstan wants science to go beyond publications. The goal is to build a system where a research idea can grow into a technology, a practical solution and, eventually, real economic and social value [1, 3].



Office of Astana Hub
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The partnership between CASIB and Astana Hub illustrates how German–Kazakh scientific cooperation can connect research with Kazakhstan's growing innovation ecosystem, creating new opportunities in AI, digitalisation, climate research and the green transition.



Dr. Aliya Sembayeva

Advisor to the Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Astana Hub

"I would like to express my sincere appreciation to CASIB for its continued support in advancing Kazakhstan–German cooperation in the fields of science and innovation. CASIB's contribution to strengthening institutional ties, fostering scientific dialogue, and promoting joint initiatives is of particular importance, as international partnerships are among the key foundations for knowledge exchange, the implementation of cutting-edge research, and the integration of Kazakhstan into the global science and innovation ecosystem"

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4.Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan. "Digitalisation of Scientific Laboratories and Research Infrastructure: E-Lab Platform." Official Government Portal of the Republic of Kazakhstan. URL = https://www.gov.kz/memleket/entities/maidd/press/news/details/1190503?lang=ru (accessed 9 September 2026).

Upcoming events

German Central Asian scientific conference
CASIB Regional Conference 2026 — Astana

CASIB is preparing its Regional Conference 2026 in Astana, bringing together partners from Germany and Central Asia to strengthen dialogue, exchange ideas and explore new opportunities for research and innovation cooperation.This event is jointly organized with Astana Hub and is held at the EXPO Exhibition Center in Astana.

With funding from the:

Federal Ministry of Research, Technology and Space

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astana hub



2nd German Higher Education and Science Forum Central Asia (DHWZ) — 2027, 22–24 February 2027 | Halle (Saale), Germany

CASIB and Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg will host the second German Higher Education and Science Forum Central Asia (DHWZ) from 22 to 24 February 2027. The 2027 event will place a special focus on early-career researchers, creating opportunities for networking, scientific exchange and new German–Central Asian research partnerships.



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