



A new chapter in transatlantic partnership

Speech of the President of the Max Planck Society

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At the Reception on invitation of the German Ambassador to

the United States, Andreas Michaelis

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Residence of the German Ambassador in Washington, D.C., USA

– Check against delivery –

Excellency, dear Ambassador, lieber Herr Michaelis,

I would like to sincerely thank you for inviting us all. I am truly delighted that so many have accepted this invitation.

Dear guests,

By the end of the 1990s, I joined Stanford University as a postdoctoral fellow. It was an exciting time – scientifically, intellectually and personally. In fact, our son was born back then. And now he lives here in Washington, and I am happy he could join us tonight. So, for me, the connection to the United States is not only professional – it's personal. It's a part of my family's story. It's a part of who I am as a scientist and a person. And it's part of the reason why I deeply believe in the importance of our transatlantic partnership, our community.

Dear colleagues,

When I came back to Stanford a few days ago, however, I noted changes on campus. But I'm neither referring to the beautiful new buildings nor the impressive new School of Sustainability. No, I'm talking about the scientists I met. Many of them were worried about the current situation, some even felt intimidated. And I encountered the same sentiments at other stops on our tour – in San Francisco, in L.A., and now here in Washington.



We all know where these feelings come from! After massive interventions at the National Institutes of Health and the National Science Foundation, the new administration is turning its focus to universities. Whether it is Columbia, Harvard, or Princeton: Pressure is mounting. Politics is tying federal funding to certain conditions, thereby threatening institutional autonomy and academic freedom.

Dear friends,

Let me say this very clearly: Threats to science somewhere are threats to science everywhere. Under such circumstances, we, as scientists, must raise our voices. We must defend science and explain once again its essential nature – in particular also to members of Congress. Let me try to do this in a nutshell: It was science that gave us the technology we use every day. It was science that gave us the prosperity we enjoy. And it was science that gave us the medical care that saves our lives. The Norwegian-American physicist Kavli put it in a single sentence: "Life as we know it would not exist without science."

Dear guests,

It is to a large extent American science that has made America great. Following World War II, American science became the driving force behind global innovation, and this came to the benefit of many people and many countries. And transatlantic cooperation and our exchange of talents were contributing to this remarkable achievement.

Take, for example, the collaboration between Max Planck and U.S. institutions. Around 1,000 collaboration projects are currently ongoing. Of our papers, one quarter is published together with US colleagues as authors. We also maintain an institute at Florida. Actually, our directors from Florida are here tonight, including a guest, Nobel Laureate Stefan Hell. Welcome to you! Talking about the Nobel, there is something else that is remarkable: Of our six Directors who received the Prize since 2020, five have worked in the US for some time. So, if this serves as any indication, more prizes are yet to come, because 10% of our directors hold a U.S. passport.

Now, why is our transatlantic partnership so successful? Well, there are many reasons, but three seem to me to stand out. First, we all strive for excellence. Second, we appreciate the synergies created by collaboration – but also the speed gained by competition. And most importantly: We share core values - integrity, openness, and freedom.



Dear friends,

It is these shared values that all those whose shoulders we stand upon have defended over the decades and centuries. And today? Today, it is our responsibility to follow down their path and continue the search for truth. Let me give you some examples. Viruses will not disappear if vaccinations are stopped. Global warming will not cease if climate data is ignored. The past will not change if history is denied. And curiosity will not fade if research funding is cut.

So, considering our shared values, we stand united in these times. As the Max Planck Society, we wish to strengthen our partnership and to help prevent the loss of talents – at all career stages. To explore our opportunities, we had meetings with many American colleagues and representatives of foundations over the last ten days. From this, a clear picture emerges.

So here's my message for tonight: We will launch a *Max Planck Transatlantic Program*. We will establish several new Max Planck collaborative research centers together with leading U.S. institutions. In these centers, but also beyond them, we will offer additional positions for postdoctoral training. We will also temporarily host additional junior investigators so they can set up an independent research group at one of our 84 institutes. And selected, outstanding investigators who have to leave the U.S. we will consider for director positions.

As our 10-day tour through the U.S. will end tomorrow, let me thank the members of our delegation: Vice President Christian Doeller, Anton Zensus, Director at our Max Planck Institute for Radio Astronomy, and Michaela Hergersberg, Sabine Panglung, and Sebastian Hoepfner.

Dear friends,

Together, we have pushed the boundaries of knowledge, tackled global challenges, and trained new generations of scientists. Over the years, we've often done this with political support, but sometimes also in spite of its absence. Politics change, but our ideals remain steady.

Now you may ask why am I so confident that our shared commitment to science will prevail? Well, this is something I learned during my time at Stanford. I was deeply inspired by the American spirit – its optimism and the belief that anything is possible.

In that same spirit, let us continue to nurture our transatlantic cooperation. And tonight, let us celebrate our successes and enjoy each other's company, despite difficult circumstances.

All the best for the future.