

MEM Summer Summit 2018, 16-26 August 2018

The Lugano Initiative

Proposals for the Middle East Mediterranean region

Version of 10th, December 2018

Introduction

1 *The Lugano Initiative* assembles concrete proposals for the development and progress in the wider Middle
2 East Mediterranean (MEM) region - from Morocco to Iran. The proposals presented within the framework of
3 this initiative have been compiled during the MEM Summer Summit 2018, held in Lugano, Switzerland (16th
4 to 26th August). Its main contributors are 150 young change-makers (YCM) from 30 countries, who were
5 selected and invited by the Università della Svizzera italiana (USI). They collaborated by drawing on their
6 diverse backgrounds and experiences across cultural differences and national identities.

7 The 150 YCMs engaged in open dialogue within a dozen smaller groups around issues of common interest.
8 Each group included YCMs from different countries and with diverse competences. The discussions led to
9 practical, yet ambitious proposals for solutions for the persisting problems of the region, including increasing
10 youth political participation, improving access to education, promoting gender equality and reducing
11 corruption.

12 The proposals have strength and credibility because they rely on face-to-face encounters and experiences
13 made during the MEM Summer Summit. These bonds underpin the proposed creation of virtual networks
14 and on-line platforms. In addition, the proposals are driven by a common awareness that the region is
15 affected by similar problems and that addressing these problems means operating not only at the local, but
16 also at the regional level.

17 The first version of this document was presented during the MEM Summer Summit Forum. The ideas and
18 proposals it contains remain open to further modification and experimentations. Its authors are engaged in a
19 continuing dialogue, sharing ideas for further developments and implementation strategies. After the
20 publication of the definitive version of the document, we will proceed with concrete work on the proposals, in
21 order to transform them into concrete structured projects. The work is developed by the YCMs and different
22 representatives of academia and civil society.

23 The structure of the document is as follows. First, a presentation of the main themes of the proposals and
24 secondly a concise versions of the proposals themselves.

I. Summary of ideas

25 **A. A new model for independent, inclusive and empowered information**

26 Various media outlets experience increasing politicisation and social media users are often exposed
27 to pressures of different natures. We propose the creation of a free and independent model of
28 empowerment through the inclusive *crowd sourcing of information*: a network of citizen journalists.
29 The editors could be professionals, but also people without specific experience in journalism. The
30 platform will have editorial boards responsible for approving the contents of the publications, to
31 guarantee the quality of the information published. Stakeholders and partners will be universities,
32 schools, NGOs and corporations willing to support the initiative and, to some extent, governments.
33 This *crowd-sourcing of information* model, inclusive and factual, will make it possible to *address*
34 *problems identified as priorities*, such as corruption, climate change and water management.
35 An online platform seems to be the best instrument insofar as it offers a space where young people
36 from different parts of the region can share their experience, publish breaking news, insights,
37 reports, and carry out investigative journalism. The idea is also to contribute to increase media
38 literacy.

39 A dedicated space will be provided for people to share their own experiences with corruption in their
40 daily lives at different levels (evidence-based approach). The data will be collected, analysed and
41 classified into different categories. The aim is to *create and publish a map of corruption* in the region
42 showing the amount, location and type of corruption in each country. One aim is to stimulate
43 competition among political parties, ministries or governments to showcase their involvement and
44 support of this initiative to fight corruption. Promises, initiatives and concrete outcomes will be
45 monitored by the platform.

46 Further, a space will be devoted to climate change challenges, designed to *collect individual stories*
47 *of people's relation to water and climate*. This will enable platform users to get a better grasp of
48 these important global issues by connecting them to questions of culture and identity. A scientific
49 panel will be appointed to work on the gathered material and to suggest small-scale solutions based

50 on best practices in order to show users how they could proceed to have an impact through their
51 own behaviour. (See Proposals 1, 2 and 3 below.)

52 **B. Foster stability across borders**

53 A country's lack of stability deeply affects its potential for development. While solutions need to be
54 sought in each country individually, some causes of instability may better be addressed by an
55 approach that goes beyond national borders. The aim is to create networks to map and to connect
56 the different actors working on similar problems throughout the region.

57 Refugee displacement is one issue better dealt with by a cross-border approach. The objective is to
58 *bring together all the actors involved in the refugee crisis*, both locally and internationally – public
59 and private sector organisations, non-governmental associations, trade unions, UN agencies, donors
60 – and *support their joint work on concrete actions*, providing help at different levels: social,
61 psychological, medical, and legal; with the aim of promoting access to rights and services, as well as
62 integration in society and the labour market. The first step is to *set up a platform* that will be a useful
63 tool to *map existing initiatives* on the refugee crisis in different regions and to close the gap between
64 them.

65 Another proposal is to *create a network linking higher education institutions and students from*
66 *different countries in the region*, in which everyone is free to share new forms of expression and
67 develop new narratives aimed at fostering mutual understanding. This will also help leverage the
68 value of academic education.

69 One *novel use of such networks* could be for collecting data from different reliable actors working on
70 the ground. This way artificial intelligence approaches could be used to help international
71 organisations or other decision makers to *evaluate the implications of their policies*, by providing
72 them with potential scenarios. (See Proposals 4, 5, 6 and 7 below.)

73 **C. Education, Investments, and Training Platforms**

74 Employment is one of the key factors of social cohesion, while adequate education and training are
75 the basis for proper employment. The objective of education is not simply to award degrees, but
76 rather to share knowledge and invest in the growth of every single individual at the different stages of
77 the education process.

78 *With an approach focused on young people, education and the labour market, we shall work on*
79 *reports or white papers to help increase funding for training and apprenticeship opportunities, as well*
80 *as organize, through a (physical and virtual) information platform, events to inform young people*
81 *about training, professions and trades. (See Proposals 8, 9 and 10 below.)*

82 **D. A Culture of Diversity and Inclusion**

83 Conflicts between cultural groups and the violation of minority rights are a long-standing issues. It
84 has been revived by radicalism, which implies the denial of diversity and in turn leads to clash of
85 identities, sectarian divides and minority rights violations. It is a priority to *address the lack of*
86 *knowledge of others and of the minorities* and to *create spaces for civic engagement* in order to
87 bring new perspectives on diversity issues.

88 *A dedicated online platform* would make it possible for diverse voices to be heard. It can offer a safe
89 space for dialogue, social and political activism, and advocacy.

90 In order to *stimulate new narratives, new ways of seeing and defining realities*, on topics ranging
91 from school to media, from family to legal systems, and to address issues such as gender
92 discrimination and other negative impacts on society caused by political and religious ideologies, we
93 propose lectures, workshops, summer camps, and film productions focused on education. These will
94 be adapted to audiences from different age groups.

95 The aim is to carry out activities, through collaboration between informal communities managed
96 locally and a few young change-makers, in which the new generations can find *values* that go
97 beyond those traditionally offered by politics or conveyed through ideology. (See Proposals 11, 12
98 and 13 below.)

II. List of proposals

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- 1. YOUNews. An independent platform for young citizen journalists**
With the contribution of independent bloggers and journalists, the goal is to *create an online platform organized as a network, through which to share surveys, stories, interviews* from across the MEM region, going beyond national dimensions and ideological views.
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- 2. The Lens platform**
The aim is to *collect information and data on corruption cases* in different countries, through an online platform that provides users with a 'map' indicating the extent, place and type of corruption, fuelling debate and pressure to move towards policies to combat the phenomenon. An objective way of working in synergy with the legal system, which is not ideologically either against or in favour of the different governments.
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- 3. Blue change – connecting people to climate change through water**
Making use of the multitude of existing information platforms on water and climate change, this is a bottom-up initiative with the objective to *raise public awareness in the MEM region about the risks of climate change*, encouraging the sharing of stories about communities and the implementation of tangible and useful action.
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- 4. Refugees and integration / Alleviating the situation of refugees on the Greek Islands**
To enable refugees in the MEM region to gain access to rights and services, we propose to map and *involve a large number of actors* – public and private sector organisations, non-governmental associations, trade unions, etc. – who will collaborate in tangible ways in the context of the labour market, through the creation of an online platform. For example, the situation in Greece has been analysed in detail and the proposal is to establish a non-governmental organisation aimed at enhancing the professional skills of refugees and thus improve their living conditions.
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- 5. Reconciliation of divided societies**
To encourage the creation of a civil identity capable of transcending borders as well as cultural and social divisions, we shall work towards *setting up* a network to support the many actors working to foster peace and dialogue in the MEM region countries.
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- 6. Education means employment**
We want to guarantee access to quality education, overcoming the stereotypes on universities in the MEM region. In order to achieve this objective, we propose to *create a strong network for collaborations* (both North-South and South-South) *and exchange* between universities and research institutes with, for example, inter-university mobility programmes that encourage the development of new synergies and thus foster openness and excellence.
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- 7. Artificial intelligence for neutrality**
Predictive A.I. technology may *provide ways of forecasting different scenarios* that can arise from decisions in complex situations. Presenting them to States and their citizens before voting on decisive issues related to peace and security will contribute to more stability. Our solution is to apply this technology to UN needs in order to make better-informed decisions for the greater good of humanity.
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- 8. Research and development in Arab countries**
Firmly believing that growth – both economically and socially – is enabled through investment in research and innovation, our endeavour is to *create a think tank* capable of dialogue with institutions and governments of different countries in the MEM region to encourage the implementation of policies focused on requirements of the academic and scientific world.
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- 9. Civil society and social cohesion: the leverage of employment**
Employment is one of the key factors of social cohesion, and it is based on proper education and training. With a focus on young people, and the labour market, we propose a *pragmatic approach* to increase funding for training and apprenticeship opportunities, as well as the organization of events, where young people can learn about professions and trades, and by directly involving their parents in the overall process.

- 147 **10. An ecosystem for economic growth (*Zero to infinity*)**
148 To enable the development of a civic identity capable of overcoming the many obstacles experienced
149 today in the business sector, *an ecosystem model is devised* consisting of three categories of partners
150 in the fields of knowledge, finance, and communication. The ecosystem is based on partnerships and
151 is created like a start-up enterprise.
- 152 **11. Religion and society**
153 Tensions in our societies have many sources. Communities tend to keep people separated in order to
154 preserve the culture, the religion or the values that define them. The fact that religion is often imposed
155 upon individuals by the State or communities is definitely a source of tensions. In secular societies
156 analogous situations are created by the incoming of migrants or refugees. We propose to elaborate on
157 these themes in *a free exchange of ideas*, based on our own, very varied backgrounds.
- 158 **12. Gender “Strong Together” / Identity and representation**
159 To address gender discrimination and other negative impacts on society caused by political and
160 religious ideologies, the proposal is to *stimulate new narratives*, ranging from school to media, from
161 family to the legal systems. In particular, an online platform could be set up as a neutral venue to
162 convey new stories, exploiting technologies on the one hand and the power of artistic expression on
163 the other.
- 164 **13. Youth engagement in politics / Increase civil society participation through empowering local
165 communities**
166 To encourage young people to be more active in politics and more aware of its value and potential, the
167 proposal aims to create an online and offline platform, dedicated to young people aged 16 to 26 years.
168 The platform will also *define physical spaces intended to empower local communities to collaborate in
169 solving common problems*, fostering a practical and concrete dialogue between citizens and
170 institutions.