

Team of German professors and students from University of Erlangen visit LERC

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Reported by Elie Nabhan

A team of German professors and students from the Institute of Geography at the University of Erlangen, close to the city of Nuremberg in Southern Germany, led by Prof. Dr. Georg Glasze, Chair of Cultural Geography at the Institute, and Mr. Florian Benning arrived at the Lebanese Emigration Research Center at Notre Dame University, Louaize, to learn more about Lebanese emigration and to visit the Lebanon and Migration Museum at NDU.

This follows the earlier visit to the Center in February of eighteen German students from the University of Mainz, Germany, led by Professor Anton J. Escher, university lecturer in Human Geography at the University of Mainz and Director of the Centre for Intercultural Studies (ZIS), and guided by Mr. Andreas Wischnat, a Research Affiliate at LERC.

To start with this latest group of Germans was taken on a tour of the NDU campus and library by Mr. Elie Nabhan and Mr. Elias Sfeir. The sunny day and stunning views were greatly appreciated by the visitors.



View of the German university group in assembly at the auditorium (Mar 2010).

At the NDU Auditorium, LERC Project Manager Ms. Basma Abdel Khalek, introduced the Center to the group, its aims and activities, its resource library, its collection of photographs, books, manuscripts, political, cultural and business materials, and its private collections, many of them family collections donated to LERC, all documenting a collective history of the Lebanese diaspora.

Ms. Abdel Khalek outlined the current LERC projects which include the research underway on subjects relating to migration, refugees, identity, naturalization and citizenship such as the report *Acquisition and Loss of Nationality: The Case of Lebanon*.

Ms. Abdel Khalek informed the group about the other LERC projects underway including *The Impact of the Global Financial Crisis on Lebanese Expatriates in the Gulf Countries*; *Impact of Naturalization on Employability, Social Mobility, and Economic Development of the Naturalized Kurds in Lebanon*; the recently published book on the *Arabs in Cuba*, and the book in the making on out-of-country voting.

She mentioned the contemporary art exhibition on Lebanese Diaspora being held in Central Beirut.

Ms. Abdel Khalek recalled past projects of LERC including the work of Dennis Kumetat, a Master's Student at CAMES at the American University of Beirut, who was also associated with LERC as a Research Affiliate, surveying Lebanese opinion about Germany, German – Lebanese relations, the emigration of Lebanese to Germany and the role of the German army in the UNIFIL, for his thesis in August 2008 titled *The Perception of Germany in Lebanon – A Qualitative and Quantitative Survey* parts of which were published as a working paper by the German government.

She also mentioned the role of LERC in arranging all the expert interviews for another German national, Mr. Wolf-Hagen von Angern, whose research project was aimed at detecting chances and obstacles for coexistence of Lebanon's confessional groups from a historical, sociological and religious perspective by identifying deep-rooted biases and preconceptions among the Lebanese communities. His research will also discuss the issue of emigration as a means to overcome the troubled situation in Lebanon.

In his reply, Mr. Florian Benning explained that the Institute of Geography carries a long tradition and is known for its wide ranging majors and youth-oriented studies in particular concentrating on Geographic Development Studies, Bio-Geography, Regional Development, and Political and Social Geography.



Mr. Florian Benning introduces the Institute of Geography and the aims of the German university visit (Mar 2010).

Students of Geography, he said, have the opportunity to travel to almost every continent in the world and this time decided to visit Lebanon. Mr. Benning explained that within the scope of the field trip he was responsible for the Lebanese diaspora.

The aim of the visit, he said, was to study the history of the Lebanese emigration and the social and professional structure of the emigrants. The group was keen to learn more on the role played by the Lebanese diaspora on the different communities and parties in Lebanon and to what extent the diaspora influences Lebanese politics today. The group, he added, was also interested in the existing linkages between the communities abroad and Lebanon.



Mr. E. Nabhan (left) explains on a LERC collection as Prof. Dr. Georg Glasze (middle) and others look on (Mar 2010).

With this in mind, Mrs. Liliane Haddad, Archives Indexer at LERC, made a presentation shedding as much light as possible, on the history of Lebanese migration and its causes, emphasizing that the Lebanese diaspora is conservatively estimated at 6-8 million people.

LERC's archival collection, she said, confirms that the largest communities of Lebanese emigrants and their descendants are found in Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, the United States Canada, Nigeria, Ivory Coast, Senegal South Africa, France, Sweden, Egypt, Gulf States, and Australia.

The presentation included relevant examples on the Lebanese diaspora taken from the LERC's archival collections that encompasses not only articles, dissertations, documents, letters, reports but also business associations, films, documentaries and other audio visual material.

The group was then given a tour of the Lebanon and Migration Museum at NDU to see first hand original samples from the LERC collections.



The German university group at the Lebanon and Migration Museum at NDU (Mar 2010).



Souvenir picture taken at the staircase down to the Museum (Mar 2010).