



Speech of the President of the Max Planck Society

Professor Dr. Patrick Cramer

At the Reception on Invitation of the German Consul General to Boston

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German Consulate General, Boston

– Check against delivery –

Dear Deputy Consul General, liebe Frau Wohlleben,
Lieber Herr Hauswirth,
Esteemed colleagues,

It is wonderful to be back in the United States—a country where I have so many valued colleagues and friends, and where the Max Planck Society enjoys many close and long-standing collaborations.

For nearly a century, the United States has been the leading nation in research. Global science has long looked to this country as both—a role model and a strong partner. This is certainly true for us—for European science in general and for Max Planck in particular.

Simply put: the U.S. is our most important partner. Let me share a few figures. In 2024, our institutes were involved in 876 collaborative projects with partners here. Our researchers co-authored almost 9,000 publications with their U.S. colleagues in just two years. By the way, this number has remained stable for years, underscoring the resilience of our cooperation.

There are even more links between us. For example: Ten percent of our directors hold a U.S. passport. Last year, more than 700 scientists from the U.S. worked at our institutes. And let me remind you that we also operate a Max Planck Institute in Florida.

Dear guests,

You can imagine, then, how worried I was when I travelled to California and Washington one year ago—actually together with Sabine Panglung and Anton Zensus, who are also here with me today.



At that time, in every meeting we felt the uncertainty created by the new administration. Our colleagues were deeply concerned; some even felt intimidated. This was hardly surprising, because last spring marked the start of a broad attack on science, critical thinking, and academic freedom.

We witnessed direct attacks on specific institutions, in particular Ivy League universities such as Columbia, UPenn, and—of course—Harvard. We saw restrictions imposed on political grounds, and we saw dramatic consequences for young researchers.

To express our solidarity, I said in Washington one year ago: “Threats to science somewhere are threats to science everywhere.” Clearly, there is only one science and science is a global endeavor. It is our shared mission.

But we did not want to limit ourselves to declarations of solidarity. We wanted to take action: against growing threats to the autonomy of institutions, against looming restrictions on academic freedom, and against new barriers being raised that endanger international exchange.

This conviction inspired our “Transatlantic Program” that we launched one year ago. The message is clear: We are a reliable partner in a rapidly changing world.

Our Transatlantic Program is built around two goals: first, to strengthen our research collaboration by creating several new joint research centers with U.S. institutions; and second, to open up opportunities for outstanding scientists who, for political or personal reasons, must relocate, so that their talent and expertise are not lost to the global scientific community.

Today, dear colleagues, I am pleased to report that we are putting these commitments into reality. By now, proposals for seven new collaboration centers have been evaluated, and I expect that most or all of them will be funded and launched already in the course of this year.

Research in these centers will span a wide range of fields: astronomy and mathematics, AI and plasma physics, ocean and climate science, and neurobiology. Again, we are partnering with some of the finest U.S. institutions, from Caltech and Stanford to Harvard, MIT and Janelia.

These centers can make a real difference. On Monday, we inaugurated a new center at Princeton, where scientists address nothing less than some of the deepest problems in theoretical physics, such as the origin of time. And on Tuesday, we visited our Max Planck center at Columbia. This center is focusing on non-equilibrium quantum phenomena.

And today, I could visit our center here at Harvard. There, scientists address some big questions about our past: How did people connect in ancient times? How did the first settlers around the Mediterranean form relationships? Actually, after talking to the brilliant scientists at the center I must say: it is wonderful what we achieve together!



However, at the same time, we are all aware that science remains under pressure. The Academic Freedom Index published this week showed that the autonomy of U.S. institutions has declined sharply over the past year. And we can see major changes in the global flow of scientific talent.

It is encouraging that European institutions respond and help prevent the drop-out of early-career researchers. In addition, we are helping to offset budget cuts affecting U.S.-led global data-collection efforts and scientific resources, such as the NOAA Global Monitoring Lab, which is an indispensable resource for climate science.

Dear friends,

The situation remains challenging. Yet there are also rays of hope. A few weeks ago, Congress rejected the massive budget cuts that had been proposed. This is an encouraging sign—even if the administration now appears to be slowing the processing and release of grants.

At the same time, institutions continue to face difficult circumstances. Harvard is still operating in an uncertain environment. Last week, UPenn confronted the administration in court after they refused to provide information on its Jewish members. And this Monday, a lawsuit was filed challenging attempts to dismantle the large climate research center in Boulder.

In this situation it is clear that we must continue to speak up for science. We at Max Planck will do so—especially as we are also witnessing the rise of anti-science political forces in parts of Europe, including in Germany.

Dear guests,

Our shared ambition is a source of genuine hope. The fact that we are launching new collaborations at this very moment sends a powerful message: despite all the change in the world, scientists have neither lost their curiosity nor their courage.

Together, we are creating spaces where our work can flourish—rooted in our shared values: excellence, openness, and integrity. This reaffirms what truly unites us: the conviction that science serves all of humanity.

I am convinced that the force of reason will prevail, that the thirst for knowledge will endure, and that science will continue to build bridges and educate the generations to come, providing a foundation of democracy.

Thank you—and my very best wishes for the future!