

**Speech by Axel Freimuth, President of the University of Cologne,
held at the 1st “Cologne Latin America Symposium” on 17 October 2005, 9am,
at the University of Cologne, Main Building, New Senate’s Chamber
(Check against delivery)**

Lord Mayor Schramma,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

As the President of the University of Cologne, it is a great pleasure for me to welcome you to the First Cologne Latin America Symposium.

Latin America and European countries, among them Germany, have close ties to one another. They have been partners in the past and are currently considering to enter a new strategic partnership in order to find common answers to the various challenges arising from globalization.

In recent years, most Latin American countries have benefited from the developments in the world economy and from the economic and social reforms they carried out. In spite of this, leading economists and other social scientists have seriously questioned the Latin American experience with transformation in the late 1990s and early 2000s. In a recent article, Nobel Laureate Joseph Stiglitz pointed out that “if development is in fact the transformation of society, we need to think carefully about what it entails, and how that transformation can be most effectively promoted”. Stiglitz strongly advocates a reform of the economic agenda within the broader context of the transformation of society in order to achieve sustainable growth and poverty reduction in Latin America.

It is the aim of the 1st Cologne Latin America Symposium to take stock of economic development and economic and social policies implemented in Latin America during the last decade and to identify the key areas of public policy that require the attention of policy makers and researchers. Another aim of the symposium is to foster research activity in Germany and Europe on topics related to the economic and social development of Latin America, to strengthen the existing networks between European and Latin American researchers and to promote the creation of new research networks.

Ladies and Gentlemen, Cologne is the appropriate location for this symposium for the relations between the University of Cologne and Latin America have a long tradition.

In this context, I would like to point at the interdisciplinary course in Latin American Studies. This course provides students not only with specific knowledge, but also with additional skills such as intercultural competence and the ability of interdisciplinary thinking, skills that are becoming more and more important in today's labour market. As a reflection of this, in 1989 the University of Cologne decided to establish an interdisciplinary course in Latin American Studies. The course leads to a graduate degree equivalent to a MA from a British University and includes the subjects Economics, Politics, Iberian and Latin American History as well as Spanish and Portuguese Languages and Literature. While History and Literature emphasize specific aspects of Latin American culture, Economics and Political Science follow the traditional curriculum for these subjects. The high requirements which result from the necessity to deal with different working methods in four disciplines contribute to prepare students for their future working life. Graduates in Latin-American Studies from Cologne University are particularly well qualified to work in an international and intercultural environment.

I am glad that some of those excellent and outstanding young German specialists on Latin American affairs have co-organized this symposium and are also presenting papers in the conference.

At the University of Cologne Institutes of two different faculties engage in teaching and research related to Latin America. Several interdisciplinary groups have been initiated during the last decades, such as the Research Group for Spain-Portugal-Latin America (ASPLA), founded in 1972, the Centre for the Portuguese-Speaking World, launched in 1993, and the recently established Interdisciplinary Centre for Teaching and Research on Latin America (LFZL). The founding chairman of the new Centre, Professor Barbara Potthast, is one of the speakers of the symposium.

Another faculty member of the University of Cologne, also presenting a paper, is Professor Manfred Feldsieper who dedicated an important part of his academic life to Latin America. He has just retired after more than 30 years of teaching and research activities. I would like to take the opportunity to thank him for his work.

This address would not be complete without mentioning the relations between the University of Cologne and universities in several Latin American countries, among them the long lasting contacts to Fortaleza (Brazil) and Tucumán (Argentina) as well as the emerging ones to Guadalajara (México).

Last but not least, let me mention the activities of “connosco”, a student consultancy founded in 2001 by students of Latin American Studies. This non-profit company offers support to companies and institutions from Europe and Latin America seeking qualified advice. Young students are given the opportunity to gather practical experience in international projects and to get in touch with their professional future.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I expect the first Cologne Latin America Symposium to strengthen the relations between Germany and Latin America and to generate new ideas that might help us deal effectively with the challenges of globalization.

I would like to congratulate the organizers and all of you who have made the effort to come to Cologne to participate in the event, and I wish you all a successful and very productive conference.

Thank you very much