



# CMEPS

Comparative & Middle East Politics and Society

**Dr. Renate Dieterich, DAAD**

**Welcome note**

**Inaugural Event, 25th November 2013**

“Comparative & Middle East Politics and Society”

(CMEPS) Joint M.A. Program

**Dear Professor Schlumberger,**

**Dear Professor Schmid,**

**dear Professor Schmitter,**

**distinguished guests,**

It is an exceptional pleasure for me to be here today in Tübingen! The DAAD attaches great importance to the academic cooperation between Germany and Egypt, and I am more than happy to take part in the inauguration event of this very special project within this cooperation.

Education is never a one-way-road. No country can build a knowledge society within closed walls. Communities of researchers will only flourish when they are allowed to interact and communicate with each other freely and without any boundaries – and here I mean boundaries in literal terms as well as boundaries in brains and minds. Only well-educated societies will be able to face the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Universities as houses of knowledge and wisdom have an essential role in this process. Scientific relations between Europe and the Arab World have a very long tradition and the DAAD itself has been working for the sake of German-Egyptian cooperation for decades.

The new German-Arab Master Course *Comparative & Middle East Politics and Society* is one of the latest manifestations of this cooperation and of the conviction that education plays a crucial role for economic, political and social development of a nation.



As we all know almost three years ago, things changed in the MENA-region dramatically. Since 2011, a huge transformation with great and unexpected changes has taken place in Egypt and in Tunisia. The world has watched these events with close attention and great suspense.

Egypt and Tunisia embarked upon a historic transformation and have experienced massive changes since then, including changes in politics, but also within society. Having faced a similar scenario in Germany at the end of the 1980s when East Germany collapsed and new structures had to be found to internally unite both German parts, it is now about intensifying the cooperation with our partners in Egypt and Tunisia to face the challenges and chances together that have also erupted on the academic landscape in both countries.

The German government has proposed a German-Arab transformation partnership as early as January 2011 in order to support this process. One focus is on fostering cooperation in the education and sciences sphere. Being fully aware of the importance of higher education for the reform processes, the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs has provided the DAAD with considerable means for new cooperation activities in this partnership. The DAAD has expanded its cooperation with Egypt and Tunisia accordingly and offers different additional funding possibilities in the areas of higher education and sciences. At this point, please let me express my deep respect and my positive feelings for this great venture.

The DAAD has therefore developed new programmes especially designed for the needs in Egypt and Tunisia in the turn of the Arab spring. Alone for Egypt, nearly two dozen long-term cooperation projects and over 70 short term measures such as conferences, workshops, meetings and many more activities have been funded so far through these new programmes.

While each country in the region must find its own path that will allow carrying the transformation process forward, the over-arching goals of the transformation process remain clear – democratic change that enables people to participate directly and higher growth that creates more jobs and that is shared equitably among all strands of society.

This focus is extremely important: A country's economic and social development is closely linked to its educational system. Universities carry out an important historic task: they pick up on the political demands and transfer them into science and research.



Especially the new German-Arab Master Course *Comparative & Middle East Politics and Society* takes this task literally: Students get in-depth knowledge of both current and former political and social developments in the Middle East and they are equipped with analytical tools for understanding the dynamics of the ongoing transformation processes.

Introducing change in politics and society is a complex and not at all a straight-forward process. Looking at the current situation in Egypt, it becomes clear: Democratic change needs time; it sometimes takes detours or steps behind. It is therefore all the more important to have qualified and well-educated experts accompanying this process academically and being multipliers within politics and society.

The DAAD is proud to contribute to this ambitious task by funding the new joint master course, developed and implemented by two very experienced partners, the American University in Cairo and the Eberhard-Karls University Tübingen in Germany. Planning for the Master course dates back to the year 2011 and I am very happy to say that the DAAD and me personally have followed and supported the genesis of this cooperation for several years. In 2012, a commission of independent academic experts from the field decided on the funding application for the project - as it is the rule for all DAAD funding decisions.

Thus the DAAD has been able to accompany the development from the first steps until today when we see a complete Master course with a first intake of students. Two years of hard work lie in front of these young people, including one term at the partner university.

But applications are not only welcome from Egyptian and German students but also from neighbouring Arab countries. Transformation with great expectations, hope, stagnation and sometimes even violence is a regional phenomenon. Other Arab countries are also experiencing massive political and social changes. That is why a regional expertise is needed which will be provided by the master course *Comparative & Middle East Politics and Society* in a very professional and highly qualified way.

Ladies and gentlemen, I wish you a nice evening with fruitful discussions and academic debate. I am sure we will remember this inauguration with joy and as an event of intellectual inspiration, driven by the spirit of partnership. Thank you very much for your attention!

**Dr. Renate Dieterich, Head of Section German-Arab Transformation Partnership –  
Cultural Dialogue German Academic Exchange Service Bonn**