



**Speech given by the President
of the Max Planck Society**

Peter Gruss

**on the occasion of the opening of the
European Neuroscience Institute
Göttingen**

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**Dear Commissioner Potočnik,
dear Minister Stratmann,
dear colleagues,
ladies and gentlemen**

It is always a pleasure to be in Göttingen - especially when we can celebrate a successful venture! Naturally, all previous speakers praised the assets of the European Neuroscience Institute already, but Johann Wolfgang von Goethe once asked us to "never tire of repeating the truth in words". (Maxims and Reflections, VII / 429)

To me, this maxim seems particularly good advice on the occasion of the opening of the European Neuroscience Institute today, as the actual advantages of this research institution cannot be emphasized often enough.

The ENI provides young researchers with excellent opportunities in the neurosciences. Modeled on the Independent Junior Research Groups - which have proven to be successful in the Max Planck Society for nearly 40 years - ENI offers talented scientists between 30 and 40 years of age the opportunity to apply their abilities by providing an international environment where they can independently implement their ideas. The researchers are mainly supported by the University and the Max Planck Society. On top of this fiscal support, Max Planck scientists, like our colleagues from the University, are available for an exchange of ideas and sharing their experiences in their field.

This is yet another demonstration of the discernible benefits of universities and Max Planck Institutes combining forces. As Minister Stratmann and President von Figura have pointed out, Göttingen is an excellent example of the networking of the two institutions. Here in Göttingen, the Max Planck Society is represented by four institutes, which closely collaborate with the University. Such cooperation can take e.g. the form of double appointments. Or at the "Göttinger Bernstein Center for Computational Neuroscience", working groups from both institutes collaborate with three different University faculties as well as the German Primate Center. In another venture, a tandem project links the Max Planck Institute for Experimental Medicine to the University Hospital. Here, researchers and doctors work together very closely to ensure that patients benefit from the latest research findings as quickly as possible.

In addition, the MPI for Experimental Medicine and the MPI for Biophysical Chemistry, together with the University, have established two International Max Planck Research Schools for the training of graduate students, which have both received excellent evaluations.

These few examples show how important it is for both these institutions - the University as well as the Max Planck Society - to have the other as a strong partner at its side.

Coming back to ENI, the European Neurosciences Institute in Göttingen has served as the starting point for the international ENI-Net network, and in some respects as a model for other Institutes. The ENI-Net allows intensive exchange of scientists between 12 other institutes in Spain, France, Great Britain, Italy, Sweden and Poland. This provides research with new impulses. Thus, it will have a significant structuring effect on research in the future European Research Area in the neuroscience field.

ENI has dynamically developed since the first Junior Research Group was set up about six years ago. I am very delighted that we are able to officially open the institute today. At this point I would like to thank all of those whose contributions have made it possible for the ENI to function in its current form:

- First of all, many thanks to Erwin Neher for his commitment and his persistence in getting this groundbreaking collaboration underway! My thanks also go to Dr. Walther Stühmer and Dr. Richter - without your initiative, the institute would have never come into being.
- At the University, I would like to express my sincere thanks to the former President, Dr. Kern and his successor, Kurt von Figura, with whom we enjoy a very constructive cooperation; as well as to Dr. Frömmel, Dean of the University Medical School, and his predecessor, Dr. Droese. I must emphasize once again that the University of Göttingen is an important partner of the Max Planck Society in general, not only within the ENI.

- I would also like to thank you, Dr. Metternich, as well as Dr. Stock (who is not here today), the former CSO of Schering AG. At a very early stage, your organization provided a group with funding, which has helped the initiative to get off to a good start!
- And last but not least, special thanks to the State of Lower Saxony, particularly to you, Minister Stratmann and to your predecessor, Mr. Oppermann. It is thanks to the State of Lower Saxony that ENI has this wonderful new building, which is a very important prerequisite for research and, most importantly, also for the autonomy of the institute.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

why is an Institute like this so important to us? First of all - and here I am speaking for the whole of Europe and beyond - we must give young and highly talented scientists the opportunity to carry out independent research. We need to be able to make competitive offers, which stand up to comparison with opportunities in the USA. The ENI offers all of this here in Göttingen, as do the other institutes in the ENI-Net in the neuroscience field. Of course, the MPS is highly active in the field of neuroscience. It would be beyond the scope of this presentation detailing the efforts the MPS undertakes in this area of research. Suffice it to say that this field is one of the cornerstones in our life sciences program and still growing as documented by our goal to try out new models such as ENI and possibly Caesar. The latter will be refocused on neurodegeneration, neuroregeneration, neuroprosthetics and neurosensoric processes.

Knowledge, after all, **is the** crucial resource for our future. Only new scientific findings can create the essential conditions for our economy to grow and create secure jobs on a consistent basis. This applies to regions like here in Göttingen as well as to nations – namely, to all of Germany; and this also holds true for Europe as a whole.

Several studies have very clearly shown the connection between scientific success and economic prosperity: In the USA, for example, it has been calculated that up to 75 percent of economic growth between 1950 and 2003 resulted from investment in research and development. According to an EU study, were the EU countries to meet their objective of investing three percent of gross domestic product in Research and Development by 2010, Europe could see a remarkable increase of 4.2 percent in gross domestic product from 2010 to 2015. Similarly, the just published “high-tech” strategy of the Federal Government is supposed to generate 1.5 million jobs.

Therefore, Europe would be well advised to focus on supporting research at the highest levels. Although European scientists are world champions in publishing according to a study by the European Commission, they lag considerably behind the USA in citations and in the share of top 1% cited papers. These figures show that Europe has a broad

base of scientific knowledge, but shows some weakness at the top level – or briefly: more mass than class. Consequently, the quality of research in Europe as a whole must be improved.

Recently, important steps have been taken in this direction: as early as the year 2000 the European Heads of State and Government agreed under the Lisbon Strategy to create a common European Research Area. Research programmes are to contribute to making Europe the most dynamic and competitive knowledge-based economic area in the world. Germany's contribution is to increase research activity at the universities in a targeted manner via the Excellence Initiative and to raise expenditure promised to non-university research by 3% by 2010.

At the pan-European level, the Sixth Framework Programme for Research, which concludes at the end of the year, only amounts to around 5 % of R&D expenditure in Europe - but is the largest external funding program in the world! The 7th Framework Programme will considerably increase this financial support by approximately 60% on the average per year*. In this way, European support for research is contributing to networking among scientists and, increasingly, to that of research on the whole.

What the EU Framework Programmes lacked so far is an efficient support of high-risk and open-ended research. This gap is now being closed by the European Research Council (ERC), which will initially fund approximately 200 independent junior research groups. It should, and must, develop into the flagship of European research at the frontiers of knowledge. Politics and science have found a good compromise for its implementation.

Funding is granted according to purely scientific criteria under the supervision of a Scientific Council, which will be supported by the Commission during the start-up phase. By help of an evaluation, the legal form of the ERC in the long term will be decided in due course: either as an Executive Agency under the supervision of the Commission or as an independent institution. From the Max Planck Society's point of view this is a pragmatic approach of putting the ambitious project, step by step, into practice and I would like to thank Commissioner Potočník for his tremendous support.

Another important European goal should be to make better practical use of scientific knowledge. Sadly, we have not had sufficient success in converting scientific findings into commercially realizable products and processes in Europe. This is a matter of particular concern to us at the Max Planck Society. Even though we see ourselves as an institution for basic research, we are open to application already for a long time. Our technology transfer center, Garching Innovation, is dedicated to facilitating the transfer of results from the Max Planck Institutes to industry. For this reason, we are very closely following the discussions about establishing a European Institute of Technology (EIT).

We would be in favor of a concept designed to strengthen the synergies between education, research and technology transfer. That is, systematic support for building up networks (clusters) with the most productive universities, the best non-university research institutions and the most innovative industrial research centers. – Dr. Metternich has shown how important research is especially for the pharmaceutical industry.

The Max Planck Society would be happy to contribute its expertise to a concept that is favorable for science and technology.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

- Europe is well on the way to facilitating better conversion of scientific results with the EIT and other activities.
- Europe has taken important steps towards supporting the work of outstanding research personalities with the aid of the European Research Council.
- For quite some time now, Europe has been supporting the networking of researchers across borders with the help of the Research Framework Programmes.
- What has been missing so far is a European voice for the excellent national Research Performing Organizations. After all, according to figures from the OECD in 2004, these organizations receive close to 40 % of public research funding in the European Union.

The work performed in the non-university research institutes is a key pillar of European science. You are familiar with the Max Planck Society. But consider the French Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS), which is the largest organization for basic research in Europe, with a budget of 2.6 billion euros. I would also like to mention as examples the Consejo Superior des Investigaciones Cientificas (CSIC) and the Polish Academy of Sciences. They all maintain to some extent cooperative ventures; they train doctoral students, support junior or partner groups, operate laboratories and infrastructure and organize conferences to share best practices with each other.

Certainly, it is not easy to identify the common goals of the European Research Performing Organizations, as opposed to those of universities, research funding organizations or the academies, since the organizations are very different: some, such as the CNRS or the Max Planck Society, cover the whole spectrum of natural sciences and the humanities. Others limit themselves to specialist areas, such as cancer research or materials sciences. Their spectrum ranges from basic to applied research - and they are, of course, also very different in terms of structure.

Nevertheless, it is essential for the further development of the European Research Area (ERA) that these organizations interact more closely. Up to now, the ERA strategies of

the European Union have mainly served players such as industry, universities, research funding organizations, regions and also member states. The specific needs of the Research Performers, on the other hand, are not yet on the agenda. I am very pleased, Commissar Potočník, that you share our findings that there is a "gap in the European Research Area" and are now seeking dialogue with the non-university research organizations in order to close this gap.

What benefits would this yield?

For example, it would be possible to exploit synergy effects. The various organizations share an interest in many areas of research. In certain cases it would make sense to pool these interests to deal with particularly ambitious projects or subject areas in Europe in a coordinated form. This is work where the necessary "critical mass" exceeds the financial means and human resources of a single institution. Instruments could range from training young scientists to exchange of junior research groups up to generating joint laboratories or even institutes.

Dear Commissioner Potočník, the European Union could assume the worthy role of a catalyst in the networking of these organizations. The cooperation of the research performing organizations could, in turn, contribute to supporting excellence clusters of a future European Institute of Technology or modified Networks of Excellence in the Specific Programme Cooperation organized around themes.

We from the Max Planck Society are very interested in promoting cooperation and exchanges between European research funding organizations on an even broader basis and I am happy to say that my European colleagues are supporting me in taking this approach. It is an important signal in this respect that the EUROHORCs, in which the most important European research organizations are represented, serves as an umbrella organization for funding agencies and research performing organizations. Together with strong universities we can build a productive European science community, which is capable of solving major challenges all our societies are facing today. ENI is a wonderful example which we are celebrating today.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Jacques Delors, longstanding President of the EU Commission, is said to have compared Europe to a bicycle that falls over as soon as it is brought to a halt.

It is in all of our interests to keep Europe moving. Science is a key driver in this goal. Indeed, I would even say, with the help of research we will be able to convert the European bicycle into a much faster vehicle! For even with the speed of a racing cyclist, we will not be able to compete internationally in the long term. The funding of research

and development, and the support of young scientists in particular is essential for the future of Europe.

The European Neuroscience Institute can make a small, but excellent contribution to this. I wish the institute every success in its future development, in recruiting new heads of research groups and, above all, in coming up with exciting data in neuroscience research!