



Speech of the President of the Max Planck Society,  
Prof. Martin Stratmann,  
At the Dioscuri Programme Signing Ceremony,  
04.07.2017,  
Kraków, Wawel Castle, Column Hall.

– *The spoken word takes precedence* –

Dear Deputy Prime Minister, Mr. Gowin,

Dear State Secretary, Mr. Bobko,

Dear Director General at the Federal Ministry of Education and Research, Mr. Rieke,

Dear Consul General, Mr. Groß,

Mr. Janeczek, Mr. Błocki,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am grateful to find myself here today, in these most impressive surroundings of Wawel Royal Castle. Indeed, I consider it a great honour that we are able to open a new chapter of Polish-German science relations in this venue, which is so dignified and rich in history. And I'm particularly thankful for being here to inaugurate the Dioscuri programme, a programme which has been close to my heart for many years and which only aims at one single goal: strengthening scientific excellence first in Poland and maybe later in other countries from that part of Europe which joined the EU after the iron curtain fell down.

For me, the Dioscuri programme is the answer to three different premises that have to be fulfilled in order to achieve research excellence in Europe:

Firstly: Commitment to the open and international character of science

Secondly: Commitment to the person-centered approach in the promotion of science

Thirdly: Commitment to and responsibility for the European Research Area

*Commitment to the open and international character of science*

Scientific research can only yield world-class results if it is built on worldwide networks. The majority of publications for example within the Max Planck Society is based on this insight. The political leaders and those of



us who are in charge of universities and scientific organizations all have to ensure that our scientists can rely on framework conditions that support the international exchange of ideas and collaboration.

### *Commitment to the person-centred approach in the promotion of science*

We in the Max Planck Society believe that the only chance to successfully answer future scientific questions is to engage with the minds of brilliant scientists. For that reason, the person-centred approach for the advancement of science has always been at the heart of our organization. We carefully select the brightest ones and build a scientific infrastructure around them.

Our conviction is that institutional autonomy, academic freedom and world-class research infrastructures are key to stimulating cutting-edge research. These are the most effective tools to reach beyond the borders of knowledge. On the European level, the European Research Council follows the same principle: selecting the best researchers and granting them generous support for their very own ideas. The ERC's success is beyond any doubt.

My intermediate result: Commitment to the internationalization of modern science and commitment to a person-centred approach are two commitments that the Dioscuri Programme is built on. The third one is our commitment to the European Research Area itself.

### *Commitment to and responsibility for the European Research Area. What do I mean by this?*

The European Research Area has to be strengthened in light of the political challenges Europe is facing today.

However, the ERA itself faces one major problem: Research excellence is distributed unevenly across the continent. Consider the ERC grants and the distribution of ERC grant holders: the wide discrepancies cannot be overlooked.

It is of utmost importance to the future of our continent that each country has the chance to participate successfully in excellent research – not only for reasons of scientific prestige, but also for creating fertile soil for economic growth and for keeping the best minds at home.

Maybe one cannot expect excellence to be evolving all over Europe in an evenly distributed manner. However, what we aim for is a European landscape made up of quite a number of centers of excellence in different locations and different parts of the continent.



What are the preconditions for such centres? To me: Scientific freedom, competitive salaries, adequate infrastructures, transparent career paths, attractive cities, and international flair. Much of this is already present in Poland.

However, Ladies and Gentlemen, the Max Planck Society is aware of the great scientific potential that is, as yet, by far not fully exploited in many countries of Central and Eastern Europe. Many of the Max Planck Institutes' most talented young researchers come from Poland and other countries in the region.

I had the pleasure of meeting a few of these talents last Saturday in Munich: We had a "Post-Lindau" event hosting young researchers from all over Europe who just had taken part in the Lindau Nobel Laureate Meeting. Most of them now live in Cambridge, Boston, or Oxford. Will they come back? I can tell you this: In our conversation, I also explained the Dioscuri idea to them – and they were greatly interested in the initiative. Their first question was: When does the programme start?

To me it is obvious:

The Central and Eastern European countries have very good foundations to build on. Foundations which can be developed into flourishing research locations, attracting talents from the respective home countries, but also from the rest of Europe and, indeed, from all over the world.

Today, Europe has some tools at hand to support this development aiming at overcoming performance gaps in Europe. For example programmes such as „Teaming Excellence“ or „Twinning Excellence“. These are good approaches, specifically in conjunction with structural funds that follow so-called “smart specialization strategies”. While they might benefit from a stronger focus on scientific criteria, these instruments serve Europe well on the supranational level. However, additional tools are needed and the Dioscuri Programme shall be one of them.

Our goal is to establish up to 10 Dioscuri Centres in Poland – a country that is at an advanced stage of transforming its science system into a system with focus on excellence. In due course, other countries from the region will hopefully follow this model.

What are our specific goals?

1. Identifying excellent scientists in this part of the ERA and helping them to become more visible internationally, as well as attracting top scientists from abroad to come to the region
2. Bringing them into close contact with leading German universities and research institutes such as the Max Planck Society
3. Building a network around them by establishing internationally very visible scientific advisory boards
4. As a result: Building scientific lighthouses with great visibility that are even more successful in applying for competitive grants like the ERC



5. And this way: Establishing international standards of excellence and closing the excellence gap within Europe

On the German side, universities and other research organizations have signalled their support for Dioscuri. Their expertise makes me even more confident and strengthens my belief in the excellent prospects of the programme.

Let me add, however, that such a favorable outcome is not a matter of course. Evidently, Dioscuri cannot thrive in a vacuum but needs an environment made up for excellent science. It needs a sustained effort from within the Polish research system to implement structural reforms that raise international competitiveness.

Having discussed the prospects for such reforms with many of you, ladies in gentlemen, I am convinced that together we shall turn Dioscuri into a great success.

I would now like to express my gratitude towards those who made it possible that we find ourselves here today.

In summer 2014, I introduced the idea for the Dioscuri Programme in my inaugural speech as President of the Max Planck Society. Maciej Żylicz, being a member of the Senate of the Max Planck Society, was the first person to really support, encourage, and motivate me to follow up on the idea and ever since, he has been contributing considerably to its advancement.

Also, the idea gained the appreciation of the German Federal Minister for Education and Research, Johanna Wanka, and the State Secretaries Cornelia Quennet-Thielen and Georg Schütte. They encouraged me to develop a specific concept that I could discuss with Polish partners on the governmental level, also in respect of possible financial structures of the programme.

When Jarosław Gowin and Aleksander Bobko both showed great interest in the project idea and signalled their readiness to contribute funding from the Polish side, this paved the way for requesting the same amount of German funding for the scheme in summer 2016. This marked the breakthrough for Dioscuri and I want to express my deepest gratitude towards all government representatives in this room and of course towards Ms Quennet-Thielen, who unfortunately cannot join us today due to illness. I wish her a speedy recovery!

Also, I want to thank Zbigniew Błocki and the numerous staff members at the NCN, but also at the Max Planck Society as well as the ministries for having put so much effort and dedication into working out the details of the programme. It is thanks to their commitment and goal-orientation that we find ourselves here today, almost exactly one year after some of us met in Warsaw to discuss the general outline of the programme in the first place.

To me, today is also a great day to foster Polish-German friendship! Thank you very much!