

The future of the Arab world: "Dialogue is the Way!"

DR. GUNTER MULACK, AMBASSADOR (RET.) AND DIRECTOR OF THE GERMAN ORIENT INSTITUTE, HAS REFLECTED ON THE RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN THE ARAB WORLD. HE WAS A GUEST OF THE KONRAD-ADENAUER-STIFTUNG, REGIONAL PROGRAM GULF-STATES, DURING "THE GERMAN WEEK" IN KUWAIT.

A dialogue between the government and the opposition, between the "old guard" and the young generation, is what the region needs, said Ambassador (ret.) and Director of the German Orient Institute, Dr. Gunter Mulack during the "German Week" in Kuwait. As a guest of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS), Regional Program Gulf-States, Dr. Mulack held the keynote speech on German-Kuwaiti relations and a lecture on recent developments in the Arab world. He has served as Ambassador to Kuwait, Bahrain and Syria, and is considered a connoisseur of the Middle East region.

Dr. Mulack praised the good political and economic relations between Kuwait and Germany and he emphasized the increasingly important role of the Gulf region in German and European foreign policy. Especially as trade partners, the Gulf countries play an important role, but also in terms of global security policy a close co-operation is essential, he noted.

In addition, the former Ambassador pointed to the tradition of democratic institutions in the political and social structure of Kuwait. He mentioned the relatively advanced *Majlis* (Parliament), the free press and the tradition of the *Diwaniya* (social space for semi-official and private meetings).

"These traditions are now enhanced by technological achievements", especially through social media applications such as Facebook and Twitter. The rulers should recognize, Dr. Mulack stated, that social media were not necessarily a threat, but



rather a chance to enrich political life. In his eyes, the young generation should be educated efficiently and systematically, for young people are the ones who will ultimately determine a country's future. Therefore, they should be integrated into the decision making process in order to meet the demands of an increasingly globalized world. In this way, they would be able to preserve and represent the interests of their country.

In this context, Dr. Mulack assigned German institutions a particular role. Organizations such as the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, he pointed out, were setting a positive example, as they were building bridges between Germany and the countries of the region. The mission of KAS and other institutions is, according to him, to offer expertise to the Gulf countries through conferences, exchange programs and by supporting the establishment of German schools. Their task to develop civil societies and to strengthen democratic structures is crucial, Dr. Mulack noted. At the same time, it is their responsibility to raise the awareness within the German society, especially concerning the importance of traditional values

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in the Gulf, in order to overcome cultural barriers, he added. The German government should "wake up" and become aware that "selling cars" is "not enough". Initiatives that target issues such as education and renewable energy are the direction that should be taken, he advised.

Dr. Mulack called upon the Arab governments to recognize the ongoing social change and to regard it as an opportunity. History "cannot be turned back", the former Ambassador said. In this context, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) may use its potential and play a key role in the advancement of the region. The European Union and its structures could serve as a model in this regard.

However, he continued, the most important task of the rulers of the region is to launch a constructive dialogue with their citizens, including minorities such as the Shi'ites of Kuwait, who form 25-35 percent of the country's population. Moreover, the introduction of the rule of law, good governance, respect for human rights, and the recognition of social aspirations of the young generation are essential components for a democratic development. This new generation is educated and technologically well equipped, yet it remains without the right to voice their concerns. No one has foreseen the outbreak of the "Arab spring", Dr. Mulack reflected, and the revolts clearly demonstrate how deep-rooted the cry for justice and freedom really is.

It is up to the respective governments and citizens, how exactly these principles should be implemented, he added. Unfortunately, Western countries often gave a "bad example", especially when it comes to the question of human rights, Dr. Mulack noted. Frequently, decisions were made based upon economic and political interests. Particularly for this reason, Western governments should not "impose their ideas from outside", the former Ambassador emphasized.

At the same time, Germany could serve as a positive example. Unlike most Western countries, it has no history as a colonial

power in the region. Arab countries could take the non-violent revolution, which triggered Germany's reunification in 1990, as a model. "The time has come for the people of the Gulf to bring about political transformation in a peaceful manner", Dr. Mulack appealed. Such changes are always fraught with difficulties, he added, and therefore, young people should be accepted as decision-makers, who contribute to social and political development in a responsible and peaceful manner. Thus, an open dialogue between the generations and the diverse groups of citizens is according to him "indispensable". The former Ambassador considers such a dialogue as the only path to a secure future for the Arab world.

The "German Week" took place on October 9-12. It was organized by the German Embassy in cooperation with the *Euro-Gulf Research Unit* of Kuwait University and KAS. The event's overall theme was "*Kuwaiti-German Partnership in the Fields of Technology, Innovation, Science and Research*". It was attended by dignitaries of the Kuwaiti ruling family, local and national government representatives, international diplomats, representatives of the German economy, as well as professors and students of the Kuwait University.