Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a privilege and honor to welcome all of you to Bielefeld University! I assume that many of you have never heard of Bielefeld before. Well, you are not alone: When I arrived almost 30 years ago, I did not have a clue myself. Since then, I have come to appreciate this place as well as its people. If you allow, I would like to take the chance to say a few words about Bielefeld.

Bielefeld is one of the 20 largest cities in Germany with a population comparable to Bonn and an area similar to Frankfurt (on the Main). It is located quite centrally in Germany, so it takes only a little more than two hours by train and you arrive in Berlin, Cologne or Hamburg. One aspect that makes Bielefeld a great place to live is the fact that it is surrounded by the Teutoburg Forest. Wherever you are in this city, it will not take you more than a ten minutes’ walk to reach the woods and send fresh forest air to your brain! If you want to explore this part of Bielefeld, you are in the right place because the Teutoburg Forest starts …… right here behind the Center of Interdisciplinary Research!

While I am at it, I would like to add a few more words about our university, which is quite a young institution compared to other universities in Germany or Europe. In 2019, we will be celebrating our 50th anniversary! We started with 3 faculties (Mathematics, Law and Sociology) and 270 students. Now we have 13 faculties (and soon it will be 14, with the Medical Faculty that is being planned). And we have about 25,000 students.
The Center of Interdisciplinary Research (ZiF) where your conference is taking place was even founded before the university. (It will be celebrating its 50th anniversary in November).

Its central idea – interdisciplinarity – became one our university’s founding principles.

Since then, the ZiF has become such an integral part of our university that I like to say it is part of our university’s DNA. The ZiF was the first German Institute for Advanced Study (and supposedly even the first within Europe) modeled after institutes at Princeton and Stanford. There was one difference from the beginning, though: The ZiF did not support individual researchers, but Research Groups concerned with a common interdisciplinary theme. You might also want to know that the first activities the ZiF hosted 50 years ago were compact conferences like the one you are attending now. So, I suppose, there could hardly be a better place for you to meet. I hope you will feel at home and find the ZiF’s environment inspiring!

In what some have called a post-truth world, your topic – “Integrity and Responsibility in Science” – is critical. About 3 years ago, the German Council of Science and Humanities (Wissenschaftsrat) published a position paper on “Scientific Integrity.” It said science bears a special ethical responsibility. A greater responsibility than any other part of society because of the autonomy science claims for itself. And indeed, if science wants to be autonomous, we all need to question what we are doing, how we are doing it and beyond setting up standards and guidelines, we need to create and live what the council calls a culture of honesty and responsibility for scientific quality. If we do not assume this
responsibility, the risk is high that science will lose credibility and that its integrity will be badly damaged.

In our so-called post-factual era, this can happen fast, so your conference on “integrity and responsibility of science” is timely. I cannot think of a more suitable group working on this important topic relevant to all disciplines and scientists everywhere in the world.

I wish all of you a pleasant stay in Bielefeld and intriguing discussions that lead to recommendations that will help all of us take a firm stand for the credibility and integrity of science!

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