

– Call for Papers –

Conference

**“A New Wave of Populism in Europe and the Arab World:
Implications and Consequences for Civic Institutions”**

Organised by the Arab-German Young Academy of Sciences and Humanities (AGYA)
(www.agya.info)

Leipzig, Germany, 3 – 5 October 2016

This conference, organised by the Transformation Working Group of the Arab-German Young Academy of Sciences and Humanities (AGYA), aims at bringing together scholars from various disciplines (particularly, but not exclusively, political science, sociology, history, communication studies, education studies, Middle East studies, European studies, philosophy, psychology etc.) who are interested in understanding forms and manifestations of populist politics in either Europe or the Arab World. A key aim is to create a better understanding of the challenges of populism for democracy and civic and associational life. In particular, our discussions will focus on how various institutions and groupings, including political parties, parliaments, trade unions, religious communities, institutions of higher education, media and civil society organisations are affected by populist forms of politics, and how they can help to counter it.

Europe is currently witnessing the rise of successful opposition parties labelled as populist (in Austria, France, Germany, Italy, UK and other countries). Populist politicians have in fact formed governments in countries such as in Hungary, Poland and Slovakia. The “Brexit” decision in the United Kingdom has been argued to have demonstrated the success that populist movements can have in shaping fundamental long-term policies. Similarly, the potential consequences of Donald Trump being elected as president are intensely debated in the U.S. and elsewhere. In many Arab countries, historically, populist rhetoric has been part of the communication strategies of post-independence leaders. Five years after the Arab Spring, a revival of populist strategies has been observed in order to restore political leadership and tame dissent. A common theme of these rhetorical strategies is a particular invocation of nationalism and the repeatedly propagated idea of permanent external and/or internal threats to the existence and integrity of the state.

As a political buzzword, ‘populism’ is used to denote very diverse phenomena: a catch-all political rhetoric, an exclusive and polarising style of governance, a personalised media strategy around a potent leader, short-lived but successful popular movements, the message of elites acting contrary to “the people”, and charismatic leadership. At its root, populism is a belief in the power of ordinary people, and in their right to have control over government rather than a small group of political actors or a wealthy elite. Populist appeals usually rely on legitimacy established by expressions of (an imagined) popular will, ideally referring to votes secured in elections, referenda or other forms of popular support, such as mass rallies and demonstrations. We are particularly interested in instances where appeals to the popular will and anti-elitist rhetoric are used to undermine democratic institutions such as parties, parliaments, or other key institutions such as the judiciary, media or civil society organizations.

The literature on populism has been largely focused on right-wing movements in Europe and the USA as well as left-wing politics in Latin America (populist socialism). The conference seeks to expand the academic discussion by investigating the aspects and forms of populism that can be observed in European and Arab countries at present, in order to identify divergences and convergences between populist politics in different socioeconomic and political contexts. It welcomes contributions about the relationship between populism and ideology, in terms of left-right divisions or in terms of secular-religious divisions, as well as its intersections with nationalism and discourses that emphasize external threat, control or intervention.

The specific added value of the conference will be the decidedly European-Arab perspective on debates around populism. The mutual perspectives on the various forms of populism can help in understanding this phenomenon and in identifying counter strategies on the long-term. Different panel discussions will problematize various sub-aspects of populism, both in Europe and the Arab world, and discuss how key institutions like the media, parliaments, universities, judicial institutions like reconciliation institutions, and economic organizations do interact and can counter (or not) tendencies of populist rule.

Contributors may focus on one or several of the following themes:

1. Convergences and divergences of populist policies in Europe and Arab countries
2. Effects and impact of populism on civic institutions in different European or Arab case studies
3. Counterstrategies against populism in different European or Arab case studies

Interested participants are invited to submit an abstract in English (max. 250 words) of their paper to the organisers Dr Florian Kohstall, Freie Universität Berlin (florian.kohstall@fu-berlin.de) and Dr Jan Claudius Völkel, Cairo University (jan.voelkel@daadcairo.org) until 20 August 2016. The results of the selection process will be communicated by 1 September 2016. The conference will begin on Monday, 3 October 2016, at 18:00, and end on Wednesday, 5 October 2016, at 14:00. Travel expenses and full-board accommodation during the conference for accepted participants will be covered by AGYA.

Contact:

Dr Florian Kohstall, Free University Berlin: florian.kohstall@fu-berlin.de.

Dr Jan Claudius Völkel, Cairo University: jan.voelkel@daadcairo.org.

Overview of important dates:

20 Aug 2016: Submission of abstract (max. 250 words)

01 Sept 2016: Notification to accepted participants

3-5 Oct 2016: Conference in Leipzig, Germany

About AGYA:

The aim of AGYA is to promote Arab-German research cooperation based on the idea of scientific excellence and social commitment of early career scholars (3–10 years post-PhD). The current 25 Arab and 25 German members are distinguished researchers from various fields of the Humanities, Natural, Life, Technical, and Social Sciences. AGYA supports their interdisciplinary research projects and promotes them as ambassadors of sciences and culture. For more information please refer to our website: www.agya.info.