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CARTE BLANCHE MIDDLE EAST

Three Goethe-Institut offices from North Africa and the Middle East have been invited by their Goethe-Institut colleagues from Central and Eastern Europe to develop joint cultural programmes:

Cairo > Vilnius

Beirut > Bratislava

Amman > Prague

Today's world is a tightly knit one. The impact of events that occur in one specific place rarely is limited to just that place. To the same extent that the Internet gives us a feeling of global simultaneity, we feel the intense political, economic, and cultural changes across national borders. The new, unexpectedly sudden, confrontation with phenomena connected to globalisation is not without consequences. Economic and financial crises as well as totalitarian regime changes and wars in the immediate neighbourhood have increased migration to Europe. This has led to heightened surveillance and strengthened trends towards re-nationalism and populism. Anti-European and ethnocentric movements and parties not only have made political and institutional territorial gains but also have succeeded in dominating the political and media landscape by stoking people's fears.

In order to defend an open and democratic society, these immunological reactions of entire countries can only be addressed by direct encounters between individuals. New forms of action and alliances are needed, because not enough positive moments of cultural diversity take place.

For the Goethe-Institut, as a German cultural institution with an international presence, this creates a new challenge: to no longer do cultural work in a predominantly bilateral context but to develop multilateral approaches to the world and to the perception of realities. Three institutes from Central and Eastern Europe – Vilnius, Bratislava, and Prague – have assigned a carte blanche to a corresponding institute in the North African / Middle Eastern region – Cairo, Beirut, and Amman – thus providing a mandate, for a predetermined time period, to help shape the programme locally and to shift activities to Central and Eastern Europe. Cairo will do an exchange with Vilnius, Beirut with Bratislava, and Amman with Prague.

The temporary presence of three Arab Goethe-Institut representatives in the centre of Europe will produce constructive confrontations between the familiar and the unknown. Artists and activists from the Arab region will become leading actors in culturally shaping this process. This will create room for human encounters, understanding, and the reduction of fears. The Goethe-Institut programme that is transferred from one city to another will guarantee an immediate, unfiltered, and telescopic insight into occurrences in the Arab cultural sphere and show how deeply Europe is connected to it.