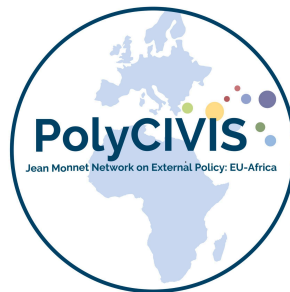


# DEVELOPING AFRICAN-EUROPEAN JOINT TEACHING PROGRAMS

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## Building bridges across cultures and continents: A stellar MA collaboration

### Interviewees

**Oliver Schlumberger**, Professor of Political Science, Tübingen University

**Mirjam Edel**, Researcher and lecturer at the Institute of Political Science in Tübingen, PhD project on repression in authoritarian regimes

### Interviewer

**Sebastian Seiffert**, PolyCIVIS Project Manager, Université Libre de Bruxelles (ULB)



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## INTRODUCTION

Oliver Schlumberger, a Professor of Political Science, and Mirjam Edel, a researcher and lecturer at the Institute of Political Science at Tübingen University in Germany, outline the rationale behind launching CMEPS—a collaborative Middle East Master’s Programme in Political Science. Now in its twelfth cohort, this MA programme continues to build on its vision to provide, through its diverse curricula, deep insights into Middle Eastern politics and society, using political science tools to analyze its complexities. This unique programme, not only offers graduates an employment rate close to 100%, but it also provides a context where students and faculty develop deep understanding of the local contexts, language and political systems of both Middle East, North Africa and Europe. As of October 2024, the MA programme takes another significant step forward, transitioning from a collaborative to a fully Joint Degree.

Join us as we delve into the factors behind this important step.

## THE INTERVIEW

### *[Q1.] What was the needs assessment that motivated you to set up this joint programme in the first place?*

**Oliver Schlumberger:** We started planning for the programme in the early 2010s. When looking at programmes that allow students from North America and Europe to go to the Middle East for at least semester length, there were mainly programmes operated by US universities sending their students to antennas they operate in Qatar, the Emirates, etc. The idea underpinning such programmes is often mere “exposure”. We were more interested in eye-level cooperation, and it was helped by the fact that most faculty and all of the administrative staff at AUC, are Egyptian. Inside Germany, when you set up a new Degree Programme, you have to apply at the regional Ministry of Science (in our case, Baden-Württemberg), and argue on a national level. Thus, we had to present in what ways this programme was going to be different from those already offered by the three other Middle East politics chairs in Germany. Other MA programmes on the Middle East in Germany tend to be interdisciplinary, but we had a political science-driven programme in mind.

The needs analysis conducted on these levels led us to develop CMEPS as a disciplinary Master programme in Political Science, offering a regional specialisation on the Middle East and North Africa. We chose the setting of a bilateral programme, between the University of Tübingen (Germany) and the American University of Cairo (Egypt).

### ***[Q2.] How did you start concretely?***

**Mirjam Edel:** We outlined the profile of a somewhat “ideal” expert on contemporary Middle East. What would he/she need in terms of content-wise knowledge, methodological and language skills? While English needed to be the primary teaching language, it mattered to us that German/European students learn Arabic. At the same time, we offered German for incoming students, accredited with ECTS.

**Oliver Schlumberger:** We also made the assets and advantages of CMEPS very clear. What could we promise to colleagues and prospective students, and what not? Being clear about this helped us in three ways: to keep ourselves motivated, to attract external funding, and to recruit students. We didn't know that when the first cohort started in 2013, but our graduates have an employment rate close to 100%, in the fields/subfields studied.

### ***[Q3.] Which are the possible student pathways, and which diploma(s) do they obtain?***

**Mirjam Edel:** Students spend semesters 1, 2, and 4 in either Tübingen or Cairo, with an exchange semester at the respective partner university during semester 3. As of very recently, we have succeeded to transform this Programme into a full Joint Degree, which can be awarded as of October 2024. A lot had to be done for this. We are really happy to be able to offer this Joint Degree from now on, with a single certificate jointly signed by both universities. This is a Degree that is equally recognised in Germany, Egypt and the US. Previously, students were awarded a degree from the university where they completed the majority of their courses, along with a Certificate outlining the learning objectives of the overall programme and courses undertaken.

**Oliver Schlumberger:** Achieving the joint diploma is the fruit of ten years of ongoing lobbying and confidence-building amidst changing policy and institutional landscapes, including a coup d'état in Egypt, four different Presidents at AUC, and four Department Heads, here in Tübingen. Initially a Joint Degree was not feasible because the presidency level on both sides thought their own academic levels were better. Therefore, we were very prescriptive about the curriculum at the beginning: in week 4 of a given course, students would study the same texts in both universities. These measures helped us to build trust over time. The jointness of the programmes is also reflected in joint thesis supervision.

CMEPS is now the first international Joint Degree offered by both universities.

### ***[Q4.] How has the programme developed over time?***

**Oliver Schlumberger:** This autumn, we welcomed the twelfth cohort and have had students from all continents. We can safely say there is a good learning atmosphere. Students appreciate the cross-cultural component, which comes from being together in the classroom and on campus in everyday life, rather than from teaching cross-cultural skills in courses. For instance, in 2022, we

had teaching assistants from Russia and Ukraine; even if these are small-scale encounters they still create opportunities for meaningful interactions that are rarely found elsewhere.

**Mirjam Edel:** The course titles have basically remained consistent over time, with minimal changes in the module and course structure. The framework of the MA is intentionally broad, allowing us to include news and recent affairs within the existing structure, or through electives. For instance, themes like democratisation and autocratisation have always been part of the curriculum, although the emphasis on teaching these topics has changed over the years. Similarly, the Israel-Gaza conflict is now more central in my course on the International Relations of the Middle East.

### ***[Q5.] Which policy actors are you mainly analysing within the courses?***

**Oliver Schlumberger:** We analyse policymaking at all levels, from substate to international. Cairo provides a good environment for this, as many UN organisations and the World Bank have offices there. AUC also collaborates with “professors of practice”, coming from outside academia. For instance, the chef de cabinet to the Arab League Secretary General recently taught some classes. Such inputs are valuable in a MA Programme whose graduates mostly pursue careers in public administration, NGOs or in the private sector, rather than pursuing a PhD. Some European students are surprised to discover that regional integration in the Middle East is fairly limited, and is often of more symbolic nature when it does occur.

### ***[Q6.] How is CMEPS funded?***

**Mirjam Edel:** As interest for the Middle East was at its peak in the aftermath of the so-called Arab Spring, the German Foreign Ministry provided us four years of seed funding, which included stipends for students. The region of Baden-Württemberg also supported us, by funding a part-time administrative staff position for the day-to-day operations of the Programme.

From the student perspective, it is currently mainly a self-funded programme. Many students utilize the financial support provided by Erasmus support for the exchange happening during the third semester. On a national-level, receiving funding from the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), has also been helpful at times. AUC tuition fees are substantial, therefore, there is some social selection bias on their side, especially now that the economic situation for Egyptian and other students from the Arabic region is very challenging.

### ***[Q7.] Did you consider adding more partners at any stage?***

**Oliver Schlumberger:** Overall, the bilateral collaboration model has been highly effective for us. While we had some initial conversations with English-speaking universities in Lebanon, practical restrictions prevented us from pursuing this option. Moreover, there are only a few universities that are academically independent in the field of Political Science in the Middle East and North Africa, and we didn't want to compromise on the principle of academic freedom. I also feel that

if we had expanded beyond this bilateral setting, we would not be able to reach the level of integration and collaboration that we have ultimately achieved.

**[Q8.] What is your advice to colleagues in PolyCIVIS developing a joint programme today?**

**Mirjam Edel:** Within the context of this MA, it is important to invest time in building the personal relationships underpinning a joint programme, at all levels – administrative staff, faculty and university leadership. These relationships can form a coalition to advocate for new solutions a joint programme will inevitably require, and help us overcome challenges and setbacks that more often than not, arise when different administrative cultures meet and collaborate.

**[Q9.] Which possible links do you see between CMEPS and PolyCIVIS?**

**Oliver Schlumberger:** I do not use the term “polycrisis” in class, but it is clearly close to what I refer to as the simultaneity of multiple global challenges. In my opinion, it would be highly relevant to offer the short courses on polycrisis , such as BIPs, to students in the various political science programmes here in Tübingen, as electives.



## PolyCIVIS: confronting the polycrisis in Europe and Africa

PolyCIVIS is a Euro - African collaboration that brings to the forefront the global polycrisis, allowing a better understanding of the impacts of several concurrent major societal crises challenging the world in the form of a polycrisis.

In the wake of the global polycrisis, urgent challenges have emerged, prompting PolyCIVIS to take action. Our initiative is dedicated to addressing these pressing global issues and their interconnected consequences.

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