
MEM Summer Summit 2018

Five ways for the future of the Middle East Mediterranean

Lugano, August 26, 2018



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Lugano, August 26, 2018 – The MEM Summer Summit organized by Università della Svizzera italiana (USI) concluded today at the Palazzo dei Congressi in Lugano. At the end of a two-day Forum which was attended by 400 participants (young change-makers from 30 countries, political authorities, experts, intellectuals, and entrepreneurs from the Middle East Mediterranean region and Europe), the first edition of the “Lugano Initiative” was issued, a document presenting several tangible projects for the development and growth in a vast area ranging from Morocco to Iran. The ideas have been developed by the 150 young change makers, who during the eight-day MEM Summer Summit Seminar at USI have worked together regardless of all cultural differences and national identities. In several cases, they are proposals for new networks and technology platforms designed across political borders, whose players will be the same participants at the MEM Summer Summit, who had the opportunity to meet in Lugano, overcoming stereotypes and ideologies. An overview of the Lugano Initiative, as presented by the young-change makers themselves, is here summarised.

1. A new model for independent, inclusive and empowered information

Taking into account that many of the media in the MEM region suffer from intense politicisation and that social media alone are not a valid alternative, it is proposed to create an online platform where young people from different regions can publish news, insights and reports. A bottom-up “civic journalism” which, on the one hand, overrides traditional media and, on the other, collaborates with the institutions present in the region, a journalism that aims at publishing news that is based both on data and fact-checking. This information model (inclusive and factual) would make it possible to address two problems identified as priorities, namely corruption, and climate change and water management. The basic idea is not to oppose governments, but rather to work with them by encouraging the virtuous cycle of transparency.

2. Overcoming ideologies

Through the collaboration between informal communities managed locally (a few of which are present at the MEM Summer Summit, represented by the young-change makers), it is proposed to implement a number of activities aimed at proposing to the new generations values that go beyond those traditionally offered in politics or conveyed through ideology. The activities proposed range from sports to the arts, depending on the different age groups. To address, for instance, gender discrimination and other negative impacts on society caused by political and religious ideologies, the perspective is to stimulate new narratives, ranging from school to media, from family to the legal systems.

3. Foster stability

The stability of many countries is an issue that deeply affects the ability for development and progress of the societies involved. This issue needs to be addressed here too from a perspective that goes beyond national borders. In the short term, the aim is to work on the problem of refugees, by promoting their access to rights and services and their integration in society and the labour market. The proposal is to set up a platform involving a large number of actors – public and private sector organisations, non-governmental associations, trade unions, etc. – who will work together on concrete actions. In the long term, the aim is to focus, on the one hand, on the dialogue between the younger generation, going beyond the ideologies at stake in this sector and, on the other, to encourage the use of new

artificial intelligence technologies by international organisations, so as to predict the implications of the various policies through detailed scenarios.

4. Investments and training platforms

Employment is one of the key factors of social cohesion, and it is based on adequate education and training. With an approach focusing on young people, families and the labour market, a policy is proposed to increase funding for training and apprenticeship opportunities, as well as the organization, through an information platform both physical and virtual, of events where young people can learn about professions and trades, involving also their parents in the overall process.

5. A culture of diversity

The issue of the conflicts between identities and the violation of minority rights is a long-standing one, and has been revived by radicalism, which implies the denial of diversity. To foster the creation of a civil identity capable of transcending borders as well as cultural and social divisions, it is proposed that a network be set up to support the many actors in the field who, in the various countries, are working to promote peace and dialogue. A platform where everyone is free to share new forms of expression, new stories aimed at mutual understanding, through art, culture and media. A virtual space, but also a physical one, that favours the authentic consolidation of a civil society based on diversity.

The MEM Summer Summit was organised by USI with the patronage of the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs and the French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs, and with the generous contribution of several private supporters and foundations.

The two-day Forum offered numerous conferences open to the public, where the geopolitical topics related to the MEM region were explored in depth, where scenarios for material reconstruction and the development of cultural policies were outlined, where the relationship between water, peace and borders were discussed, where new models of citizenship, energy transition and education as a driving force for change were discussed. The Summit addressed topics related to infrastructure, how to rethink the economy, but also success stories in the field, how to foster new and positive narratives through art and literature.

The intention is to make the Summit a venue for periodic meeting and discussion on the MEM region, highlighting the role of USI and the Italian-speaking part of Switzerland as a bridge between continental Europe and the Mediterranean. The next edition of the MEM Summer Summit is scheduled to take place from 15 to 25 August 2019.

For information: www.mem-summer summit.ch

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