



Speech of the President of the Max Planck Society

Professor Dr. Patrick Cramer

At the Reception on Invitation of the German Ambassador to Argentina

October 8, 2025

Residence of the German Ambassador in Buenos Aires, Argentina

– Edited Transcript: check against delivery –

For the last two days I had about a dozen meetings with young people, colleagues and representatives of politics. And what I saw was what I expected from Argentina. The people are warm-hearted, they are motivated, they are friendly. But then the discussion started and I could hear the concerns. I learned about the challenges that Argentine science is facing at this time.

I would really like to thank the ambassador for inviting us here so we can send out a signal of hope that science will continue. Research and education will be very strong also in the future. We will continue to collaborate. It is the purpose of my visit to say exactly this. I would like to welcome all of you. It's wonderful to be here in Buenos Aires.

Did you know that the only partner institute we have in the whole world is the one here in Buenos Aires? I'm so glad that I just met some of the people who were there in the beginning, in 2007, when the institute started. In two years, we will celebrate the 20-year anniversary of our partner institute. And how do I know? It's because we signed an agreement to continue our collaboration. This is the kind of trust that we would like to provide. We know our Argentinian friends also trust us, and that is because we have this long-standing scientific collaboration. So we signed an agreement that we will continue over the next five years, and we even extended it to three Max Planck Institutes who will establish additional activities that strengthen our partnership.

Today, we also signed a memorandum of understanding with the University of Buenos Aires, which is one of the top ten universities on the continent. UBA is also a very big University, which hosts 350 000 students, around seven times more than the biggest German university, the LMU in Munich, where I actually have been a professor before I moved to the Max Planck Society.

What does unite us with UBA are the values. We both believe in excellence. And we believe that we need to carry out research in many different fields, because we know that the future is unknown, at least to a large extent. The future can only be predicted to some extent. For example, we know that the world is heating up. We know that by the end of this century one third of humanity will live in places that will be below sea level. These are facts. We know about climate change, and we must take action.



But there are a lot of things that are unknown. Just think of the pandemic. Within a single year, scientists came up with the diagnostic tools so we could follow the virus, and politicians could take decisions. Should we close the school or is it still possible to keep it open? Then, within 10 months, scientists come up with a new type of vaccine, for the first time an mRNA-based vaccine.

Can you imagine that mRNA was first discovered in 1961? In 1961! Many would have thought that the basic research on mRNA was entirely useless. Can you believe it? 60 years of basic research and suddenly there is a breakthrough and very quickly thereafter the Nobel Prize is awarded, actually to a Hungarian woman who suffered a lot during her career, Katalin Karikó. I once asked her: why did you use pseudouridine to make sure that the mRNA is not causing inflammation but rather it's a real vaccine? And she said, well, because it can be translated normally, the mRNA remains functional. It is like this: Basic research gives you the idea that then rescues human lives. It's estimated that between seven and 20 million human lives have been rescued by these Corona vaccines.

Why is science so important? It's one thing to make a new vaccine, or to have a new product which stimulates the economy, that's all required. But it's another thing about science that is even more important. Simply put: it is not just an academic issue if academic freedom or the autonomy of institutions are under threat. It's much more than that. It concerns our social and democratic fabric. Science is a pillar of democracy, just like free media or independent courts. It's a pillar of democracy. It's a pillar of the states we are living in – the democratic states we would like to defend also for our children and for our grandchildren.

And this is why with great concern I also look at the developments in the United States. I've never seen my colleagues in the U.S. so intimidated. The only way to fight it is to raise our voice. You have to stand up and raise your voice. But that is very difficult for those who are concerned, and that is why we are doing it because we have this great privilege that we enjoy that freedom, we enjoy that autonomy, we enjoy the strong support of the German society. But let me be clear: Science is also under pressure in parts of Europe. You just need to look at the right-wing parties who are openly criticizing science. And that is why we speak up also in Europe when democracies are endangered.

I think one of the greatest dangers for our democracies is social media. It's really a big problem. If you follow what happened to social media over the last five years, maybe starting with the pandemic, it is a serious concern. They are now bots that basically try to change the opinion of our children. I think we have to defend democracies against these kinds of social media threats. It's a serious concern.

Now, coming back to something more positive, our collaborations between Max Planck and Argentinian scientists. Can you believe it? We published 1,268 shared papers over the last five years. That is wonderful. Based on this success, we will continue to look for the best scientists. One of the values that we share is excellence. Since we get taxpayer money, we have to make sure that it goes to the very best scientists. We have to make sure that they can develop their very best ideas and turn them into reality. And from that, innovation will come. And the future of the society will be shaped.



One last thing: we must not forget the importance of education. I think it's under threat around the world. You know, families and children don't have a lobby. We have to fight for the best possible education. Because we want the next generation to be critical thinkers. We want them to be able to judge what is fake when you serve the internet. We want them to be mature people who can defend democracy, who can defend free speech and who also can defend free science.

I want to leave you with a word of hope. I see many people here who have contributed to these successes. I would like to thank you for everything you have done. I see people here who will contribute to more successes in the future. And some colleagues even came over from Montevideo, crossing the Rio de la Plata, to discuss possible interactions with us. This is the right spirit.

We want to be open to the whole world. When you consider the geopolitical changes, it's of real importance that we have a multilateral system in science. Science is a global endeavor, not a national one. And this can also give our young researchers hope. They are part of a global community. They must be able to move without borders. And we should finance them so that they can go to conferences, that they can meet scientists from different places.

In this respect, science is part of diplomacy. For example, I'm urging the UK government to rejoin the ERASMUS student exchange within Europe. We cannot revert the Brexit. But we should allow the exchange of the next generation of scientists. We don't want old stereotypes to return. We want people to be open-minded and to be friendly to each other. This is our spirit. I'm so happy that I'm in science because we are a global community.

Before I finish, I want to thank our delegation. And thank you all for coming. Have a wonderful evening! We should celebrate, even in difficult times, what we have achieved, but also what we are going to achieve together in the future. Thank you very much.