

Youth Dynamism and Regional Exchange as a Priority for Egyptian Citizens

Dina AL KHAWAGA

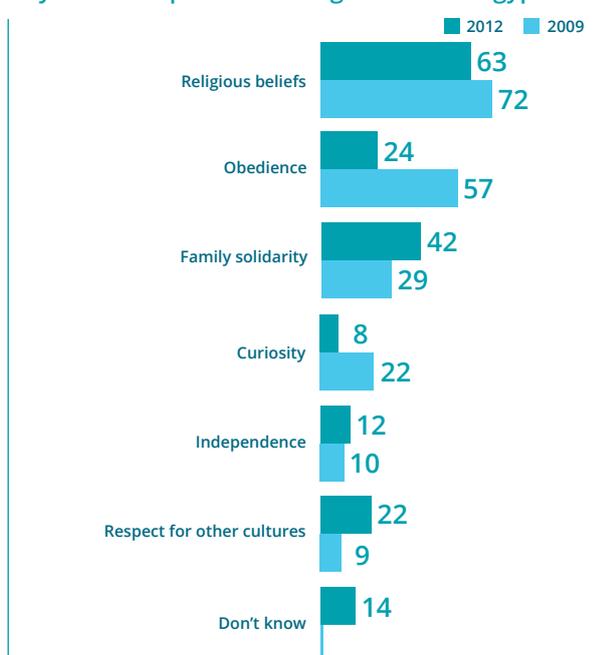
The timing of the latest Anna Lindh/Gallup polling was of upmost significance for Egypt, whose citizens were experiencing a particular moment of transition. Dina Al Khawaga exposes the interest that Egyptians show towards an enhanced cooperation in the Euro-Med area, as a signifier of dynamism and openness to the cultural diversity of the region. At the same time, the author highlights how people - exhausted by a prolonged climate of change - have reverted to values such as the family, in hope for stability.

The Anna Lindh/Gallup Poll conducted in 2012 among Egyptians about their perceptions of the Euro-Mediterranean space provides valuable data about the common representations concerning the national and regional issues of Europeans as near and distant others. The year 2012, after the advent of what has been called for ease or Euro-centrism 'Arab Spring', in reference to the spring of '1848 people', is particularly relevant as an in-between year, both in relation to time and to policy changes. It is a period which saw the first parliamentary and presidential elections, laying the basis – even if it was only in the rhetoric – for a new democratically and freely elected political regime. On another level, it was also a 'moderate' year compared to the preceding one which was more colourful, if not to say euphoric, with all the hopes and enthusiasm that it sparked, as opposed to the following year which was more pessimistic, blurred and marked by multiple conflicts.

2012 as an 'in-between year'

It is in this context that the citizen - which is the focus of our investigation - is found. As all the circumstances appear precarious, he prefers to hide in calm waters. This tendency is supported by the central emphasis on family solidarity (+12 points, compared to the 2009 Survey), (Chart 11.1). This retreat to the organic links, which can seem unexpected in the context of national and regional mobilisation, is symbolic of marking a distance from the immediate political scene. This interest in the family is therefore quite significant because it illustrates how any public space feels fluid and uncertain, polarised and fragile, if not corrupted by various internal and external levels of manipulation. One could not yet speak of environmental alarmism as the interviewed continue to find that their country occupies a central place in the Euro-Mediterranean region (+7 points than in 2009) and it continues to be a nice place to live in, even more than the rest of the southern and eastern Mediterranean (SEM) countries. It remains to be seen whether this voice is individual, representative of national or social trends. The general framework of the asked questions

Chart 11.1 — Key values to parents raising children in Egypt

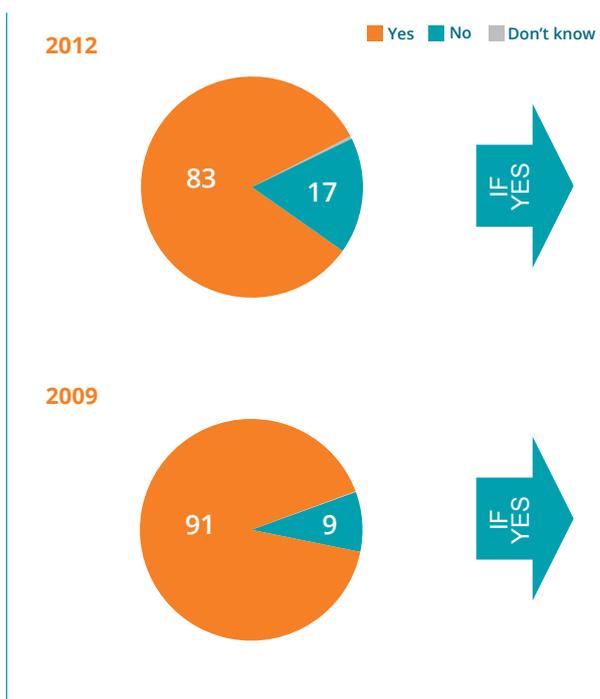


Survey Question: Assuming that we limit ourselves to six values only I'd like to know which one of these six would you say is most important when raising children? **Base:** % of all respondents; % of the sum of 'Most important' and 'Second most important' answers are shown (© Anna Lindh/Gallup Poll 2012).

addressed at the same time the two components of the interviewees' identity.

According to the answers provided by Egyptian respondents, the Euro-Med area appears benevolent, with interest in the future of the SEM countries, including Egypt. The answers gathered also reflect a net increase in professional exchanges, even though tourism continues to struggle in Egypt as everywhere else in North Africa during the last years. These types of exchanges are more concrete by nature, far from the mutual stereotypes or the enunciation of otherness (13 points more for professional exchanges and 3 points less for communication through the internet compared to the 2009 Anna Lindh/Gallup Survey), (Charts 11.2, 11.3).

Chart 11.2
Interaction of Egyptians with people
from European countries



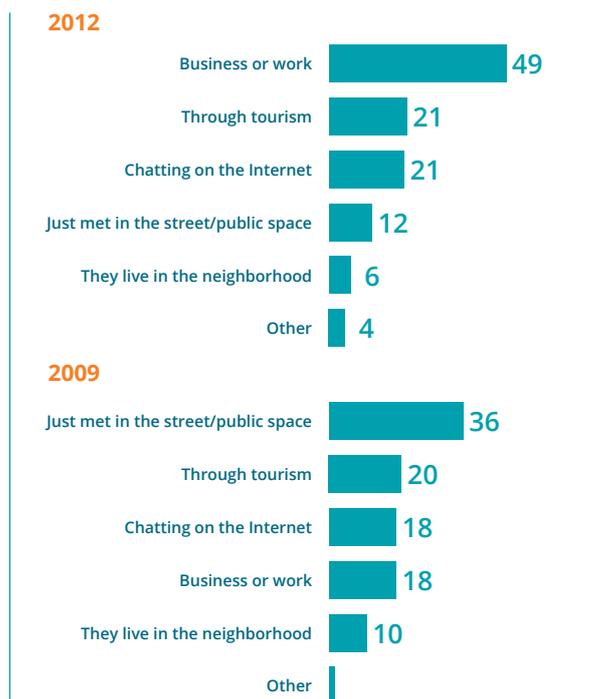
Survey Question: In the last 12 months have you personally talked to or met with any person (or persons) from European countries? **Base:** % of all respondents (© Anna Lindh/Gallup Poll 2012).

This backdrop, which illustrates the growing reciprocal interest of the peoples of the two shores of the Mediterranean, is reaffirmed by an additional series of answers on values. 17 additional points, in comparison with the previous 2009 Survey, are awarded by Egyptians to the tolerance of the European socialisation of their children (Chart 11.4). The constant worry of rejection or racism, which the Arab press denounces all day long, disappears and gives way to the expression of shared values. On the other hand, we can observe a society that found the meaning of politics and that is discovering the virtues of revolt and of change. The net drop in the valorisation of obedience as the central value of socialisation in the Egyptian and European families is a perfect illustration: 19 points less compared to 2009.

Exchanges with Europe as a gain for youth

It is also a society which wants to be practical and rational. The attention granted to the potential common objectives of the Euro-Mediterranean space, where youth dynamism and entrepreneurship are among the priority themes, would appear to affirm this trend to openness and exchanges among the Egyptian citizens, and does not reveal identity bitterness or political denunciation of the former colonisers. At the same time, an 'idealisation' of Europe is not in evidence. It is rather the voice of practical reason and hope to consolidate

Chart 11.3
Method of interaction for Egyptians



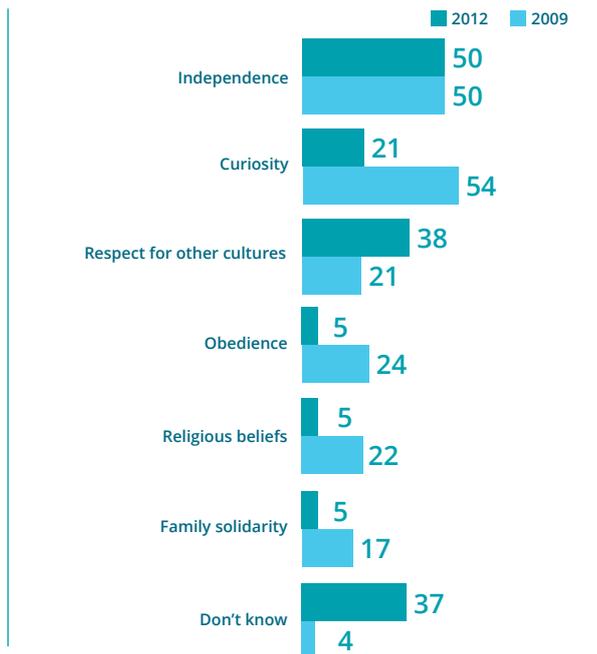
Survey Question: If yes, how did you meet or talk to that person? **Base:** % of those who talked to or met with persons from European countries (© Anna Lindh/Gallup Poll 2012).

the beneficial economic exchanges between both poles.

This positive and detached perception of identity or religious otherness is particularly pronounced through the replies regarding the interests of the interviewees to closely follow the European economic context (62% in 2012 compared to 54% in 2009), with 53% of those who lingered on the European culture and lifestyles and only 34% who appear interested in knowing information about the beliefs and religious practices. The Euro-Mediterranean area is first and foremost a space of economic exchange and for learning new skills necessary for future generations.

Due to the above mentioned areas of interest, Europe does not appear as a space which arouses the cultural or religious curiosity. This political realism and this serene outlook to the cultural and religious diversity that characterises the Euro-Mediterranean area is sustained in the responses concerning the potential benefits that Egypt could gain from this regional space. The ecological challenges come on top of the list, followed by dynamism for the new generations and the spirit of entrepreneurship, advancement of common interests related to tolerance, freedoms, the rule of law and gender equality. In other words, the classic themes of otherness come only after issues promoting interaction, innovation and openness to the world.

Chart 11.4 —
Key values to parents raising children in Europe according to Egyptians



Survey Question: Assuming that we limit ourselves to six values only I'd like to know which one of these six do you think is the most important to parents raising children in Europe.? And the second most important?
Base: % of all respondents, % of the sum of 'Most important' and 'Second most important' answers are shown (© Anna Lindh/Gallup Poll 2012).

An open and optimistic profile

The Survey results basically reflect Egyptian perceptions not limited by identity or religious dimensions, open to exchanges and particularly confident in their youth with its independence and capacity. The feeling of political and/or economic insecurity is timidly expressed through the focus on the family nucleus and modes of socialisation that accompany it. Through many of the responses given, the various actors within the Euro-Mediterranean region seem well-intentioned and interested in Egypt as a country, revealing quite similar challenges and hopes. This perception, ultimately guided by interest, is far from being a detail. Egypt is a country whose demographic composition is as follows: 32.3% of the population is between 0 and 14 years old; 18% are between 15 and 24 years old; 38.3% between 25 and 54 years old and only 6.6% are between 55 and 64 years old and finally 4.8% are older than 65.

It is an extremely young society, and relatively far from the foundations of legitimacy that supported the post-independence State. It is a society whose education, access to practical knowledge, labour and material and symbolic well-being seem to constitute its compass according to the responses collected. In this sense, the Survey provides elements of reflection that allow us

to go much further than the analysis of structured and formal policies. It is in this perspective that policy will be debated in the coming years and decades.

The displayed results are especially positive having in mind that they were gathered during the Muslim Brotherhood regime in Egypt, noting that the arrival of the so-called 'Islamists' to power did not affect the rational and logical outlook towards the Euro-Mediterranean space as an area of action and interaction. Several explanations are plausible in this regard. The arrival to power of the most important component of the political Islam comforted Egyptians in their relation to the religious factor and therefore to otherness; the advent of the revolts - throughout the Arab countries - fostered a sense of proximity and similarity to the peoples of Europe, who had emerged themselves from a long democratic transition with the Central and Eastern European countries; the year 2012 was an in-between year and maybe answers in 2014 would be different; or finally that consultations carried out with the lay people, and not with targeted officials, remain an inexhaustible source of optimism and complexity as the Survey analysed here shows.

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