

Dear students,

Dear parents and friends of our students,

Dear Vice-President of UIT, cher Maher,

Dear Vice-President of CIFE, chère Esther,

Representatives of Consulates,

Dear colleagues and friends,

I am glad to welcome you to the graduation ceremony of the first year of the Mediterranean Branch of the Master in Advanced European and International Studies. I am very glad, and I must say, very proud of the completion of the first academic year of this new programme.

The idea for this programme goes back to the year 2012, when I attended together with Tobias Bütow a conference devoted to what was called at that time "the Arab spring". One of the speakers, a Moroccan historian, compared the Arab spring to the year 1989 and said: "Nothing will be the same as before in the North African region." My conclusion was that an educational institution like CIFE, which had intensely followed and accompanied the transformation process in Central and Eastern Europe, also needed to contribute in its own way to the changes in the North African region and to the rethinking of Europe's relation to the Southern Mediterranean. The idea for a Master programme on the Mediterranean space was thus born; and I immediately knew whom I wanted to give the responsibility to develop this project - to Tobias Bütow. It's always a great pleasure for the boss when he can say "I made the right decision". I rather would like to say today "Thank you" to Tobias Bütow, because without his commitment, perseverance, creativity and diplomacy, this programme would have never been carried out.

When thinking today about the end of this academic year, a famous line from Leon Tolstoi's "Anna Karenina" came to my mind: "All happy families resemble each other; each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way." Certainly an academic programme is not a family (even if the size of this group could be the size of a family), but what Tolstoi means to say also applies to us, working and partly living together over one intense period of nine months. Because what Tolstoi wants to tell us is, that a number of elements need to be combined for a family to be happy. If one or more elements are absent, a family will be unhappy; however in its own way unhappy. Applied to an academic year, I would name a few elements that need to be united for a programme to be successful and for the students to be happy:

- They need to see a sense in studying the courses that we offer.
- We need to get along with each other.
- We need to live in an external environment that doesn't stress us too much.

- Finally, and most importantly: All students here present came with a personal project related to this Master, and this programme should have made them advance in their personal project. Either by bringing them closer to realizing, implementing their personal project, or by changing it, or even by making them aware that they need a different project for their lives. Obviously, I don't know whether this was a happy academic year for you, our

students. I can only hope that it was one in the sense that I mentioned, that it brought you forward in accomplishing your personal project in life.

These nine months were overcharged with troubling events in Europe and its neighbourhood; too many events, too many challenges to be comprehended by one individual person in such a short time frame. From terrorist attacks over the refugee crisis up to the Brexit, we are constantly confronted with processes that are often beyond our understanding, and certainly beyond our control. These are tough times for students and academic teachers, but also for the organizers of such a programme, because we want to provide you with a protective environment in these insecure times. I cannot thank enough those who have been instrumental in making this possible. I pay homage to Maher Tebourbi, who represents tonight not only his university, the UIT, but also a great family, which I highly regard and respect. They took great care of our students, and I thank you, dear Maher, very much for this. I thank Raluca Darau, who has meticulously planned and carried out all administrative aspects of this programme, to the point that only five hours after the last exam we are here tonight with diploma and transcripts of record. I thank Emre Gür, who not only taught you how to manage a project, but proved again his own excellent management skills by organizing the Istanbul section of the programme together with his assistant Enis. I thank all the partners who cannot be here tonight, Ayhan Kaya from Bilgi University, our representative in Tunis, Riadh Jaidane, our assistant Luisa Bunescu. I thank the core faculty members of this programme, Silvia Colombo, Esther Zana-Nau, Jean-Claude Verez, and Laurent Baechler.

Sometimes in life you make experiences when you almost physically understand the truth of something. This was for me the case when I first visited Tunisia in November 2014 in the company of Tobias Bütow and my friend Arnaud Leconte, who brought us together with UIT. When being in Tunisia, I realized that the separation of the Mediterranean in a Northern and a Southern part is totally artificial and must be overcome. We are not only neighbours (as the European Neighbourhood Policy suggests), but we are brothers and sisters around this great lake, which is the Mediterranean. If this programme contributed a little bit to this understanding, it was for me a successful and a happy year.

Matthias Waechter, Director General of CIFE on the occasion of the graduation ceremony of the MAEIS,  
Mediterranean branch

Istanbul, 28 June 2016