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Press Release

## Professor Theodor W. Hänsch receives Order Pour le mérite'

**On 1 June the section of the 'Order Pour le mérite' in Berlin elected Professor Theodor W. Hänsch, Director at the Max Planck Institute of Quantum Optics in Garching and leader of the Laser Spectroscopy Division, as a new member. Membership of this Order is regarded as one of the most renowned awards for artists and scientists who enjoy outstanding respect worldwide for their excellent contributions. This distinction was also conferred upon the poet Durs Grünbein and Professor Dr. Svante Pääbo, a researcher in paleogenetics.**

The Order Pour le mérite was established by the Prussian King Friedrich Wilhelm IV in 1842 to honour outstanding scientists, scholars and artists. It was intended as a complement to the military order founded by Friedrich II. Alexander von Humboldt was its first Chancellor and advisor. The end of the monarchy in 1918 also brought with it the end of both orders. The 'peace order', however, was renewed in 1952 by German President Theodor Heuss. Since then it has been under the protectorate of the respective German President. At present 38 German and 29 foreign members belong to the Order. They meet twice a year at conferences to exchange their views and ideas.

Professor Hänsch was born in Heidelberg in 1941. He studied physics at the University of Heidelberg, earning his doctorate in 1969. He went on to post-doctoral study in the United States, and was a professor of physics at Stanford University from 1975 to 1986. Since 1986 he has been Director at the Max Planck Institute of Quantum Optics and Professor of Experimental Physics at the Ludwig Maximilians University in Munich. His main research fields are the high-precision laser spectroscopy of hydrogen and similar elements and the investigation of ultracold quantum gases.

Professor Hänsch has received many scientific prizes and awards. Among others he was awarded the Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz Prize of the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft in 1988. Twice – in 1998 and 2000 – he received the renowned Philip Morris Research Prize. In 2006 the Große Bundesverdienstkreuz mit Stern (Great Cross of Merit with Star) of the Federal Republic of Germany was conferred upon him. In 2005 he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Physics for the frequency comb technique which was developed within the framework of high-precision laser spectroscopy experiments.

*Olivia Meyer-Streng*

### Contact:

#### **Prof. Dr. Theodor W. Hänsch**

Professor of Physics, Ludwig Maximilians University, Munich  
Director of the Max Planck Institute of Quantum Optics  
Hans-Kopfermann-Straße 1  
85748 Garching  
Phone: +49 89 32905 702/712  
Fax: +49 89 32905 312  
E-mail: [t.w.haensch@mpq.mpg.de](mailto:t.w.haensch@mpq.mpg.de)

Press & Public Relations,  
Dr. Olivia Meyer-Streng

Phone:  
+49(0)8932 905-213  
E-mail: [olivia.meyer-streng@mpq.mpg.de](mailto:olivia.meyer-streng@mpq.mpg.de)

Hans-Kopfermann-Str. 1  
D-85748 Garching

Phone: +49(0)8932 905-0  
Fax: +49(0)8932 905-200