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## 50 Years of German Orient-Institute

by Helene Rang



H.R.H. Prince Turki Al Faisal Al-Saud, Chairman, Board of Directors, King Faisal Centre for Research and Islamic Studies

On June 14<sup>th</sup>, 2010, the German Orient-Institute celebrated its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary. The German Orient-Institute / Deutsches Orient-Institut was founded by NUMOV / German Near and Middle East Association / Nah- und Mittelost-Verein e.V. on 14<sup>th</sup> June 1960 and is Europe's oldest private research institutes for the Near and Middle East region. To celebrate this event, the institute organized a special anniversary conference on Politics, Science, Culture and Economy of the Near and Middle East and a festive gala event. The Gala was opened with

a speech by **Martin Bay**, Chairman of the Board of Directors of German Railway Group International, Chairman of the Board of NUMOV and Member of the Board of the German Orient-Foundation.

Martin Bay stressed that 50 years after its foundation the relevance of the German Orient-Institute seems to be higher than ever. In times of globalisation nations, religions and cultures become more and more interconnected and interwoven. Orient and Occident depend on each other like never

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before. Accordingly, developments in the "Islamic" and the "Arab" world influence daily life in the "Western" world and vice versa. This is particularly noticeable since Muslims have become an important part of Europe's societies. Martin Bay stressed that mutual understanding is a prerequisite for co-operation and also scholarly research on issues of the Near and Middle East. This is what he described as the most precious resource of the German Orient-Institute: to provide information, knowledge and expertise in politics and economics and to depict complex developments and contexts in an understandable way. A highlight of the Gala event was the endowment of the library of the German Orient-Institute to the Institute of Asian and African Studies at Humboldt University Berlin. Symbolizing the donation, Martin Bay solemnly handed over the first book of the German Orient-Institute's library collection of several thousand books to **Professor Dr. Michael Linscheid**, Vice-President of the Humboldt University Berlin. He sincerely thanked the German Orient-Institute for the donation of the rare and precious literature and praised the Institute's remarkable contribution to scholarship and research on the Near and Middle East. **H.E. Dr. Gerhard Schröder**, Honorary Chairman of NUMOV, in his address also extended a warm welcome to all guests. In particular, he emphasised the visit of H.R.H. Turki Al Faisal Al Saud as an important sign for the growing and sustainable networks between Germany and the Near and Middle East to which NUMOV is dedicated. For the German business community, strong ties with the region were becoming more and more important and should be strengthened by constant cooperation. The Honorary Chairman of NUMOV further described it as an important task of Western societies to get to know better Islam and the Muslim cultures, as in the course of 11<sup>th</sup> September 2001 and the following wars prejudices and extremism in the Orient as well as in the Occident have become a more obvious challenge to the world community. H.E. Dr. Gerhard Schröder finished his speech by rephrasing Samuel Huntington's famous description of the clash of civilizations by saying: "This is not a struggle between cultures, but for cultures". **Dr. Ehrhart**



**Körting**, Senator for the Interior and Sport in Berlin, joined this argument. Concerning the important subject of Muslims living in Europe and against the background of a German society that continues to ask critically, if and how a peaceful coexistence of cultures is possible, he demanded tolerance, open-mindedness and respect from both sides. He called upon the society to bear in mind the many successful forms of intercultural life instead of endlessly discussing its potential conflicts and challenges only. **H.R.H. Prince Turki Al Faisal Al Saud**, Chairman of King Faisal Center for Research and Islamic Studies, lauded the previous speakers: Their words should be an invitation for mutual efforts from the Muslim and the Western world to come to an understanding, he said. He then described Saudi-Arabia's way from a tribal society, united by Islam, to an open-minded kingdom that is oriented towards modernity. He stated that cooperation with other nations, religions and cultures had always been vital for Saudi-Arabia in its long standing history. H.R.H. Prince Turki Al Faisal Al Saud stressed the important role the Saudi government is playing also in today's world in also guaranteeing security and stability of the whole MENA region. **Dr. Michael Lüders**, Deputy Chairman of the Board of the German Orient-Foundation, who described how constantly changing views and opinions about the Orient as well as the Occident have influenced politics, public opinions and in particular academia.

According to Dr. Michael Lüders the academic landscape was and still is facing obstacles to paint a differentiated picture of "the Islam". Researchers and thoughtful observers of recent and current developments in the different Islamic worlds in Asia, Africa, America, Europe and Germany should therefore not only deal with the subject of research but as well with the way of doing research on this subject, he demanded. At the end of the Gala event Dr. Michael Lüders introduced the winners of the German Orient-Institute writing competition. Each of them received a round-trip ticket to a GCC-Country of their choice that was kindly sponsored by Emirates Airlines represented through **Henry Hasselbarth**, Vice President Central and North Europe of Emirates Airlines and Deputy Chairman of the Board of the German Orient-Foundation. ●

