



Democracy and Security

Speech of the President of the Max Planck Society

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On the occasion of the inauguration of the Max Planck Center for Democracy, Security and Human Rights

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– Check against delivery –

Over the past two years, I have traveled to Israel six times. But this is the first time I see a spark of hope in my colleagues' eyes – a glimpse of better times ahead.

Dear President Sheaffer,

Dear colleagues and friends,

Dear guests,

These two years have reminded us how precious and fragile life truly is. They also showed us how valuable it is to live both in security and in a democracy. Indeed, security concerns are growing in many parts of the world, and, at the same time, democracy is declining across the globe.

Security and democracy should go hand in hand – yet they can come into conflict. Where does this conflict come from? I believe it goes to the heart of our identity as a society. What values define us? How can we protect ourselves without damaging the very principles we want to defend? In simple words: Who do we want to be as a society?

These and other deep questions will be explored at the new Max Planck Center for Democracy, Security and Human Rights, which we are launching today here in Jerusalem. The center will take a bold and open approach, bringing together legal scholars with diverse perspectives. Experts in democracy, security law, and human rights will join forces here.

Ladies and gentlemen,

This new research center is another strong example of our close partnership with Israeli colleagues. After October 7, we came to Jerusalem to show our support and to start a new program to strengthen our cooperation. Since then, we have opened our Israel office here in Jerusalem, hosted young researchers at our institutes, and expanded our Post-doc Program with the Weizmann Institute.



And today, we take the next step. The new center is timely, ambitious, and urgently needed. We are pleased to continue working with our colleagues here at Hebrew University and the Minerva Center for Human Rights. I am truly happy to witness and support these meaningful developments, to the benefit of society.

Dear colleagues,

Looking back at two very difficult years, I want to express deep respect, gratitude, and admiration to you – the academic community – and to all the citizens of Israel who spoke out against war, and for peace and human rights.

Your role will remain vital also in the future. Your country, the region, and the world need scientists like you – critical thinkers, rational teachers, and imaginative innovators. I am sure: you can build a better tomorrow. We can build a better future.

Finally, I want to thank all those who have fostered our cooperation in Jerusalem over the decades – especially Tomer Broude, Dean and long-standing head of the Minerva Center; Danny Evron, the matchmaker, if I may say so; Ulman Lindenberger, the encourager and supporter; and his successor, Christian Doeller.

Today, a special thanks goes to Barak Medina and Ralf Poscher, who will lead the new Center. I wish you and your teams every success in your collaboration.

I am sure we will meet again soon. But for now, let me assure you that the Max Planck Society will continue to stand against boycotts, to fight antisemitism, and to ensure that Israeli science remains an active part of the European research community. All the best for the future!