



MAX-PLANCK-GESELLSCHAFT

# Max Planck Institute for Biological Cybernetics



Max-Planck-Institut  
für biologische Kybernetik

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Dear colleagues

The president of the Max Planck Society, Mr. Stratmann, has felt it necessary to write an “open” letter justifying certain measures affecting me personally. As the aggrieved party, I feel entitled to state my own position and to respond with a clarification of the circumstances and situation. As I hope to show you, the president's statements and claims are simply incorrect.

First and foremost, let me clarify one point. The open letter of the president is full of shocking allegations. The specific ones, in case you are wondering, originate from a report written by a veterinarian not familiar with our institute and as requested by the public prosecutor. Unfortunately, this report was full of mistakes and misunderstandings because the writer was not provided with all of the evidence, something that was outside of my control. There can be no talk of non-transparency, because I forwarded to our leadership all the documents that I had to ensure synergy. These included personal documents like the veterinarian's report and the penalty order. While the court rejected everything, our president did not. I suspect that Max Planck himself would have been appalled by the way our society's leadership is handling the situation.

Mr. Stratmann states that I gave up my research with non-human primates much to the Max Planck Society's regret and although I had the society's full support. He also claims that I betrayed the Max Planck Society's trust, failed to adhere to

simple compliance guidelines and exhibited leadership deficits in my research with primates.

1. Perhaps the most distressing and disappointing experience for me was the striking lack of support from the Max Planck Society. I received an impressive amount of support from a number of politicians, colleagues and press outlets when my co-workers and I were being villainized and threatened. The Max Planck Society remained deafeningly silent when a public declaration of unreserved support for our research would have made a vital difference in public opinion.

My decision to leave non-human primate (NHP) research followed 9 months of intensive and genuine efforts to establish communications with the presidium, to clarify what exactly was presented by the activists and why it was inaccurate, to make suggestions of how the NHP research could be strongly defended and enhanced by permitting, for instance, the recruitment of independent group leaders working with primates, and so on and so forth. The presidium refused to answer the vast majority of the letters/emails sent to president and vice president, and when I stated that I would stop NHP research, its reaction was to have one of their leading members call me and intimate that I would be kicked out of the society if I dared to stop. Following a final discussion in Tübingen during the inaugural visit of the president, it became crystal clear to me that the presidium would do nothing to support the NHP research of the department, and this was the final straw in my decision to leave the research to which I have dedicated my entire life. A letter that I wrote to a selected number of directors in 2016 is available to anyone who wishes to read the details.

Following the termination of my NHP research, the president publicly declared that he would support my research in primates or rodents unconditionally. Only days later in a private meeting of institute administrators, however, he stated that he wouldn't pay "a cent" for Logothetis research. Unfortunately, the president not only refused to support my own NHP research, but following my declaration that I would be stopping NHP research, the presidium also declined to support other group leaders who wanted to continue their own NHP research with their own funding.

2. Claims that compliance standards were not adhered to in my institute are simply not true. Staff responsibilities were assigned and separated in accordance with the Animal Welfare Act and the regulations on the welfare of animals used for experiments (*Tierschutz-Versuchstierverordnung*). Every aspect of the work, including the responsibilities related to animal welfare, animal housing and breeding, and animal experiments were reported to the regulating authority, the Tübingen Regional Commission (*Regierungspräsidium*), and were unconditionally approved by that commission. Apart from this, the Max Planck Society was also continuously and accurately informed about the conditions pertaining to staff responsibilities. Allegations that deliberately false or inadequate information was provided by me are simply incorrect.
  
3. If I am accused of leadership deficits, management shortcomings and related personal inadequacies, I hope that you will understand that I do not wish to comment on such personal accusations. Everyone is entitled to form their own opinion of my personality and character. I will only mention objective facts: Our institute enjoys an outstanding scientific reputation and is a leader in the field of neuroscience as reflected by our scientific publications. I am inclined to doubt that a scientist with the character defects I am accused of could rally so many outstanding young scientists together as I have done in this institute.
  
4. The responsible Public Prosecutor's Office in Tübingen wanted to stop proceedings against my colleagues and me because they saw no or only minimal culpability in the case of three animals which were supposedly euthanized too late in experiments. There can therefore be no talk of alleged severe breaches of the Animal Welfare Act from the point of view of the law enforcement authorities. According to my information, the fact that proceedings were not terminated and that penalty orders were issued against my colleagues and me is due to the fact that the Public Prosecutor's Office wished to avoid an open confrontation with militant animal rights activists and instead leave the decision to the courts. Anyone who might have expected for me to receive support from the Max Planck Society or its president in this difficult situation would have been bitterly disappointed. In his letter of 19/10/2017, the president not only announced his desire to strip me of my position as the leader of the institute, but also intimated that I might have conducted illegal animal experiments in foreign countries with supposedly lower scientific standards

than Germany at the expense of the Max Planck Society. He went on to advise me to voluntarily terminate my employment with the Max Planck Society. All of these measures against my person were depicted as necessary to protect the reputation of animal researchers at large. It may be my own dismayed personal interpretation, but when I read the president's letter, I had the impression of a secret joy that I was being confronted with legal proceedings.

Moreover, Mr. Stratmann speaks of serious violations against the Animal Welfare Act and argues that the court did not stop proceedings in favor of the payment of a fine for this reason. These claims are also unfair: As mentioned above, there can be no talk of serious violations from the point of view of the judicial authorities; the maximum sentence for such penalty order is a monetary fine, and it is not recorded in a police certificate of good conduct at any time.

Although the president states that no prejudgment took place, it is a fact that removing an experimental researcher's leadership role with respect to experimental work before a legally valid verdict has been reached does indeed represent a prejudgment.

With his allegations the president of the MPG pretends to know my "serious violations of animal welfare" better than the public prosecutors. Attached please find a brief document, the reading of which would take not more than 10 minutes of your time. It was presented to the police in Tübingen during an interrogation (*Vernehmung*) procedure, and it shows the degree of "disorganization" in my department.

5. The claim that the approval and authorization of animal experiments by the Tübingen Regional Commission were endangered at any time by the investigation or the penalty order is simply not true. The Tübingen Regional Commission has never indicated that the authorization of animal tests or animal housing might be put in question due to the procedure being discussed. The authorities expressed concerns only because the president had appointed another colleague as interim facility manager who had no experience with animal experiments.
6. I have sent you all details about the cancellation of the Scientific Advisory Board (SAB) of our institute, and I leave it to you to judge the president's

actions to impede and cancel it. It is entirely incomprehensible to me. The activities of individual institute employees to which the president is referring served to convince the scientific advisory board to carry out an evaluation for the entire institute and not a selected few laboratories. It is unclear how these positive interactions could have led to the president's *ex cathedra* decision to outright dissolve the institute's scientific advisory board. The vice president himself admitted to the entire institute that the cancellation of the SAB visit was a serious mistake on the part of the president and the Max Planck Society.

Our institute's excellence in animal welfare is also documented by the recent DFG Animal Welfare Prize awarded to Hamid Noori, the head of "neuronal convergence" research group at the Max Planck Institute for Biological Cybernetics. Moreover, the MPG itself praised our institute's transparency in its "White Paper", as mentioned by the president himself.

The actions of the Max Planck Society and its highest representatives towards me are not the result of simple misunderstandings, but bitter reality. They are aimed at discrediting me as a scientist and as a human being and at pushing me out of research. Even if I find it difficult to work under such conditions and although I am seriously considering simply giving up and going elsewhere, I want to avoid this if at all possible for the sake of my esteemed colleagues. We will continue to work together.

With best wishes,

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