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Media kit

# **Middle East Mediterranean: 150 young people from 30 countries at the MEM Summer Summit 2018**

Lugano, May 30, 2018



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**The first edition of the Middle East Mediterranean Summer Summit will take place from August 16 to 26, in Lugano, where 150 young individuals from over 30 countries of the Middle East Mediterranean region and Europe will gather, as well as political authorities, managers, entrepreneurs and intellectuals, to discuss and propose solutions aiming at developing an open dialogue and growth in the region.**

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# 1. Middle East Mediterranean: 150 young people from 30 countries at the MEM Summer Summit 2018

**Media release**  
Lugano, May 30, 2018

**The Middle East Mediterranean is concerned with a high rate of tension, conflicting interests, ruins, climate challenges and forced migration. This is also the prevailing picture of the region that tends to be drawn. A closer look, however, can also uncover a different story, a land of technological innovation and at the same time of memory, a laboratory for new models of citizenship based on a rich heritage of plural identities, capable of coexisting and that are looking into the future together.**

The MEM Summer Summit, organised by Università della Svizzera italiana (USI) with the joint support of the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs and of the French Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs, has the ambition to encourage a realistic and constructive narrative of the Middle East Mediterranean (MEM), addressing the situation in an innovative and tangible way. From August 16 to the 26, the first edition will welcome 150 young “change makers” from over 30 countries of the Middle East Mediterranean and Europe, as well as political authorities, managers, entrepreneurs and intellectuals, to discuss and propose solutions for dialogue and growth in the region.

The Summit was presented this morning in Lugano at a press conference held by USI Rector Prof. Boas Erez, the renowned political scientist and arabist Prof. Gilles Kepel, the Mayor of Lugano Marco Borradori, and the Councilor of State of the Canton Ticino Manuele Bertoli.

The programme, divided in two parts, includes a Seminar (16-24 August) dedicated to the young participants, and a Forum (25-26 August) attended by political, economic and cultural leaders, who will be joined by those who attended the seminar to discuss the most relevant topics.

The involvement of young change makers is crucial, as best described in the speech given by the Rector of USI: “The consequences of the situation that this region is experiencing affects us all and tells us that we cannot allow these things to continue as such, and the key to enable change is to harness the opportunities that the region offers”. “For this reason – he added – we have invited doctors, veterinarians, students, artists, entrepreneurs, academics, and bloggers, from different cultures and religions, with whom we will work – during the Seminar – to devise innovative proposals that will be discussed at the Forum. A new approach based on dialogue and inherent in the identity of our University, as well as its natural function as a bridge between continental Europe and the Mediterranean, which the MEM Summer Summit seeks to emphasise”.

## **MEM Summer Summit 2018**

### The Seminar

From August 16 to 24, the USI Lugano campus will host the Seminar structured around three main subject areas:

- 1) The new geopolitical dynamics in the Middle East Mediterranean;

- 2) Governance, administration and the design of public processes in the MEM region;
- 3) Middle East Mediterranean: Narratives, Representations, Fictions.

One of the main objectives will be to identify new narratives proposed by the young change makers, who will bring to the table unconventional and non-stereotyped representations of the region, through positive models. The Seminar, which will take place behind closed doors, includes plenary sessions, workshops, film screenings, and cultural activities, and will see several professors from USI and other Swiss and international universities, as well as professionals and experts from the region, follow the selected group of young participants. Many of the latter will benefit from scholarships offered by various public and private supporters.

#### The Forum

The forum will take place on August 25 and 26 at the Lugano Congress Center (*Palazzo dei Congressi*) where high-level national and international political authorities will dialogue with the young participants, starting from the proposals devised during the Seminar. Discussions will focus on: the recent social, political and economic developments in Tunisia; the importance of cultural activities to lay solid foundations for the future (the Louvre project in Abu Dhabi and the project for the reconstruction of Mosul will be presented); the role of literature, often prophetic, in representing the region. The programme will also include several sessions aimed at finding possible ways to define citizenship in the MEM region and in Europe. A number of models will be taken into account, with emphasis on the importance of plural identities in a global perspective. The political and economic consequences of the inevitable transition involving the energy sector will be discussed, as well as possible sustainable strategies to address them. The participants will share success stories - tangible initiatives by human rights organisations, innovative technological and social projects - of this ever-changing region. Each session will be moderated by an expert and will see the active involvement of the Seminar participants. There will also be breakout sessions on: sports as a mean for diplomacy; sustainability projects and policies; infrastructure and transportation; gender issues; training systems and educational models; development, technology and innovation.

**The Forum is open to anyone interested, subject to registration and to a participation fee. For details, please refer to: [www.mem-summersummit.ch](http://www.mem-summersummit.ch)**

On the evening of Saturday, August 25, there will be a live performance of the Blue Peace Orchestra, organized by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and the City of Lugano. The intention of the free public concert is to raise awareness on the topics of peace and water.

#### **Official website**

[www.mem-summersummit.ch](http://www.mem-summersummit.ch)

**At present, the Summit is supported by:**

#### Patronage

Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA): Middle East and North Africa Division (MENAD) and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC)

#### Institutional partners

City of Lugano

Republic and State of the Canton Ticino

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Partners

Chaire Moyen Orient Méditerranée (MOM), ENS Paris Science et Lettres  
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## 2. Speech by Boas Erez, Rector of Università della Svizzera italiana

*The spoken text prevails.*

### **A brief overview of the project**

Università della Svizzera italiana aspires to become a **way for the future** for the members of its community. Well rooted in the Italian-speaking part of Switzerland, located between North and South, representing thus a window on the Mediterranean and with a documented history of openness, the University has decided to bring together in Lugano, from August 16 to 26, young people from a region that has been coping with a critical and dramatic situation for too long.

The **objective** of the Summit, the MEM Summer Summit, is to **develop innovative ideas and tangible and lasting proposals** to foster dialogue and development in the region.

**USI** is accustomed to welcoming an audience of young people from various parts of the world and **has many skills** that it will employ to accompany the work of the young people invited to Lugano. For logistics, we have gained experience from the organization of many summer schools and a **dense network of institutional collaborations**.

We designed this project by drawing on the experience of Professor Gilles Kepel, who heads the **MEM Freethinking Platform** at USI since 2017. The Platform encourages public debate and fosters knowledge and further dialogue of the current situation in the Middle East Mediterranean. But the project would not have materialized without the support of the Swiss Department of Foreign Affairs and the of the French *Ministère des Affaires étrangères*, as well as of the institutional support of the City of Lugano, of the Canton Ticino, and of the two great cultural institutions in Ticino with which we are enhancing our relations: Locarno Festival and LAC Lugano Arte e Cultura.

### **A region with many definitions and undergoing rapid change**

The Middle East Mediterranean region can be defined in many ways. For us, however, it extends beyond territorial borders: from Morocco along the Mediterranean coast all the way to Lebanon and continuing to Europe, as well as from Iran to the Persian Gulf. This definition is justified by the many and intense relations that exist between the nations in the MEM region. The region is vast, heterogeneous, complex and experiencing rapid political, economic, demographic, cultural and religious changes.

There are diverse ambitions in the region: those expressed with the Arab Springs, those by enduring or faltering powers, and those expressed by groups that take advantage of the vast grey zones and the power vacuums. The divisions created by these conflicting ambitions translate into remains, ruins, and dramatic consequences. But the challenges that the region must address are many, from climate change to the uneven allocation of natural resources. The consequences of this situation affect us all and tells us that we cannot allow it to continue as such.

A way to start dealing with these challenges is to **change the narratives** and to **harness the opportunities** that the region offers.

Certainly, **religion** will continue to be a very important element, thanks to its magnetic appeal, and we shall reckon with it for a long time to come. But religious traditions must live with their time and therefore evolve.

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Like elsewhere, there are **great infrastructures** to be maintained or planned, that enable for instance trade and energy supply.

In many parts of the region, the question of **citizenship** is being re-examined and innovative initiatives are being developed. **Leadership** is no longer a prerogative only of politicians and religious leaders, and the investment in the necessary **cultural exchange** has already begun.

Hence, it is possible to imagine **new answers to old questions**.

### **The Seminar**

A few answers and proposals will emerge from the workshops during the **Seminar** attended by the young change makers, who will come to Lugano from August 16 to 24. We have admitted 150 participants, coming from over thirty countries: doctors, veterinarians, students, artists, entrepreneurs, academics, bloggers, etc. A heterogeneity reflecting the richness of the region.

To encourage them to work together, we will share with them a geopolitical reading of the history of the region, providing them with tangible examples of reconstruction. We will work together on the powerful imagination of the artists and we will accompany them towards the expression of ideas and proposals. The proposals will then be collected and summarised in a document, which will provide a basis for further discussion.

### **The Forum**

The **Forum** will take place on August 25 and 26 at the *Palazzo dei Congressi*. We look forward to welcoming heads of State, high-level political authorities, managers, entrepreneurs and intellectuals from the North and South – all of whom will discuss together and with the young participants which we have gathered in Lugano.

### **The support of many**

As mentioned before, we can count on the help of many. The Swiss Department of Foreign Affairs has activated its diplomatic network and will be a key participant at the Seminar and the Forum, by bringing its *bons offices* and its international initiative *Blue Peace Movement*; the City of Lugano will provide infrastructures and logistic skills; the Canton will support us in receiving the Forum participants and – together with the Federal authorities – in making the event safe; the LAC Lugano Arte e Cultura and the Locarno Festival will contribute directly with the cultural programmes offered throughout the Seminar; RSI, which with SSR-SRG, is the official media partner of the event and has joined us in the organization, ensuring national and international media coverage of the Summit.

This is the contribution of public organisations and cultural institutions in Ticino and Switzerland, but there are also foreign institutions and private organizations that endorse our values, who with their financial support will allow us to guarantee the high quality and adequate independence that are essential to our project.

In addition to the above-mentioned, I wish to thank the following:

#### Partners

Chaire Moyen Orient Méditerranée (MOM), ENS Paris Science et Lettres  
Franklin University Switzerland

Grand Hotel Villa Castagnola  
Cukier, Goldstein-Goren Foundation



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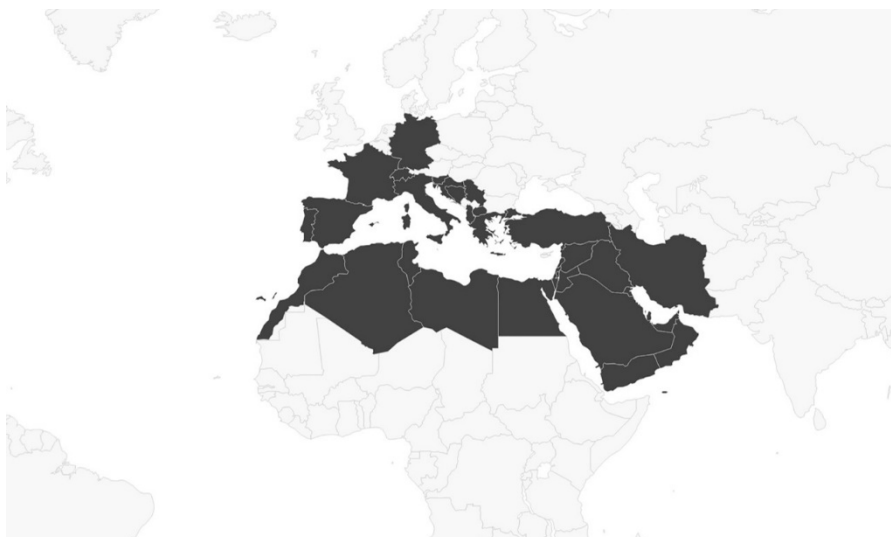
Fidinam Foundation  
GK Investment Holding Group  
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Naval Group

for endorsing the project.

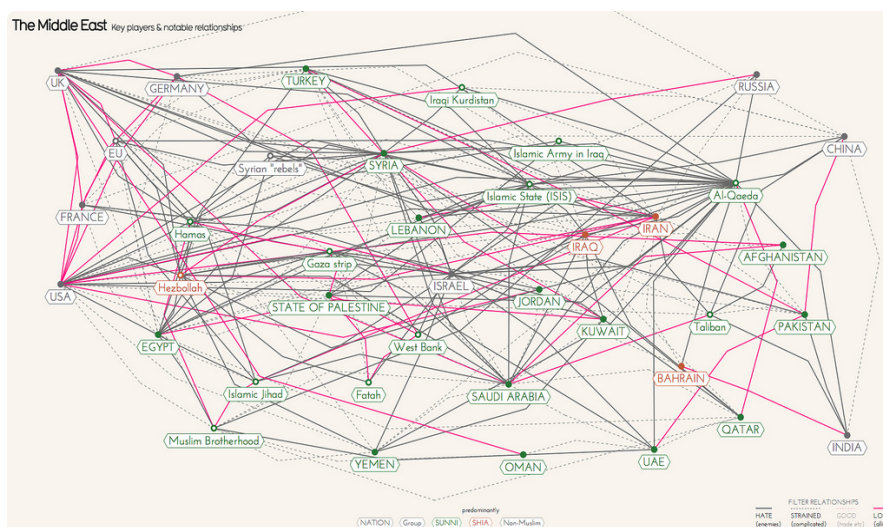
The Forum is open to anyone interested, subject to registration and to a participation fee. The citizens of Lugano will also be able to take advantage of cultural activities at different times during the Summit.

It our intention for this Summit to continue over time, in an inclusive way. The creation of a wide local and global network, and the opening of the Summit and of its side activities to the local population, will contribute to the growth of Ticino as place for cultural exchange, in the sign of innovation, which we do not see only as technological, but also - and especially - as social.

### 3. Factsheet on the Middle East Mediterranean: one region, many definitions



The Middle East Mediterranean region extends from Morocco along the Mediterranean coast all the way to Lebanon and continuing to Europe, as well as from Iran to the Persian Gulf. This definition is justified by the many and intense relations that exist between the nations in the MEM region:



#### Data

- The MEM region has a population of about 355 million, 85% of whom live in countries defined as middle-income countries, 8% in high-income countries and 7% in low-income countries. It includes both the oil-rich economies of the Gulf and countries with limited resources in relation to the population: Egypt, Morocco, and Yemen.
- According to World Bank analysts, absolute poverty - set at an income threshold of less than \$1.25 a day - affects about 14.2 million people, which is 4% of the total regional population.

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- If we consider the population immediately above the line of absolute poverty - which has a daily per capita income of between \$1.25 and \$2.50 – we find that this situation concerns about 45% of the population of Yemen, more than 30% of that of Egypt, a little less than 30% of that of Algeria and, respectively, about 20% of those of Morocco and Tunisia.

Source : [www.worldbank.org/en/region/mena/publication/gep-2018](http://www.worldbank.org/en/region/mena/publication/gep-2018)

### **Political instability**

- Since 2011, several uprisings have occurred in the region, commonly known as 'Arab Springs', resulting in full-blown conflicts in Syria, Iraq, Libya and Yemen.
- The Arab Springs, promising a more democratic and prosperous future, raised hopes among young people in the Middle East Mediterranean region.
- Seven years on, the situation has in many cases deteriorated dramatically.
- Inter-religious conflicts, terrorism and mass immigration represent an explosive potential not only for the unstable countries of the region, but also for the countries of the Northern shore of the Mediterranean and for Europe.

### **Demographics**

- The population composition of all the countries in the region is highly unbalanced in the 15-24 age group, which is between 20 and 25% of the total, against a world average of 18%.
- It is estimated that in the long term the population of the region will exceed that of China.
- Unemployment rates, especially of young people and women, higher than in any other region of the world.
- This situation, combined also with the characteristics of a labour market defined by inefficiencies in the recruitment mechanisms and by the persistence of a very large public sector with its many benefits that also produce distorting effects on new entrants, results in a level of unemployment among young people, which is higher than in any other region of the world.
- Today's young adults have had more opportunities to complete their studies compared to previous generations, but they are unable to find jobs in line with their level of education.

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## 4. Università della Svizzera italiana and Lugano, an ideal setting

### **USI. Create freely, act responsibly.**

Università della Svizzera italiana (USI – [www.usi.ch](http://www.usi.ch)) is one of the 12 certified public universities in Switzerland. It is structured around five faculties several institutes, and is active in several study and research areas, among which: architecture, communication sciences, computational science, data science, economics, health studies, humanities, informatics, law, medicine and biomedicine.

USI is a young and lively university, a hub of opportunity open to the world where students are offered a quality interdisciplinary education in which they can be fully engaged and take centre stage, and where our researchers can count on having the space to freely pursue their initiative.

Around 2800 students and about 800 professors and researchers, hailing from over 100 countries, convene every day on the three campuses in Lugano, Mendrisio and Bellinzona. The relatively small size of the campuses encourages the free flow and open exchange of ideas within the academic community. USI encourages faculty, students and researchers to develop their potential, and appreciates their curiosity and willingness to experiment with new ways of thinking, learning, teaching and working.

Established in 1996, USI is in constant evolution, always taking on new challenges while remaining true to its three guiding principles: quality, openness and responsibility.

Based on these values and its natural function as a bridge between continental Europe and the Mediterranean, since 2017 the Middle East Mediterranean Freethinking Platform (MEM) at USI has been encouraging public debate and raising awareness and fostering in-depth analysis of the current situation in the Middle East and the broader Mediterranean region. ([www.usi.ch/it/mem](http://www.usi.ch/it/mem)).

1445 hailing from the Middle East Mediterranean are currently enrolled at USI, representing 29 countries. Specifically, 69 students come from the Southern shore of the Mediterranean (18 countries represented) and 1376 from the Northern shore (11 countries represented).

### **Lugano, an ideal setting**

Swiss traditions of tolerance and neutrality make Lugano the perfect setting for an open dialogue. Situated in Southern Switzerland – at the heart of Europe – Lugano is a natural bridge between the Mediterranean and Continental Europe. The city is located just one hour away from Milan, Italy, and its international airports, a 2 hour train ride from Zurich, and just 20 minutes from its own small airport by taxi. The picture-perfect city, a major center for tourism, trade and culture, is known for its unique combination of Swiss nature and Latin culture. The city center of Lugano is pedestrian-friendly, with an accessible historic downtown and lakeside walks, surrounded by mountains. Università della Svizzera italiana is located a convenient 10 minute walk from the city center or 2 minutes by bus.

For detailed information on the Lugano region:  
[www.luganoregion.com/media/883831/media-kit-72-dpi-en.pdf](http://www.luganoregion.com/media/883831/media-kit-72-dpi-en.pdf)

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## 5. Contact

### **Media**

Media and Communications Service  
Università della Svizzera italiana  
Middle East Mediterranean (MEM) Summer Summit  
e-mail: [MEMpress@usi.ch](mailto:MEMpress@usi.ch)  
tel +41 58.666.47.92  
fax +41 58.666.46.19  
Twitter [https://twitter.com/USI\\_MEM](https://twitter.com/USI_MEM)

To obtain press credentials: [www.mem-summer summit.ch/media/](http://www.mem-summer summit.ch/media/)

### **Public**

E-mail: [MEM@usi.ch](mailto:MEM@usi.ch)  
Website: [www.mem-summer summit.ch](http://www.mem-summer summit.ch)