

## **1<sup>st</sup> Egypto-German Alumni Seminar in Berlin**

The 23<sup>rd</sup> to the 26<sup>th</sup> of August 2007 saw more than 40 participants come to attend the Müggelsee Congress-Hotel in Berlin, for the first ever Egypto-German IAESTE alumni seminar.

The official opening of the seminar began with a greeting by the IAESTE German national secretary Günter Müller-Graetschel and Prof. Ahmed El Sheikh, the national secretary of the IAESTE in Egypt, and was supplemented by the Egyptian cultural-attaché, Prof. Galal and Elmar Jakobs from the Foreign Office department for the promotion of German-Islamic dialogue.

The first central contribution to the seminar was provided by Prof. Jürgen Beneke of the Hildesheim University and his speech “Intercultural Communication”, in which he introduced many practical examples of different cultural behavioural patterns, inherent cultural coding as well as typical misinterpretations in direct dialogue within intercultural meetings.

For the second half of the seminars first day, the participants were divided into 2 groups by Prof. Beneke, those of “Minoria” and those of “Majoria”. In an impressive role-play simulation, they “experienced” culture-specific problems, in the context of mutual intercultural development work between rich and poor nations, which they subsequently discussed enthusiastically.

The second day of the seminar began with Iman Taha, a Ph.D student from the institute for polymer materials and plastics technology at the University of Clausthal, and her report on life as an Egyptian living and working in Germany. Likewise very impressive was the German alumnus Patrick Schmidt, who presented his anecdotes and important experiences from his months-long stop-overs in Cairo, Alexandria and Dahab.

With his lecture “Islam in Context of Qualification and Employment in Engineering”, Prof. Axel Hunger of the University of Duisburg-Essen presented some possible future challenges for engineering job-profiles, from which he derived new demands on international higher education courses in engineering. He drew concrete comparisons between the educational experiences of German and Asian students, with regard to their knowledge and competence as engineers in a global job market and also in reference to their behavior as university students. On the basis of cultural dimensions (such as: distance from power, avoidance of uncertainty, individualism vs. collectivism, masculinity vs. femininity, and short-term vs. long-term) drawn up by Geert Hofstede, Prof. Hunger empirically illustrated that, for instance, Indonesian professional training shows a distinct difference when compared to German training, because of its inherent cultural conditions. A stimulated discussion between the attending Egyptian and German participants followed. Prof. Omar, University of Magdeburg, and Prof. Ziegmann, University of Clausthal, both longstanding partners of the IAESTE-Germany-network, gave profound input from their personal experience with German/Islamic cultural encounters.

The second day of the seminar was rounded out on the Saturday afternoon with a cultural context programme in Berlin, which, no doubt helped by the good weather, greatly contributed to the over all good mood of the participants.

The conclusion of the three day seminar started early on Sunday morning with a presentation of the Alumni activities, under the direction of Malene Hansen from Denmark and Marija Kljajc of Hamburg who work actively both on a national and international level for the IAESTE-Alumni-project. After a discussion with the participants on the expansion of the IAESTE network and the desired content for the Alumni Societies work, a questionnaire was given out to the participating students to evaluate the organization and to aid in planning future events.

As a result, the content and organizational format of the seminar was given good to excellent marks by both the Egyptian and German participants.

Looking back, this first IAESTE Alumni seminar ever turned out to be a powerful tool for knowledge sharing, communication, career development and even recruitment. Both IAESTE national organizations involved are keen to repeat this format again soon, for the benefit of the IAESTE worldwide.