

## A Checking Account for the Future

■ **Destination** – The General Meeting of the Max Planck Society this time took place in a German federal state held in high regard by many as a vacation paradise: Mecklenburg-Vorpommern. However, science, too, has a traditional place there. Consider, for example, the University of Rostock, the oldest in northern Europe. In fact, it was there that we received some welcome news: after much to and fro, the federal and regional governments have finally come to an agreement on the Excellence Initiative for universities and the Pact for Research and Innovation. Under the terms of the pact, the governments at the federal and regional level will undertake to raise research organization budgets in the coming years by 3 percent annually. This gives the Max Planck Society – a “decisive contributor to Germany’s international renown,” as Chancellor Gerhard Schröder remarked in Rostock – a degree of security to plan ahead. For example, for the seminal projects in Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania: For one, there is the Institute for Demographic Research in Rostock that is laying the scientific foundations on which to tackle one of Germany’s greatest challenges. For another, the Greifswald Branch of the MPI for Plasma Physics is engaged in recreating the solar furnace here on Earth. Nuclear fusion holds the promise of creating vast amounts of energy without endangering the climate by discharging CO<sub>2</sub> into the atmosphere. Assembly of the Wendelstein 7-X fusion plant has recently begun in Greifswald. When the system begins its work in six years’ time, we will have taken an important step forward toward a clean energy supply.

■ **Departure** – Max Planck researchers participating in the inter-institutional *Environmental Microbial Genomics* initiative are addressing new aspects of environmental research. Three Max Planck Institutes have amalgamated their efforts to unravel the biology of ecosystems with the aid of molecular techniques. One of the important goals for these scientists is to decipher the metabolism of microorganisms that play a central role in the formation and degradation of the greenhouse gas methane, for example in rice

paddies and marshlands. The initiative is being promoted via our strategic innovation fund. We set up this fund to provide central support for unusual projects generally initiated by several institutes jointly. Over the past year, we were able to make a total of some six million euros available to our scientists. In the process, the fund is creating unique opportunities, as it is becoming steadily more difficult to finance research of this kind solely from the institutes’ own resources – or indeed, to attract third-party funding. Just how much money the fund

will be able to disburse in the future will naturally depend on the continuing development of the Max Planck Society’s budget.

■ **Journey** – Science is a global undertaking. That is why Max Planck researchers can always be found in a wide variety of places. Nevertheless, it is an unusual occurrence for two exhibitions to go on tour at the same time, as will be the case in the months ahead. The *Science Tunnel*, a multimedia presentation of our research, will be going on the

road in September. It will be heading for Japan as part of Germany Year, with which the Federal Republic will present itself as a center of high technology and cutting-edge research. This purpose is one for which our contribution is ideally suited: in the *Science Tunnel*, visitors can experience science at close range, from fascinating images of microscopic worlds to a glimpse of the far-off Milky Way. Should you be tempted to cast an envious glance in the direction of Japan, don’t forget that the *Science Tunnel* was also exhibited in Germany until the middle of July in Ludwigshafen, thanks to the support of BASF. Similarly, our major contribution to Einstein Year, the central exhibition entitled *Albert Einstein – Engineer of the Universe* has another destination ahead of it when it moves on from the Kronprinzenpalais in Berlin. After the exhibition closes its doors on September 30, 2005, parts of it will begin a journey to Italy. The exhibition is dedicated to an entertaining analysis of Einstein’s conception of the world, as well as to his research. And it demonstrates the impact of his findings, from which we all benefit today.



Peter Gruss, President of the Max Planck Society