

EDITORIAL

Dear Reader,

It appears that our last edition of MaxPlanckResearch struck a nerve: never before have we received so many letters to the editor. Some of them expressed approval or acknowledgment, others indignation. Many readers complained that we reported too little on the “pure or exact sciences,” that we had “conformed to the prevailing spirit of the times” and failed to portray “free, independent science” in the magazine.

But is science not at its most free and independent when it addresses controversial topics within a society and enriches debates by providing insights from basic research? That is exactly why we also report on the results of research from around 20 Max Planck Institutes that are dedicated to exploring current social issues in the humanities and social sciences.

The Max Planck Society has a long history of successful research in legal studies in particular: the Max Planck Institute for Comparative Public Law and International Law is celebrating its 100th anniversary this year (counting the predecessor Institute within the Kaiser Wilhelm Society). This issue of the magazine illustrates how this Institute provided scholarly expertise that influenced German diplomacy.

In this edition, we also address the theme of the 2024 Science Year: “freedom.” This time we explore how law and regulations create freedom. The Basic Law creates the primary framework for freedom in Germany, and the Federal Constitutional Court ensures it is protected. Whether and to what extent the highest court can be protected against attacks on freedom and democracy is one of the topics we discuss. We also address countries and people whose freedom is existentially threatened by climate change. International agreements create the basis for securing their freedom – including the freedom to seek refuge in other countries. Finally, we examine the considerable extent to which Germany has benefited from the freedom and opportunities that the EU has created, primarily through the European single market, and how it can guarantee freedom and prosperity in the future.

The fact that we are devoting several issues to one topic is unusual. But we have good reason to do so: freedom is indispensable in ensuring that both the “exact sciences” and “free, independent science” can perform research without prejudice and hindrances. Incidentally, the humanities and social sciences are the fields that are most often subject to regulations in autocratic systems. This is something that we should all be aware of.

In this spirit, we wish you a stimulating read!

Your Editorial Team