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**REPORT**

**Living in Diversity – Euro-Mediterranean Intercultural Trends (module 4)**

The fourth part of the Euro-Mediterranean Intercultural Trends online course, titled “Living in Diversity”, focuses on the influence of religion on people’s opinions, the level of tolerance for who comes from different backgrounds, the issue of radicalization and the challenges of living in multicultural settings. These themes are analysed in the four units using data from the Anna Lindh/Ipsos intercultural Trends Survey, presented through videos and experts’ contributions.

The first topic examined is the relation between religiosity and openness to intercultural relations. In order to understand such connection, it is crucial to consider that the degree of religiosity variates a lot on the two shores of the Mediterranean: 23% of the respondents in Europe and 34% of the ones in Southern and Eastern Mediterranean (hereinafter SEM) countries are very religious; while not religious people represent 30% of Europeans, but only 5% of SEM people. However, these data alone are not enough to explain how the level of openness variates in different states. For instance, a comparison can be drawn between the data presented by Robertson-von Trotha (2014, 73-76) and Boufrikha and Jerba (2014, 113-114) on Germany and Tunisia: while the responses are very similar with regard to who strongly or somewhat believes that diversity can bring prosperity (84% in Germany and 81% in Tunisia), it seems that the Tunisia is more open to diversity, since more Tunisians (93%) than Germans (88%) strongly or somewhat agree that everybody should have the same rights and opportunities despite their cultural and religious backgrounds and less Tunisian (39%) than Germans (61%) strongly or somewhat believe that diversity can be a threat to society.

Getting to the point of analysing the relation between religiosity and openness to intercultural relations, there are variations among the countries facing the Mediterranean. Cohen highlights how the situation in Israel and Palestine is very different from the one of other SEM and European states: while Israelian and Palestinian not religious respondents are quite open to the possibility of having a children attending a multicultural school (45% not minding this at all), much less religious people in the same countries have the same opinion (only 14% in Israel and 25% in Palestine not minding at all); on the other hand, the situation in other SEM countries shows that people respond similarly despite their different degree of religiosity (2018, 62-63). Therefore, in the large majority of states analysed, the degree of religiosity of a person does not considerably impact its openness. This is particularly evident considering the data coming from Europe, where respondents with different levels of religiosity show very similar attitudes regarding which are the most efficacious tools to prevent radicalization: the only difference in approaches can be seen in the case of inter-religious dialogue that is supported more by religious respondents; while, despite their religiosity, most respondents support education, youth participation and exchange programs to fight radicalization (Cohen 2018, 61-62). As this report will display, the fact that respondents tend to privilege approaches focusing on the role of youth is a leitmotiv of the data presented in this whole module.

The analysis continues presenting the level of tolerance of people in having relations with people of different cultural and religious backgrounds: most respondents (with a slightly higher percentage in Europe) would not mind at all having people from different cultures as colleagues, neighbours or acquired relatives. Data also show that a higher level of tolerance is connected to a higher belief in the efficiency of measures such as exchange programs and inter-religious dialogue to deal with radicalization and conflict (Özerdem 2018, 47). These two instruments are particularly crucial since they are recognized by the United Nation and the Council of Europe as strategic ways to tackle radicalization (UN General Assembly 2015, 49.e and 58.j and Fataliyeva 2016, 6.1 and 6.4.1). In fact, Özerdem highlights that, especially among very tolerant people, SEM more than European respondents support these mechanisms: exchange programs are considered very efficient by 67% of SEM people and 39% of Europeans; interreligious dialogue by 63% and 36%, respectively (2018, 47).

The fight against radicalization is, in fact, one of the most investigated topics in this module, which also provided a definition for such concept. Fahmy and Valstaaffirm that radicalization is not simply caused by ideological polarization: it derives from a complex combination of individualcircumstancesand social marginalization (2018, 40). According to these authors, to avoid that whole communities are perceived as radicalized because of the actions of single individuals (as in the case of islamophobia, as a consequence of the action of radicalized terrorists), it is crucial to support three types of cooperation initiatives to ensure intercultural interactions and mutual understanding: fostering media literacy, promoting tolerant educational systems and supporting youth-led dialogue (id., 40-41). It is interesting to notice that the respondents showed a strong support for similar measures involving education and youth. In fact, both in European and SEM countries initiatives that involve the participation of young people – such as education and youth programs to foster youth-led dialogue initiatives, support of youth participation in public life and exchange programs – are considered efficient in contrasting radicalization, as the contribution by Özerdem displays (2018, 45).

At this point is, therefore, the case of Jordan is investigated, since it represents a country with a unique relation with cultural diversity. As Tabba and Almasri present, particularly since the Syrian Civil War, Jordan is hosting a high number of refugees and has experienced a decrease of economic opportunities especially for young people: while the percentage of Jordanians strongly believing that people from different cultural and religious backgrounds should have the same rights and opportunities (56%) is slightly lower than the SEM average (58%), Jordanians strongly disagreeing that diversity is a threat to societal stability (41%) and instead strongly agreeing that diversity is important for prosperity (64%), reflect a more tolerant image than the one depicted by SEM (29% and 51%) and European averages (40% and 36%), showing a particular openness to cultural diversity (2018, 106-108).

It is, therefore, evident that the Mediterranean is facing a challenge regarding multicultural coexistence. In this sense, Moschis-Gauguet explains that diversity can become a source of prosperity when it is well managed, but is perceived as a threat if badly managed: the majority Europeans (71%) and SEM respondents (72%) strongly or somewhat agree that diversity is a source of prosperity, but at the same time many Europeans (36%) and SEM respondents (54%) strongly or somewhat agree that diversity is a threat to society (2018, 48-49). How to live in multicultural cultural environments, then? The people interviewed support a wide set of actions for this goal: education is crucial, but multicultural events and expression of cultural identity in public spaces are sustained, too (id., 50). This reflect, once again, that initiatives that involve the youth are particularly appreciated. Moschis-Gauguet also highlights that this kind of actions are perfect to be performed in intercultural cities: in fact, cities are laboratories for cross-cultural fertilization, and it is possible to take advantage of their public spaces to promote dialogue, especially through artistic and creative initiatives, while connections among cities in crucial areas – as education, art, civil society and migration – can be very useful (2018, 50-51). For this reason, the institution of the “Euro-Mediterranean Capital of Dialogue Award” is proposed to promote such developments (ibid.).

Finally, it can be interesting to consider the case of Italy to examine the challenges of intercultural coexistences posed by new events. According to Chaouki’s analysis, as a consequence of the rise of migratory flows towards Europe, the perception of the Mediterranean in Italy changed: while the number of Italians strongly associating the Mediterranean with hospitality remained stable between 2012 (50%) and 2016 (49%), Italians strongly associating the Mediterranean with conflict grew from 24% to 33% (2018, 102). Despite this evolution, data show that Italians remain tolerant towards cultural diversity: the number of respondents who support of equality of rights and opportunities of people from different cultures, who belief that diversity is a source of prosperity and who do not think that diversity is a threat to societal stability are in line with the European average; moreover, Italians showed a level of support in collaborative actions to counteract radicalization above the European average, especially in the case of education and youth programs and youth participation in public life (id., 103-105).

Concluding, the analysis conducted by the Anna Lindh Foundation and presented here gives space for optimism: it seems that along the shores of the Mediterranean tolerance is present and that people find initiatives involving youth and education very efficacious to face the challenges of multicultural societies. The hope is that future generations will be able to experience positive intercultural relations. However, it would be interesting to see more recent data (the one presented here date back to 2016) in order to analyse if new events – such as the rise of populism in Europe, the evolution of the tensions in the Middle East or the most recent outbreak of COVID-19 global pandemic – have impacted how people in Europe and SEM countries perceive each other and their intercultural relations.

**RESOURCES**

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Boufrikha, A.; Jerbi, M. (2014) “Tunisia Laying the Basis for a Sustainable Civic Engagement” in *The Anna Lindh Report 2014: Intercultural Trends and Social Change in the Euro-Mediterranean region*, p. 113-114.

Chaouki, K. (2018) “Italian hospitality in the face of rising migratory flows” in *The Anna Lindh Report 2018: Intercultural Trends and Social Change in the Euro-Mediterranean region*, p. 102-105.

Cohen, S. (2018) “Convergences independently from religiosity level” in *The Anna Lindh Report 2018: Intercultural Trends and Social Change in the Euro-Mediterranean region*, p. 60-63.

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