



Extending our Network in the Czech Republic

Speech of the President of the Max-Planck-Gesellschaft

Professor Dr. Patrick Cramer

At the opening Ceremony for the first three Dioscuri Centres of Scientific Excellence in Czechia

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– Check against delivery –

Today is a very important day. But yesterday was also very important for me personally. For the last three decades, I had worked in molecular genetics. And yesterday I could visit the place where it all began: the monastery in Brno where *Gregor Mendel* discovered basic laws of inheritance. In the monastery's garden, he conducted more than 10,000 crossing experiments with pea plants before arriving at some truly fundamental insights.

Ladies and gentlemen,

To me, there are three remarkable aspects to this story that teach us general lessons about how science progresses. First, *Mendel followed his curiosity*. He carefully observed nature, was taken by the enigmatic phenomenon of inheritance and then explored the underlying mechanisms of life. Second, *he crossed borders*. He combined botany with statistics for the first time. He also postulated "units" that act as the carriers of heredity. Nowadays of course we call these units "genes". And third, *Mendel went through frustration*. He openly shared his results. He sent a copy of his essay from 1865 to Charles Darwin, but Darwin never even opened the mail. And it took until the turn of the millennium before his results were rediscovered and it was realized that Mendel laid the foundations of genetics! This tells us that we have to be persistent and that in science the truth always prevails.

Dear Professor Honys, dear Vice-Minister Wildová, dear colleagues,

What was equally interesting during my visit in Brno: I have seen places where the future of science has begun. At CEITEC, Masaryk University and Brno University of Technology I met highly motivated researchers and saw state-of-the-art equipment for nanotechnology, cybernetics and the life sciences. And today, I am happy to be here at the Czech Academy of Sciences in Prague, another science hub. Thank you for hosting us!



Dear colleagues and guests,

We should never forget what is key to our success in research: maintaining strong *cooperation within Europe*. Actually, for the Max Planck Society, most shared publications result from collaborative research with scientists in Europe – the EU, but also in the United Kingdom, Switzerland and Israel.

Look at Poland, for example. There are many changes since the election last October. I am so happy to see several of our Dioscuri Center Leaders here in the audience. Thank you for coming! This demonstrates that you care about Dioscuri. It also shows that we grow a European scientific community.

This month, the Czech Republic celebrates 20 years of its membership in the European Union. The European Union has changed the way we do science. Just look at the leaders of the three new Dioscuri Centers: Helena Reichlova, Barbora Špačková und Peter Fabian. They have all moved within Europe, working in France, Germany, or Sweden. It is the EU that fosters such mobility that scientists need in order to change perspective and to succeed.

The EU also fosters cooperation. Last year, our Max Planck institutes were engaged in 66 scientific collaborations with laboratories in the Czech Republic, about half of them in the natural sciences. From now on, the Dioscuri centers provide additional hubs to enlarge our European network of excellence. And they help to attract young scientists from around the world.

Let me take this opportunity to thank our partners here, without whom Dioscuri could not have been realized: our colleagues at the Ministry for Education, Youth and Sports, our supporters from the Dioscuri roundtable, and the German Embassy here in Prague. A particular thanks to Joachim Sauer, the Chair of the Dioscuri Committee, who shaped this program from the beginning in 2018. And of course, I would also like to thank the German Ministry for Education and Research for their contribution.

Dear Helena, Barbora and Peter,

today *you* are at the center of our attention. Congratulations on the first three Dioscuri Centers in the Czech Republic! Thank you for your ideas and efforts to advance European science and for taking on the responsibility to train the next generation. We are all much looking forward to hear about your science in the areas of single-molecule optics, quantum materials and human hereditary diseases. Be assured that we wish you all the best for your work and all the success for your further career in Europe! Best of luck!