

Sehr geehrter Herr Professor Siebenhaar, in Vertretung von Spectabilis Liedtke,

sehr geehrter Herr Oberbürgermeister Jung,

esteemed ambassadors of the embassies of Argentina, Columbia, El Salvador, Peru, Portugal, as well as representatives of the embassies of Spain and Mexico,

dear Professor Fine, director of the European Forum of the Hebrew University,

sehr geehrter Herr Professor Ingenschey,  
sehr geehrter Herr Professor Meyer-Minnemann,  
sehr geehrter Herr Professor Wotjak,  
sehr geehrter Herr Professor Gärtner,

verehrter Herr Professor de Toro,  
sehr geehrte Frau Dr. Gatzemeyer,

dear ladies and gentlemen,

it is a great honour and my very pleasure to welcome you on behalf of the Rektorat of the Alma Mater Lipsiensis on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of the Ibero-American Research Centre of Leipzig University, the Centro de Investigacion Iberoamericana de la Universidad de Leipzig, or as I will abbreviate by its german name, the IAFSL.

I particularly want to express the greetings of Magnifizenz Schücking.

Just four weeks ago we celebrated the twentieth anniversary of the Philologische Fakultät, that is the department within our university comprising all philological disciplines. Against this background, today's ceremony to honour 20 years of activity of the IAFSL clearly elucidates the importance of the IAFSL as a major pillar from the first hour of philological life at Leipzig University reshaped in a democratic environment after the german re-unification.

The IAFSL was founded in 1994 and inaugurated with a scientific lecture by Professor Meyer-Minnemann. Today, 20 years later, Prof. Meyer-Minnemann will again give the lecture on this festive occasion.

The Ibero-American Research Centre is both, a research institution as well as a cultural institution, deeply rooted and well-established within the city of Leipzig, within the region and recognized nationally and of course internationally.

Let me dwell a little further on the three main principles of the IAFSL as they are:

- Research,
- Training of young academics and future scholars,
- Internationalization

In terms of research, the IAFSL has paved new paths for Romance studies in Germany. Professor Ingenschay will be the expert to lay this out us, so let me only mention that it is due to the IAFSL that Leipzig University is known for its research in Latin American studies and on the area of the Maghrib .

A project which has been developed and which evolved throughout the last 4 years and during my time in office as vice-rector for research, is focussed on the topic of „diasporas“. On this subject, the IAFSL began a seminal collaboration with the Institute for Romance Studies of Hebrew University, most notably in the person of Prof. Ruth Fine. This evolved into in a transdisciplinary project involving more than 60 researchers from Israel, Europe, the Maghrib and from Turkey. On the side of Leipzig University, 4 different departments in the humanities are comprised. This project so far received funding from the Federal Ministry of Education and Research, the Federal Foreign Office, the German Academic Exchange Service, but also from many other remarkable institutions and think tanks at the Hebrew University. It finally culminated in a project proposal submitted a few days ago within the just established new European Research Funding Scheme Horizon 2020 under the title

*Migrations and Diasporas.*

*Construction and Representation of 'performative-hybrid' identities, gender and cities*

*in Global Societies in transdisciplinary perspective,*

a proposal within a consortium of 9 partners: 3 from Germany, and 1 from each Israel, Turkey, the Netherlands, Spain, Italy and France.

This project is just one example to illustrate the widely spread and truly international activities of the IAFSL, transcending not only geographical boundaries but also widening the disciplinary perspective, building bridges from humanities and philologies in particular to the social sciences and political studies. It is self-understood that such broad and vivid research activities have all along been paired with a well-established and recognized publication series.

Training of young researchers and scholars is one of the noble and vital duties of every scholar. Leipzig University puts quite an emphasis on this point, and we go to great lengths to assure quality in this endeavour. 14 years ago, the IAFSL has started a very successful series of workshops with the purpose of training young academics, the so-called „Forschungstag: Lateinamerika / Iberische Halbinsel“ which, with the collaboration of Prof. Ingenschay and Prof. Floeck, again developed towards a remarkable international event, eventually starting to change stages for its periodic activities throughout many different countries.

Internationalization is also the final point of my short outline. Leipzig University is one of Germanies high-ranking universities in terms of internationalization, for example among the top ten on the list of the German Academic Exchange Service (number 5 in 2010). This success owes also substantially to Professor de Toro and the Ibero-American Research Centre. Here, the IAFSL has a most remarkable role, influence and importance also in collaboration with the city of Leipzig for which internationalization is clearly a prime discipline. This aspect, however, will certainly be much better be laid out by Mayor Burkhard Jung.

So let me finish at this point, not without emphasizing how much of the essence and impact of the Ibero-American Research Centre is connected with and owes to the person of Prof. de Toro himself. Informally speaking,

it is his baby. And I want to congratulate him to the achievement of having raised this child to the stage of such an accomplished grown-up of the mature age of 20 years.