

**Introductory Speech at the Conferment of the  
Humboldt Research Awards**

**Professor Dr Hans-Christian Pape**

**28 June 2018, 8.30 p.m.**

**Cafe Moskau, Berlin**

**- approx. 10 Minutes –**

Verehrter Herr Parlamentarischer Staatssekretär Meister,  
dear Humboldtians,  
Friends and Guests of the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation,

It's an honour and my great pleasure to welcome you to this evening's awards ceremony at which we are presenting the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation's research awards. What a fine and special occasion this is!

**Welcome**

We have gathered in this interesting historical venue in what was formerly East Berlin. When approaching the building you might have recognized the full-scale satellite 'Sputnik' on top of it, a gift from the Ambassador of the Soviet Union in the 1960s, which in a certain way symbolizes the changeful past of this city. We have gathered here on the final evening of our annual meeting to celebrate you, our research award winners, and to extend our warmest welcome to the most recent award recipients who are seated in the front rows and will receive their award certificates tonight. A special welcome goes to you, your partners and families who have accompanied you tonight, and to the hosts and collaborative partners based in Berlin – 'Sputnik', as you may know,

means companion, reliable and faithful companions – so, be welcome, companions.

### **Academic Freedom, International Collaboration and Trust**

In my opening remarks yesterday at Free University Berlin in Dahlem, I stressed the importance of academic freedom as a human cultural and intellectual achievement and as a value that is worth defending where it is challenged and jeopardized. And I shared my conviction that a thriving and respectful international science community is vital to the well-being of our societies and our shared future on this planet. Since its founding in 1953, the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation has fostered these principles – academic freedom, international collaboration and trust. And the research awards programme, which we are celebrating tonight, was built upon precisely these principles.

In each of your disciplines *you*, our award winners, have helped to push the boundaries of your fields, to reveal unexpected secrets of nature, of the universe, of societies and ourselves – of humankind. You have helped to extend our knowledge beyond what may have been expected. Each of you has achieved remarkable changes of perspective, has acquired and revealed new insights into your field and beyond. And each of you has contributed, in many different and diverse ways, to a new understanding and vision of our life and planet.

Undoubtedly, Alexander von Humboldt, the man after whom the foundation is named, would have encountered each of you with joy, amazement and curiosity. As one of the great natural explorers and universal scholars of his time, he embodied the time-honoured spirit of Friedrich Schiller – not to live *off* science but *for* science. As scientists and scholars, many of us live *for* our research. We are curious, eager to explore new territory, eager to question the unknown, and to search for

answers. We appreciate our academic freedom and we make use of it. As scientists and scholars, we are destined to know that international collaboration is crucial to our endeavour. It broadens perspectives, it inspires new approaches and – *ways of thinking*. Here I would like to quote Humboldt who wrote the following words of thanks to his teacher, the physicist Georg Christoph Lichtenberg, in 1790: “I do not merely regard the sum of positive insights that I was able to gather from what you told me – what I value even more is the general direction that my way of thinking took under your guidance. Truth in itself is precious, but even more precious is the ability to find it.”

Finally, as scientists and scholars, we know that trust is a precious asset. We need to be able to trust our collaborative partners if we wish to excel in our research. And we need *societies* to trust *us*, scientists and scholars, to trust our ways of thinking, our language and scientific findings, if our work is to be of relevance for the human enterprise.

Here, in this room tonight, we are full of admiration, delight and the deepest respect for each other and for the knowledge and expertise each of us brings to the scientific quest. So, allow me to say: Let us not forget to value and – if necessary – to stand up for the principles of academic freedom, international cooperation and trust, whenever and wherever we can and must, both within our scientific communities and beyond. The Alexander von Humboldt Foundation has built its funding philosophy and reputation on these principles, forming a worldwide network of mutual trust. As Humboldtians, you are invited to join in bringing it to fruition!

### **The Award Programme and Award Ceremony**

With these thoughts in mind, dear award winners and guests, let me return to our award ceremony. The research awards, which we are

conferring tonight, were not part of the Foundation's sponsorship portfolio from the start. They were introduced in 1972, as an expression of gratitude by the Federal Republic of Germany to the people of the United States of America for the help that our country had received through the Marshall Plan during the lean years immediately following World War II. It was the German Chancellor Willy Brandt, who in his famous speech at Harvard University marking the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the inauguration of the Marshall Plan, announced a new sponsorship initiative afterwards known as the *US Senior Scientists Program*. Hence, in the early years, the Humboldt Research Award was only conferred on natural scientists, physicians, and engineering scientists from the United States. It was then gradually expanded to encompass distinguished researchers from all countries and all fields of research. I am very pleased that Parliamentary State Secretary Michael Meister is with us tonight, for it was his ministry, the then Federal Ministry for Research and Technology [*founded in 1972*], which provided the necessary funds to establish the programme in the early 1970s and which continues to be the principal funder of the Foundation's research awards programmes. Lieber Herr Meister, thank you for your support and for joining us this evening to address our audience and confer the awards funded by your ministry. We appreciate your commitment!

The Federal Foreign Office that established our Foundation in 1953 later contributed to extending the awards programme, allowing us to honour scientists and scholars worldwide in any field of research. We have every reason to be grateful for its continued support, and I would like to express my sincere thanks to the Foreign Office! And please allow me to mention *all* the funders of the awards conferred tonight: in addition to the aforementioned ministries, they are the Carl Friedrich von Siemens Foundation and the Fritz Thyssen Foundation.

This evening, we have the pleasure of honouring 26 recent award winners from 11 countries. 15 of you work in the natural sciences and mathematics, 7 in the humanities and social sciences and 4 in the engineering sciences. You are hosted at 23 research institutions in 15 cities in Germany.

After Parliamentary State Secretary Meister's address, Katrin Amian will read the laudations for the award winners individually. Please enjoy your laudation while seated, then step up to receive your certificate, and please don't forget to smile: we will take a photo! And be assured: we have no objection whatsoever to you displaying your certificate and photo in your office or lab. You may wish to tweet it, post it, send it to the press office of your university – whatever you do: be proud, celebrate and let your colleagues be jealous, you worked hard for it, you deserve to be admired!

After the ceremony, you are invited to stay for a reception. So, ladies and gentlemen, I wish you a splendid evening! And please join me now in welcoming Parliamentary State Secretary Meister.