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Middle East Summit (MES)
Topic 1: Regional Economic Integration
YUNMUN XXXVII

The first topic we will examine is regional economic integration, exploring both the opportunities for stronger economic ties and the challenges that continue to divide the region.

Regional economic integration refers to the strengthening of economic ties between neighboring countries, and has been a subject of discussion in the Middle East for decades. Countries have sought to expand opportunities beyond their own borders, through trade, investment, and other economic relationships. Existing frameworks, including the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and the Greater Arab Free Trade Area (GAFTA), are examples of efforts to build these connections. However, regional integration *remains* limited and incomplete, raising questions about what it is that prevents closer cooperation and whether countries share the same goals for the region's economic future.

Four major barriers limit regional economic integration in the Middle East: slow customs procedures, weak transportation links, similar economic structures, and political rivalries. Complicated customs rules can make moving goods across borders costly and time-consuming, while gaps in transportation networks can limit connections between markets. Economies that rely on similar exports, particularly oil, may have fewer opportunities to trade complementary products with one another. Political disagreements and security concerns further complicate cooperation. This is especially true when governments are reluctant to deepen their dependence on countries whose interests may conflict with their own.

These challenges raise broader questions about the relationship between economic cooperation and national priorities. Closer economic ties may create opportunities, but countries must also consider how such changes could affect domestic industries, workers, and control over economic policy. The benefits of economic integration may vary, with some countries and groups gaining more than others. Wealthier states, countries seeking investment, and countries

recovering from conflict may therefore approach regional cooperation with different expectations and concerns.

For delegates in the Middle East Summit this year, regional economic integration presents both an opportunity and a challenge. Delegates must consider why previous efforts have produced mixed results and what their countries would want from future cooperation. They must also examine how conflict, economic uncertainty, and relationships with outside powers influence regional priorities. Finally, they should consider how recent challenges, including shipping disruptions in the Strait of Hormuz, affect their countries' willingness and ability to strengthen regional economic ties.

Questions for delegates to consider:

- Which of the four barriers poses the greatest challenge for your country, and how do these barriers reinforce one another?
- How should countries balance regional cooperation with national sovereignty and domestic economic priorities?
- How do political rivalries, security concerns, and international alliances affect your country's willingness to strengthen regional economic ties?
- How should countries address differences in their economic resources, priorities, and ability to benefit from cooperation?
- What practical measures can Middle Eastern countries, and non Middle Eastern countries, adopt to strengthen regional economic integration?
- Can existing agreements, such as the GCC and GAFTA (mentioned above), be strengthened to promote greater economic cooperation?

These questions are intended to guide, not limit, your research. Please remember to stay true to your country's stance when researching, writing, and debating. All papers must include citations, and plagiarism will not be tolerated. AI use must not exceed the UG1 maximum, and papers flagged for improper AI usage will not be eligible to win awards. If you have any questions, thoughts, concerns (or just want to say hi), feel free to reach me at tnaggar@mail.yu.edu. I'm looking forward to an incredible conference!

Yeshiva University National Model UN

Sincerely,

Talya Naggar

Chair, Middle East Summit

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