**Report on the Euro-Mediterranean Intercultural Trends Course**

**Module 2: Values and Mutual Perception**

**Introduction**

The second module of the Anna Lindh Foundation and UNIMED’s Euro-Mediterranean Intercultural Trends Course is about values and mutual perception within the Mediterranean basin.

In particular, Unit 1 discusses how children are raised in Europe and South and East Mediterranean countries, and which values are considered fundamental in raising children, investigating similarities and differences among North and South. Bridging the educational aspects explored in the first unit, the following one, Unit 2 analyses and deconstructs gender stereotypes through the study of economic, political and cultural life fields.
Finally, Units 3 and 4 link values to the mutual perception European and SEM countries have about each other; Unit 3, through the work of Paul Gillespie, focuses on the extent to which media influence opinions about the other shore of Mediterranean, while Unit 4 focuses on the most trusted media sources within the area, deepening into generational differences in preferences.

**Introduction to Unit 2.1: The most important values (Maddalena Castelli)**

The second module analyses the impact of values in the upbringing of children. Looking at the data, experts provide some important points of reflection. Nayla Tabbara, underlines the emergence of two different frameworks: secular for Europe and religious for South- eastern Mediterranean countries (SEM). On one hand, Tabbara suggests that when analysing the relevance of these values in Europe and SEM countries, we should bear in mind that there is a cultural gap between these two frames of reference and between a perception of society as a whole with a focus on values of the public life and a vision of a communal identity which has to be preserved. On the other hand, Nabil Falmy and Emilia Valsta, warn on the need to avoid over-generalization since perceptions may differ greatly from urban areas to rural populations, and depending on the different socio-political and economic contexts, class structure and levels of inequality.

**Reading: “Intercultural education between local values and universal principles” (Nayla Tabbara).**

In her study: “Intercultural education between local values and universal principles”, Nayala Tabbara, realizes an in-depth analysis of the tensions between universal principles and cultural diversity in the context of intercultural education. When looking at the data provided by the Alf/Ipsos survey on the values that parents from EU and SEM countries consider important when raising children, Tabbara spots three types of fears influencing a positive perception of universal values: a fear of influence on culture and religion, on economic and political stability and the fear of diversity in the public sphere. Starting from here, the author tries to establish whether intercultural education should give more attention to the acceptance of diversity and mutual understanding or focus on the development of universal principles and public values, through the guidelines provided by the Anna Lindh/Ipsos survey. The first thing that Tabbara points out, is the striking difference between the two shores of the Mediterranean when it comes to deciding which values should be taught to children. For 61% of respondents in SEM countries, religious beliefs and practices have a primary role whereas in Europe, 63% of respondents put more emphasis on the respect of diversity. From this picture, two distinct frames of reference emerge: religious/traditional in South-Eastern Mediterranean countries and secular/philosophical in European countries. However, data show that these frameworks can easily be challenged. To the statement: “People from different cultural religious backgrounds should have the same rights and opportunities”, only 23 % of Europeans “somewhat agree”. It is an interesting outcome given our tendency to see Europe as a cultural space characterized by a strong focus on human rights and on the importance of the common good. Here however, it appears that equality is not universally considered as a fundamental human right. SEM countries seem more coherent in respect to their religious and traditional backgrounds when analysing their responses to fear of diversity and xenophobia. Respondents from South-Eastern Mediterranean countries in fact, are less willing to have people from a different background at their workplace, in their neighbourhood and at school with their children. The gap gets narrower, only when it comes to accepting someone from another country into one’s family circle. Here, data shows that 21% of Europeans and 27% of SEM respondents mind having a relative from a different cultural background. Going back to the three fears mentioned in the first part of her research, Tabbara states that higher numbers in xenophobia and fear of diversity may be fed by the preoccupation that universal values could have a negative impact on culture. This fear of the “other” is found also in the data related to the statement: “cultural and religious diversity is important for the prosperity of your society”, in which 27% of EU respondents and 24% of SEM respondents disagree. Even in this case, Nayla Tabbara, offers a possible explanation: this idea that foreigners can be a threat to the national economy may be largely due to the refugee crisis and the perception of a threat to political stability.

Moving to diversity in education, a vast majority of respondents both in the EU and SEM countries (89% and 82% respectively), agree that intercultural education should be included in school programs and that the promotion of intercultural events should be encouraged. Interestingly enough, when it comes to enabling the expression of diversity, some contradiction with the aforementioned results comes to surface. In Europe, 30% of respondents believe that such a measure would not be efficient in promoting diversity, whereas in SEM countries only 15% share this belief. Still, when asked whether cultural practices should be relegated to the private sphere the majority of SEM respondents agree (68%). It is yet another contradiction with the results mentioned but Tabbara shows little surprise. She believes in fact, that SEM citizens may be subject to a greater amount of religious display in public spaces.

After grasping a general picture regarding the perception of which values are relevant to both sides of the Mediterranean and the role that diversity should play in the two contexts, Tabbara re-focuses on the concept of intercultural education and offers some insights on how the subject should be approached in order to be effective. First of all, Tabbara underlines that the respect of diversity and local cultures should not lead to a contextualization of universal principles and rights, which need to have a primary role. In this regard, the author suggests a re-conceptualization of the intercultural educational principles presented by UNESCO, in order to make them transformative and value based. In this way, intercultural education could prompt citizens to promote values of public life and the common good, and share a common sense of humanity. To achieve this aim it is necessary to rethink also the concept of “citizen”. The “Beirut Declaration on Educational Reform for preventing violent Extremism in Arab Societies” promotes the model of “inclusive citizenship”. It’s a model that recognizes the multiplicity of identities and cultures that characterize our modern societies, and allows citizens to express them in public. “Inclusive citizenship” then, respects both the principle of diversity and universality, plus it constitutes a unifying point for both the religious and secular frames. Is precisely for this reason that education on inclusion and shared public values is fundamental in both contexts.

**Reading: “Tunisians and their affiliation to the Mediterranean region” (Dalenda Largueche).**

Moving from a general perspective, this module adopts a regional focus on Tunisians’ perceptions of the Mediterranean space, their openness to multiculturalism and how data has changed over time since the Anna Lindh Report of 2012. The results show that Tunisia is more open to encounters with other cultures than Europe and SEM countries.

All in all, the Mediterranean region is seen by 85 % of Tunisians as a hospitable place, although there has been a slight decrease since 2012 where the percentage reached 90%. Largueche suggests that this change may be caused by illegal immigration. Plus, the decline in the perception of the Mediterranean as a region with a common cultural and historical tradition (86% in 2012 and 79% in 2016) is seen as a response to the rise of Islamism and to the policies oriented toward a reshaping of the Tunisian personality based on a new Arab and Islamic consciousness. Despite these first negative results, data also shows that less Tunisians see the area as a source of conflict (62%) compared to 2012 where numbers reached 73%. Dalenda Largueche, interprets this new orientation as a gain of confidence in the policy of the Northern Mediterranean countries toward Tunisia. In support of this thesis, there is also the fact that despite being more attracted to their country of residence, Tunisian respondents choose Europe as another country in which they could spend their lives. Even when it comes to encounters with people from the other side of the Mediterranean, Tunisian respondents show a more positive attitude compared to their European and SEM counterparts (19 % against 15% and 17% respectively).

Still, attitudes toward diversity are more contradictory. There is in fact a rise in the number of those who consider cultural and religious diversity as a threat to social and political stability (54% in 2016 and 39% in 2012). Together with this, there is also the fact that 60% of Tunisians think that religious beliefs and practices are paramount as educational values and an element of unity for society. At the same time, 77% of respondents believe that diversity is important for their social prosperity. Furthermore, the percentage of Tunisians who accept work colleagues or neighbours from different cultural backgrounds is really high (92%) and close to those of European and SEM countries.

When it comes to measuring the system of values prominent in educational contexts, we can see that thus obedience remains relevant (39%), there is an important rise in the percentage of respondents who consider teaching about others as an important educational value (from 25% to 34%). Subsequently, there is also wide-spread consensus over the necessity to promote multiculturalism through education (90%), together with the organization of multi-cultural events and the expression of diversity in public spaces. In this regard, it appears that Tunisians are more tolerant than their European and SEM counterparts.

The last section of Largueche’ s work focuses on establishing which improvements Tunisian respondents feel that a European Neighbourhood Policy could bring. What emerges is that whereas expectations from Euro-Mediterranean cooperation have remained stable, priorities have changed. In 2012, cultural diversity and prevention of extremism was leading the chart at 90 % but in 2016, entrepreneurship, innovation and youth employment results as the number one priority. Dalenda Largueche, suggests that this change may symbolize a shift from the fear of extremism to that of an economic crisis, which could be solved only through cooperation with Europe. Promising for the development of intercultural education is also the fact that education and training are also seen as priorities, followed by environmental sustainability. These advantages are accompanied by desires of cultural diversity, prevention of extremism and the promotion of policies for gender equality, individual freedom and the rule of law.

In conclusion, Dalenda Largueche, suggests that the tendency toward cooperation and openness constantly shown by Tunisians should be seen as a solid basis for the development of a common Euro-Mediterranean neighbourhood policy.

 **Introduction to Unit 2.3: The role of the women (Meltemi Di Biase)**

This unit analyses the view of respondents to the Anna Lindh / Ipsos Survey concerning the expected role of women in the Mediterranean region in three areas, economic and business life, political decision-making, and cultural and social life. Inès Safi, notes how the role perception has is crucial in building a greater role for women in the areas mentioned above. She further notes how, observing the survey’s results in depth, country by country, European countries cannot be grouped together at the top of the list before the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean countries in any of the fields.

In order to promote a better perception, Inès Safi calls for empowerment of women, giving them the chance to choose their path independently from ideological, political or religious systems. She then supports the idea of promoting female role models in both geographical areas, in order to make it clear that women also have a role in the world, contrary to what stereotypes emphasize. She concludes by affirming how it is necessary to start somewhere and it is best to start enhancing the role of women in areas in which the perception is of help, like the social and cultural field, to be able to further improve the role of women in other areas as well.

Lastly, Mohamed Tozy agrees with the positive note that Inès Safi introduces, however, he stresses how the perception of the political role for women is the most difficult area to adjust, especially in countries with strong religious pressure.

**Reading: “Towards a common deconstruction of gender stereotypes” (Inès SAFI)**

In her study “Towards a common deconstruction of gender stereotypes”, Inès Safi realizes an in-depth analysis of the view on the expected role of women in the Mediterranean region in three areas: cultural and social life, political decision making and economic life.

The data is provided by the Anna Lindh / Ipsos Survey, who inquired respondents on the perceived role of women and whether, in the three areas mentioned above, this role should increase, decrease, or stay the same. The survey divided respondents depending on gender, age groups, and countries, as well as their distribution into two geographical groups: Europe and the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean (SEM).

When comparing results more in general depending on the two geographical areas, Inès Safi, interestingly noticed how Europeans and southern and eastern Mediterraneans held nearly equal views on women playing a greater role in the economy, but when considering the reduction of the role of women in this field, 14% of the respondents in the SEM countries believe women should have a smaller role opposed to only 2% of the EU countries.

The gap between those choosing that women’s role should be reduced gets wider when considering the political decision-making area, where 27% of the respondents in SEM countries believe women should have a smaller role opposed to 4% in Europe. Lastly, for what concerns cultural and social life, SEM countries hold that women should have a greater role at 65% while EU countries believe so at 47%.

However, when analysing the data more closely, considering country by country, it is clear that European countries cannot be put at the top of the list in willing to grant a greater role for women as opposed to SEM countries although a general look would make us suppose it.

The most striking example is Tunisia, which stands out in all fields of men in favour of a greater role for women compared to both SEM and European countries. This result is surprising considering the fragile economic situation, the rise of extremist movements and the very high unemployment rates in the country. On the other hand, when considering the men who oppose a greater role of women, if the data is confronted with other countries with a different economic situation like Israel, aside from the economic situation that could partially explain the results, other factors including the influence of religious orthodoxy could be useful in understanding the data. As a matter of fact, the merit of the Anna Lindh/Ipsos survey is that of illustrating the variations in the discourse as opposed to a biased interpretation that only considers ethnic or religious factors.

Lastly, the rate of women in favour of greater roles is generally higher than that of men.

Inès Safi then shifts the discourse and calls for the empowerment of women, inviting both men and women to start this process by breaking free from ideological, political or religious systems, which manipulate perceptions. She believes there are two ideological systems in particular that condition perceptions.

On one hand, the ultraliberal rationalism and all its environmental and geopolitical impacts which set aside the value and respect of the human being. Moreover, the division of responsibilities of men and women are imbalanced due to this ultraliberal rationalism, bringing perceptions less in favour of women having a greater role.

On the other hand, the system of religious rationalism. To counterbalance these aspects, the author encourages the promotion of female role models in both geographical areas in order to limit stereotypization.As a matter of fact, Inès Safi affirms that this perception of the role of women is not a fixed given, rather it is modelled by the context and these perceptions can contribute in weakening the mechanisms involved in the context, activating a circle in which both elements are essential and both elements become dependent on one another.

Inès Safi concludes by affirming how the Anna Lindh / Ipsos survey is useful in detecting the effects of social injustice that are a consequence of consumerism, which she hopes can be counterbalanced. For this reason, she concludes on an optimistic note, attributing great importance to the perception of the role of women in the social and cultural fields in SEM countries, which could be a crucial factor in order to transform societies and mentalities, leading them to free themselves from oppressive ideological and economic systems.

**Introduction to Unit 2.3: How media influenced you (Martina Lima)**

In this unit, the focus is on the media and how their perspective of reporting shapes perceptions and influences citizens. Paul Gillespie, the author of the main article in the unit, explores the way in which intercultural reporting is made, how it affects readers or viewers’ perceptions and how it creates biases: starting from an overview on the level of interest European and South and East Mediterranean citizens have about each other, and on the media they trust the most, he analyses the hidden information coming from the Anna Lindh surveys and addresses some recommendations for overcoming a partisan or partial reporting, such as an observatory created by Anna Lindh Foundation.

**Reading: “Media challenged to match the public’s interest in better coverage” (Paul Gillespie)**

In this 2018 paper, Paul Gillespie analyses two Anna Lindh/Ipsos surveys about the interest European people have over news regarding the South and East Mediterranean (SEM) countries - and vice-versa for the SEM countries - and which are the news sources they trust the most.

Regarding the first survey, the possible answers were five (cultural life and lifestyle, economic conditions, political situation, sport activities, religious beliefs and practices) and for each of these categories –Gillespie underlines – the European respondents are generally more interested than the SEM ones. Going in depth into differences, it should be noticed that sport activities from the other shore of Mediterranean are far more interesting for the SEM respondents (61%), but Europeans are more curious about religious beliefs and practices in SEM countries (59%), reversing the pattern.

Although these points are only hinted by Gillespie, and the curiosity factor will be more deeply analysed by Rima Marrouch in her “*Social media in shaping perceptions: human curiosity as mediator”* research report, it is important pointing them out for the scope of his work, because he suggests that these findings are vital for mapping and understanding media in a truly efficient way and thus, serve as a benchmark for building an evidence-based intercultural reporting approach.

In fact, the author states that reports like these ones briefly presented are deeply context-dependent and respondents can be influenced by a partisan article or a misleading title. Using the 2015-2017 migration and refugee crisis, he proves his point: 54% of European respondents to the question “Is the Mediterranean region characterised by migration issues?” said that it was so, and the exposure to news about the Mediterranean region impacted negatively their opinion about SEM countries, profoundly. Furthermore, it shall be considered that, in the same span of time, Europe suffered terrorist attacks from Islamic fundamentalist groups who involved people coming from the SEM regions and that news sources constantly flooded the European audience with impacting pictures of the Syrian war, Jihadists and refugees, all framed by catchy negative headlines. This was not balanced by an equal exposure of Europe on the news sources of the other shore of Mediterranean: 38% of SEM respondents said they had not seen or read anything related to Europe within the last 12 months, while only 17% of Europeans replied the same, counting as less than a half.

Consequently, this leads Gillespie to discuss the second survey and to go deeper into which media are the most trusted for cross-cultural reporting. On a first level, both European (45%) and SEM (58%) countries point at television as the preferred source of information. Indeed, on a second level, the results are different: print is more trusted by Europeans (40% to 15% in SEM countries), along with books and documentaries, while online and social media are preferred by South people (32%/27% to 28%/18% for the North). Finally, Gillespie states that education and age levels affect these preferences.

These outcomes are even more interesting if one considers that the respondents were not directly asked about media credibility, so answers not only point out which media they trust the most but also which media they use the most. And it is even more interesting if combined with what has been previously said, the fact that a consistent amount of SEM citizens has never heard or seen anything about Europeans and thus has not been influenced by the media in shaping an opinion.

Gillespie ends his report with the hope for further and deeper research on this topic, considering the willingness of both South and North Mediterranean citizens to know more about each-other and the misunderstandings that exist. He hints to the fact that, even though both sides are committed to educational, youth, cultural and exchange initiatives, the difficulties these actions meet – both online and offline – are many, from language to stereotypes (largely fuelled and/or by media).

In conclusion, the author gives some suggestions to Anna Lindh Foundation: apart from both South and North countries individual efforts in cross-cultural report training to overcome and avoid these backlashes of media reporting, Gillespie argues that a media observatory developed by ALF and partners, annual media dialogues and researches would be useful in fostering mutual understanding, knowledge and fair reporting; a major involvement of media in intercultural debates could also help to build a more objective way of reporting.
In particular, the observatory should be made up by journalists, researchers and media experts but also civil society representatives, and it should focus on how media cover intercultural issues and develop evidence-based resources for journalists, in line with the 2003 Anna Lindh Foundation foundational Constitution.

**Introduction to Unit 2.4. Which source do you trust more?**

In the final unit of module 2, Rima Marrouch further develops the work of her colleague Paul Gillespie. Starting from some Anna Lindh Foundation Surveys that cover many European countries (Austria, Croatia, Finland, France, Italy, Poland, Portugal and the Netherlands) and SEM countries (Algeria, Israel, Jordan, Palestine and Tunisia), Marrouch elaborates which stories regarding the other shore each zone is more interested in. The author comments the findings and analyses in depth which media sources are the most trusted in every zone involved in the Surveys, how they shape public perceptions and the impact cross-cultural reporting has on young people.

**Reading: “Social media in shaping perceptions: human curiosity as mediator” (Rima Marrouch)**

Throughout the whole article, Rima Marrouch manages to link her personal experience as a person born and raised in Syria who had to move to Poland during her childhood, to her work as a journalist within the Anna Lindh Foundation; knowing how it is like to live on both sides of the Mediterranean, the author knows the impact curiosity can have on people and how information about the other side of the basin is crucial, as well as the way information itself is delivered.

In this 2018 article, Marrouch starts discussing the Survey about what kind of stories coming from the other shore of the Mediterranean Sea generate more interest among respondents, thus she moves on questioning the impact media outlets in general have on people’s view and finally considers how the trust in media sources is connected not only to the single country or Mediterranean shore but also to the age range of the people interviewed.

When European and SEM respondents are asked which aspect of the other side of the Mediterranean Sea makes them more curious about, respectively 28% and 30% of them stated to be very interested in the culture and lifestyle of the other. Besides lifestyle and culture, SEM countries' citizens are very interested in sports stories coming from Europe (32%), while North citizens are keener on knowing more about the political situation of the South (28%). What the author notices, though, is the lack of a category for environmental stories coming from the other shore of the Mediterranean Sea, probably due to a misconception that SEM citizens are not interested in them.

Having proved the curiosity for both European and South and East Mediterranean citizens about each other, what is left to be analysed is to what extent the stories media sources tell influence people’s view. In other words, how does the media shape public perception in these areas?

The answer Rima Marrouch gives is not a positive one: studies about the Surveys underline that, if media influenced people, they influenced them for the worst. In particular, 18% of European respondents stated that media influenced in a negative way their opinion about SEM citizens; on the other hand, 28% of SEM people interviewed stated the same about cross-cultural reporting on Europeans, even if the majority of South people remarked – as Gillespie said before – they had not read or heard anything about European countries in the media.

These findings lead to the conclusion that media do not frame the other shore of the Mediterranean in a positive or even neutral light. Furthermore, they induce to find out more about the media sources that are more trusted in these areas for cross-cultural reporting.

Again, as Gillespie pointed out, television is the preferred – and thus the most trusted – media source both in European and SEM countries, respectively mentioned by 45% and 58% of respondents. What is interesting in Marrouch analysis and lacks in Gillespie’s one is that, if the same question is asked to young people only, TV loses the hegemony on both shores. Considering young people in the 15-29 age range, Europeans choose news websites and online magazines as the most trustworthy (42%) while young SEM citizens stick with television although the percentage drops to 48% because social media are gaining trust in those areas as well.

If young people relying on online sources for cross-cultural reporting in the fake news era sounds worrying, it is also worth mentioning that people on social media can compare and double-check the truth of the information given, especially in SEM countries, where there is a lack of media outlets with an independent and reliable way of doing journalism. Marrouch herself states that, for her work as a journalist, Facebook groups in which news are shared and somehow verified are a necessity.

The author concludes her article by affirming that, being proved the influence media sources have on people’s view, especially in cross-cultural reporting, it is necessary that journalists ask themselves «what are the stories we choose to report on, how we report on them, and what impact they may have on people’s perceptions».

**Conclusion**

All in all, Module 2 of the Euro-Mediterranean Intercultural Trends course provides some interesting insight on the present, and possibly future, relationships between the two shores of the Mediterranean. In this conclusive part of our report, we are going to present a general outline of the findings made so far and provide some recommendations that politicians but also the civil society should take into consideration if the aim is that of developing friendly and cooperative relations with their Mediterranean counterpart.

Starting from findings, we believe that what emerges most in all four models is that, above all in the case of SEM countries, citizens are going through a transition phase: they are trying to leave behind conservative and traditional beliefs in order to embrace a more modern way of life. Quite unsurprisingly however, such change is not easy and remanences of the traditional framework are still present. We also believe that the fear of diversity and xenophobia is partially caused by a lack of knowledge about the other and the fact that the chances for real life encounters between people from the two shores of the Mediterranean are quite slim, particularly for SEM countries. In connection to this, it also emerged quite clearly that negative perceptions about the other are mainly fed by the media and the unequal exposure to news. A more promising outlook for future cooperation between the two regions, is found in the importance given to the teaching of diversity and multiculturalism within school programs and the public space more in general. Another sign that, despite some resistance, citizens want to become more open to pluralism. Finally, we also had the opportunity to explore how exceptions can be found when the analysis shifts to the regional level. Countries like Tunisia, in fact, appear to be more open and progressive than many of their European and SEM counterparts; plus, they present a general willingness to establish relations with people from different cultural backgrounds and European states, and have demonstrated a very progressive mindset when considering the role of women.

The question then is: how can we enhance relations between the two regions? From where do we start? In this last part of our paper, we want to provide a first answer.

Generally, we believe that the first step is to invest in education and in new generations that appear more willing to embrace diversity and engage with people from the other shore of the Mediterranean. In this regard, we also suggest more investment on social media and the key role they could play in the creation of communication channels and in the fight against prejudices. Within both societies, the role of women must be strengthened, above all in the political field. Although we start seeing some promising signs, they are not enough to consider our societies progressive. Furthermore, given the fact that most of the fear of others is due to external geopolitical factors, like the immigration crisis, we believe that SEM and European political leaders should cooperate to solve these issues and reduce the reasons for tensions between them. In connection to this, European countries which are willing to enhance cooperation with SEM countries, should start dialogues with those countries which already present a positive attitude toward multiculturalism and diversity. Starting the creation of common policies with them, may encourage other regions of the area to be more open to dialogue with European countries. Last but not least, we think that what emerges clearly from these researches is the need to promote universal values of non-discrimination, tolerance and dialogue within societies and promote a model of “inclusive citizenship”, which guarantees the expression of traditional cultures while protecting fundamental human rights and promote the common good of humanity.

**Bibliography**

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