

AMBASSADOR'S LECTURE SERIES "Innovation Is The Ability To See Change As An Opportunity"

With this sentence, the German Ambassador to Belgium opened his lecture at the K.U.Leuven. Prof. Dr. Reinhard Bettzeuge was invited to this university as part of the Ambassador lectures, a series of lectures by prominent Ambassadors on social relevant themes. Topic of the day was Germany's Research and Innovation Policy Chances for Belgo-German Cooperation. Your reporter was present

by Jannes Motmans

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According to Prof. Dr. Bettzeuge, Europe risks becoming a "museum of the 20th century, visited by Asian tourists."

...And the first thing worth mentioning was the large absence of students. Very few were present, although the topic was about their future. You couldn't blame them, the lecture was indeed very theoretic and hard to follow for those not familiar with the topic, such as your reporter. A humble attempt to summarize the lecture.

It is generally known that the East is on the rise as an economic power, and that Europe risks running behind the facts. For Prof. Dr. Bettzeuge, we can

only maintain a role of importance if we uphold our comparative advantage in the key policy field of innovation and technology. If not, we risk becoming a "museum of the 20th century, visited by Asian tourists." We don't have the manpower of Asia, nor the energy supplies of Russia, nor the military strength of the US. Nevertheless, we do have our knowledge, innovation and spirit. It is on this field we can excel.

Germany is giving the good example in Europe. They are investing 2,8% of their GDP (or around 55 – 60 billion

euro) in R&D and are aiming to reach a solid 3% in the near future. Why are they doing so? If we may believe the Ambassador, R&D is "the backbone of a post-modern country with a strong industrial culture." He then continued by discussing the German policy on the field of R&D and mentioned the several institutes and universities in the German academic landscape. Worth mention is the impressive improvement the university in Aachen is currently experiencing. They are developing a new campus which will consists "of 19 research clus-

ters, laboratories, offices, and 250 national and international industries and companies."

He ended his lecture by focusing on the possibilities for Germany and Belgium to strengthen their cooperation in education and in R&D. In 2011, German universities are facing an increase of 70,000 extra students as a result of ending the system of conscription, combined with the shortening of the high school cycles in two Länder. This, as the Ambassador stresses, is an opportunity for Belgium to attract German students to their universities. With the help of some good advertising, the K.U.Leuven could indeed attract more students than the current 184.

The next Ambassador will be the one from South-Africa, speaking about sport and integration.

