

Speech Burkard Jung Lord Mayor of the City of Leipzig

Welcome:

Celebration of the 20th anniversary of the foundation of the Ibero-American Research Seminar of the University of Leipzig (IAFSL)

(June 20, 2014, 6:30 PM, Leipzig, New City Hall)

Professor Schwarz,

Professor Fine (= Director of the European Forum at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem),

I welcome you in the name of our many guests from abroad, like Professor Ingenschay (= Director of the Institute for Romance Studies at the Humboldt University, longtime Chair of the German Hispanists' Association), as well as in the name of our German guests!

I extend a special welcome to the ambassadors from Argentina, Columbia, El Salvador and Peru as well to the Counselors from the Embassies of Mexico and Spain. Your presence here is a sign of the political significance of the Ibero-American Research Seminar of the University of Leipzig. Thank you all for being with us today!

And, last but not least, I welcome Dr. Gatzemeier and Professor de Toro, Directors of the Ibero-American Research Center, the birthday boy and girl, so to speak. Congratulations on your first 20 years!

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Making the unknown graspable by grasping it: This could be IAFSL's motto. I don't know about you, but I believe, when one thinks of the conflicts raging in the world – the horrors in the Ukraine alone, for example – one can see how little we know about the conditions at the centers of these conflicts, and how little we know about one another. In an increasingly networked world, not knowing about the lives of other becomes an enormous political obstacle.

We must, therefore, get to know one another better in this era of global politics that has long been our condition. We must know whom and what we are dealing with. Communications are becoming more and more important. The mutual understanding that is always the foundation for cooperation is indispensable to a world of many cultures.

Understanding means talking to one another. In a letter from the Portuguese Ambassador that reached me today, I was reminded of a little-known fact: After English and Spanish, Portuguese is the world's most widespread language, with over 220 million speakers. And this does not just include fans of the World Cup.

So we may consider ourselves lucky here in Leipzig to have such an esteemed multicultural and multilingual organization as IAFSL. Their enormously diverse gamut of scientific, political, cultural, and diplomatic contacts sends a clear message. For this, Dr. Gatzemeier and Professor de Toro, you should be very proud of your staff.

Professor de Toro,

Allow me to address you directly as spiritus rector: You, of course, play a large part in all of this. Here we see an example of ideal harmony of fact and biography. You have never denied your Latin American roots. The academic world of South America and Romance cultures is your intellectual homeland. Opening it to us was, for you, not just a scientific duty, but also a personal one. It is no surprise that the Argentine writer, philosopher, and intellectual Jorge Luis Borges is so pivotal to your work. Like no other, Borges took the mixing of cultures as his life's work. You, Professor de

Toro, have taken this inspiration and made it fruitful for your research and for the benefit of young scholars at IAFSL!

The achievements of IAFSL stem from this and many other sources. For this reason, its effects reach far beyond the bounds of the academic world. For Latin America, the Maghreb, France, Spain, Portugal, and Israel, it serves as professional mediators that have shaped the global perception of Leipzig as a city of international openness. Evidence of this fact are the many international conferences that have taken place and the many quality publications that have been produced.

Its effects on the political sphere in Leipzig are also clearly visible. Former President of Chile Ricardo Lagos and current President Michelle Bachelet got to know Leipzig through IAFSL. The Research Seminar regularly invites influential authors to the Leipzig Book Fair. Numerous ambassadors and representatives have made their way to Leipzig due to initiatives by IAFSL. Tonight is a reconfirmation of this.

In a word: Here we see a perfect marriage of passion for and astute interest in community. Through IAFSL, Leipzig has developed an impressive profile as a place of exchange with Romance cultures.

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is here that the two have met. Latin America has been at home in Leipzig for some time now. Since the 1970s, our city has been the home and place of study of many young people from South America. Of course, it was the political conditions of those years that achieved this. After 1973, many Chileans lived in Leipzig, and many Cubans and Nicaraguans came soon after. But it is also clear that many of our visitors from those days have now become friends of Leipzig, and look back on this time with great nostalgia.

But at the time of the Peaceful Revolution, South America was also part of our city in another way. It represented another way of life, another way of thinking and being part of this world. And the literature of Borges, Marquez, or Pablo Neruda had a place on the bookshelves of many of Leipzig's citizens – as long as the bookstores were able to stock it.

After 1990, the City of Leipzig further developed its international orientation. This went hand in hand with the long and rich tradition of our city that has always been shaped by exchange across city walls and national borders. Without a doubt, IAFSL is in the right place.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I leave you with this! Even this happy anniversary is not without its troubles. The dire struggles of the sciences in Leipzig cast a shadow on this day. I have received many letters over the past weeks, from Algiers and Ottawa, from Jerusalem and Hamburg. For this, I thank the friends of IAFSL. I take their concerns very seriously.

For our city needs strong sciences to develop. Let me assure you that we are doing everything in our power to change these policies, in Leipzig, and with the help of our many friends in Germany and across the globe.