Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dear Professor Nowak, (Rector JUK)

Dear Professor Strzałka, (Faculty of Biochemistry, JUK)

Dear Consul General Köhler,

Distinguished guests,

Dear friends,

Great to be back in Krakow and at MCB!

I am very honored to speak on the occasion of the opening of the laboratory of the Max-Planck Research Group in Kraków.

Biochemistry has, undoubtedly, been one of the most dynamic and forward-looking fields of science for quite some time. It has travelled a long way from its origins in physiological chemistry to a discipline closely engaged with virtually all areas of the life sciences, from botany to medicine to genetics. Correspondingly, its findings are applied in a broad spectrum ranging from the cure of diseases to nutrition to agriculture. Interdisciplinary exchange has opened up an enormous array of possibilities as well as raising ethical and political questions that extend far beyond the

disciplinary expertise of biochemists. All of this means that biochemistry is destined to continue its dynamic evolution and will see further expansion in the future.

While the overall trend of disciplinary growth is beyond doubt, the generally bright prospects for biochemical research do not imply that success simply comes as a matter of course. Launching new projects and opening new labs makes a lot of sense but requires – apart from adequate working conditions and know-how – a clear sense of focus and purpose to make science move forward.

Today we have come together to celebrate the official opening of a lab that undoubtedly meets these criteria. Its well-structured research agenda is designed to understand specific regulatory mechanisms of protein synthesis by combining approaches from structural biology, molecular biology, protein biochemistry, biophysics, and cell biology. The goal is bold but achievable: looking at molecular mechanisms that lead to specific base modifications in anticodons of tRNAs, Dr Sebastian Glatt and his team seek to contribute to the understanding of the rôle of these

modifications in the onset of neurodegenerative diseases and cancer. Dear Sebastian and dear members of the Max Planck research team here in Kraków, I wish you every success in this ambitious undertaking and encourage you to be as persistent as necessary and as inventive as possible.

Let me now also take the opportunity to thank all the other people who helped to lay the foundation of this new lab . Please forgive me if I cannot refer to all of them by name, but allow me to mention a few: first of all, people from the host organisation, most notably Prof. Wojciech Nowak as Rector of Jagiellonian University, Prof. Kazimierz Strzałka as Director of the Malopolska Centre of Biotechnology, and Prof. Stanisław Kistryn as co-chairman of the joint selection committee; then, on the part of Max Planck Society, former Vice Presidents Prof. Klaus Hahlbrock, who has been instrumental in promoting German Polish co-operation for many years, and Prof. Herbert Jäckle, as well as people from the administrative headquarters, particularly Dr Sebastian Höpfner from the Division for International Relations; further, from the Max Planck Institute of Biochemistry, Prof. Wolfgang Baumeister, who kindly agreed to act as mentor of the Research Group led by

Dr Glatt; and, finally, German Consul General Dr Werner Köhler, who greatly facilitated the development of scientific co-operation between the two parties. To all of you, and to your collaborators and teams, I would like to extend my sincere gratitude.

As I pointed out in the first part of my speech, this lab has a clearly outlined scientific agenda within the discipline of biochemistry and, to a certain extent, beyond. However, there is another aspect that makes this lab opening special, namely its pioneering function in the context of East-West co-operation in the European Research Area. At first glance, this claim may sound exaggerated, if not outrageous, as though I were overlooking what has been accomplished in the quarter of a century that has passed since the peaceful revolutions of 1989 and particularly in the last decade following the accession of Central and Eastern Europe to the EU. Undoubtedly, a lot of progress has been made in this period towards a comprehensive transformation not only of the political and socioeconomic, but also of the scientific landscape of the region.

Nevertheless, this process is as yet far from complete, certainly as far as science is concerned. While Poland and other countries from Central and Eastern Europe have been raising their investment in research and development as well as introducing reforms to stimulate competition, transparency, and international exchange, much remains to be done, particularly in the segment of scientific excellence. By this, I mean cutting-edge research at the very highest level, which nowadays needs to be contemplated from a global perspective. For what we are witnessing these days is intense competition for the best brains and facilities across national and, increasingly, continental borders. This is not mere coincidence. All over the globe, people have come to realise that, in an age of unprecedented mobility and technological progress, research performance and innovation are key to future growth and development.

In these circumstances, our common goal must be to strengthen Europe and the European Research Area, whose overall success is in many ways remarkable but continues to be spread unevenly across the continent. In the medium and long term, such a distribution is something we must not allow, both for scientific

reasons and for the political and socioeconomic implications it is bound to have. Consequently, we need to mount a sustained effort to make the best possible use of intellectual resources in the entire European Research Area, including the regions that currently lag behind.

Viewed from this perspective, East-West co-operation in projects of scientific excellence such as the Max Planck Laboratory in Kraków is still very much of a pioneering exercise: firstly and most obviously, as a genuine contribution to biochemical research; and, secondly, as a beacon of high-level research in Central Europe, something that is clearly visible in and beyond the region and that will hopefully encourage others to follow our example and do likewise. Let me stress in this context that this is not only about the sheer quality of research. Perhaps even more importantly, it is about certain principles and a certain understanding of research that Max Planck Society has demonstrated, over many decades, to be conducive to major scientific breakthroughs: on the one hand, autonomy of the actual scientists to define their research agenda and select their staff, coupled with the provision of excellent working conditions and a long-time perspective for the people

involved; on the other, strict criteria of scientific excellence, subject to independent evaluation by peers.

It is this person-centred approach that has made Max Planck Society special and, arguably, very successful as a motor of basic research in Germany and beyond. We are confident that it will also help, here in this new lab in Kraków and elsewhere, to advance scientific excellence in Poland and the whole region of Central and Eastern Europe.

With this in mind, I very much look forward to observing the exciting work and future impact of the Max Planck Laboratory here in Kraków.

Thank you very much for your attention