Max Planck-Hebrew University Center for Brain Research launched at event in Jerusalem

First in this field involving German and Israeli scientists

A new brain research center involving scientists from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and the Max Planck Society in Germany was inaugurated today. A delegation from the Max Planck Society, including its president, Prof. Peter Gruss, attended the launching event, held on the Edmond J. Safra Campus of the Hebrew University.

The new center, called the Max Planck-Hebrew University Center for Sensory Processing of the Brain in Action, brings together as partners the Max Planck Institute of Neurobiology in Martinsried, Germany, and the Edmond and Lily Safra Center for Brain Sciences (ELSC). at the Hebrew University.

The new center is one of only 11 such international partnerships between the Max Planck Society, Germany's leading research organization, and a foreign research institution, and is the only one in the field of brain research. The new center will be funded at 3 million euros for its first five years, with funding shared between the two institutions.

Under the joint leadership of Prof. Tobias Bonhoeffer of Germany and Prof. Idan Segev of the Hebrew University, the new, cooperative center brings together senior scientists, including Prof. Bert Sakmann (a Nobel Prize laureate) and Prof. Alexander Borst of Germany and Profs. Haim Sompolinsky and Adi Mizrahi of the Hebrew University. Special emphasis will be placed on promoting young Israeli and German scientists through fellowships and joint research programs.
Inauguration event for Max Planck-Hebrew University Center for Sensory Processing of the Brain in Action (L to R): Prof. Idan Segev, Prof. Peter Gruss, Prof. Eilon Vaadia and Prof. Tobias Bonhoeffer (photo: Sasson Tiram)

Through a combination of experiments, computer-assisted modelling and theory, the researchers from Max Planck and the Hebrew University will be studying both individual nerve cells as well as circuits of cells and analyzing how sensory perceptions are processed in the brain. They are particularly keen to understand how perceptions lead to certain behavioral patterns, and in turn how behavior impacts on perception.

"The center raises our long-standing partnership in the field of neuroscience to a new level of quality. It offers the prospect of an entirely new dimension in the study of the brain in particular," emphasized Max Planck President Gruss. He said the Max Planck-Hebrew University cooperative group "will form a unique team" to study how behavior is formulated.

Hebrew University President Prof. Menahem Ben-Sasson, who participated in the center inauguration, said: "Cooperation with Germany in science and research is among the most important and fruitful of our international contacts, and makes it possible for us to be at the forefront of science." He said that the Hebrew University looks forward to many future projects to be undertaken together with the Max Planck Society.

Also participating in the inaugural event was German Ambassador to Israel Andreas Michaelis, who said that "scientific cooperation is one of the strongest pillars of the mutual cooperation between Israel and Germany."

Lectures on aspects of the work being done in Germany and Israeli on brain research were presented by Profs. Bonhoeffer, Segev and Sompolinsky. A visit was also made to the laboratory of Prof. Mizrahi.

Deciphering the enigma of the brain is one of the major challenges of the 21st century, with leading researchers worldwide seeking to gain new and fundamental insights into the brain's remarkable sensory, motor and emotional capabilities as well as investigating how to treat its many devastating disorders and diseases.

At the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, brain sciences have long been a central focus of research. Towards that end, the university launched the interdisciplinary Edmond and Lily Safra Center for Brain Sciences (ELSC), led by Prof. Eilon Vaadia.
ELSC's interdisciplinary researchers -- neuroscientists, physicists, computer scientists, cognitive scientists and others -- focus on several broad areas of inquiry, including genes and neurons, neural networks learning and plasticity, cognitive neuroscience, computational neuroscience and sensory and motor functions.

The Max Planck Society is widely known as one of the world's outstanding research organizations. Since its establishment in 1948, 17 Nobel laureates have emerged from the ranks of its scientists. In recent years, the society initiated its international research program linking their research institutes with leading research centers worldwide in order to create a scientific umbrella whereby German and foreign scientists combine their experience and expertise to enhance scientific discovery and breakthroughs.

The establishment of the new Max Planck Center at the Hebrew University signifies a substantial expansion of the already extensive cooperation between Max Planck Institutes and the Hebrew University over the past decades.
It is now widely accepted that deciphering the enigma of the brain is the most challenging intellectual endeavor of the 21st century, “The Century of the Brain” - Join our quest and become a friend of ELSC.

Our Int'l Ph.D. program provides outstanding students with top-notch courses in computational neuroscience.
The Jerusalem Brain Sciences Building will provide a state-of-the-art research and teaching facility for the Edmond and Lily Safra Center for Brain Sciences.

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