

# Differences and Similarities in the Value Map

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Dalia Mogahed underlines the importance of shared values in building a common project around the Region. From shaping shared objectives to developing guidelines for the positive interaction between people, she illustrates how common values can form the foundation of a mapped political vision. At the same time, however, Mogahed stresses on the importance of not ignoring differences in values in order to clarify challenges to face as well as opportunities for cross-cultural learning and understanding the unique assets of different communities.

In the first comprehensive survey of its kind, the Anna Lindh Foundation, in partnership with Gallup, measured the attitudes of residents of both European and southern and eastern Mediterranean countries about a plethora of issues, including personal values. If the aim of the partner organisations is to explore the viability of a new union of Mediterranean countries, why is a study of public opinion regarding values important? Is it not enough to explore strategic economic and geo-political advantages of such a union?

There are in fact several reasons which make the study of a society's values key to assessing the viability of a union of states. Firstly, values help predict priorities. Any cooperative entity will begin with shared goals and these in turn will be driven by what the partners deem important. An account of each communities' values, and a recognition of both commonalities and differences, informs the process of creating shared objectives for the Union.

Secondly, values reveal what societies see as their greatest assets, what each hope to protect and from which each draws strength. This helps guide interaction where by each group of countries understands the likely reaction the other may have to proposed programs and initiatives that brush up against these cherished principles. Finally, a study of communities' values helps chart out areas of cross learning opportunities. One group of countries may value a set of norms that the other group enjoys with little effort. These areas of mutual exchange can strengthen a union's sense of cohesiveness and benefit to member states. For these reasons, there is a great deal of value in not only commonalities, but differences.

## Commonalities in Mediterranean Values

Common values present a foundation to work from, and build upon. Differences however present the challenge of appreciating diversity, but also the opportunity to learn and perhaps more deeply understand one's own community. It is

also where societies can complement each other's strengths creating stronger ties since duplication often means one's partner is unnecessary.

The most prominent area of commonality between the European and the countries on the southern and eastern shores of the Mediterranean is 'family solidarity' (Chart 5.1). Both groups of countries rate this as either the most or second most important value to pass on to their children. A common appreciation for the importance of family is a strong foundation for cooperation for several reasons. Firstly, 'family solidarity' is likely related to raising healthy children, who represent the future of any community. A shared emphasis on children and their well being may present the strongest foundation for creating cooperative institutions.

Secondly, the family, perhaps in contrast to economic prowess, is an area of the most basic shared humanity. It is an area that no society can claim superiority. Finally, the importance of family is a central teaching of Islam. While religion is not important to most European respondents, and is most important to residents in the countries on the southern and eastern shores of the Mediterranean, it is noteworthy that this celebrated value of Islam is shared with Europeans helping to bridge the gap between the faithful and the secular.

Other areas of commonality are actually the lower value placed on 'curiosity', 'independence' and 'obedience' by both groups of countries. It is interesting to note that a minority in both country groups only value all both individualistic values such as 'curiosity' and 'independence' and their approximate opposite, a value of communal conformity, such as 'obedience'. This helps to dispel the notion that the West values individuality, while the East values conformity. In fact, it is worth noting that European country respondents directly counter this notion by valuing 'family solidarity' highest, a value which some may regard as tempering extreme individuality.

## Differences in the Value of Religion

The most pronounced difference in values between European countries and those on the southern and eastern shores of the Mediterranean is the importance placed on faith. A majority of residents of countries in the South East Mediterranean regard religion as the single most or second most important value to pass on to their children, more so than any other studied value. Other Gallup research shows that clear majorities in on the southern and eastern shores of the Mediterranean countries, including Turkey, say religion is an important part of their daily life and cite religious values as their society's greatest asset (Esposito and Mogahed - Gallup, 2008).

In sharp contrast, Europeans place religion as the least important value to pass on to their children of any of those presented. This striking difference likely presents the greatest challenge facing this group of countries. If one group regards religion as central, while the other regards it as unimportant or even harmful, the relationship is at risk for misunderstandings and mutual offense.

It will be important to proactively recognize this challenge and work to address it early on. Since Europeans value respect for different cultures, leaders should leverage this value to help them understand the importance residents in the countries on the southern and eastern shores of the Mediterranean place on religion even if it is very different from the dominant European point of view.

At the same time, residents in the countries on the southern and eastern shores of the Mediterranean should understand that while Europeans may not value religion per se, they do value some of the central teachings of religions, most notably 'family solidarity'. As has been famously quoted, a prominent Egyptian Muslim scholar of the 19th century said upon visiting France, "In the West I found Islam and no Muslims. In the East I found Muslims and no Islam," referring to his perception that the West had more successfully implemented the values of Islam than his home society (Noakes, 1991).

The other major difference is the value placed on respect for other cultures. This value is important to Europeans while most residents in the countries on the southern and eastern shores of the Mediterranean place less value on it. It is worth noting that European countries enjoy more culturally diverse societies than do most of the countries southern and eastern shores of the Mediterranean.

Though there are Europeans in the countries on the southern and eastern shores of the Mediterranean, these are often not well integrated and may live in isolated expatriate communities, rarely interacting with locals. In contrast, most immigrants in European countries live in mixed communities (Coexist Index, Gallup, 2009). Though there is a great deal of diversity in the countries southern and eastern shores of the Mediterranean, especially Lebanon, it is more religiously rather than culturally based diversity.

In conclusion, European countries and those on the southern and eastern shores of the Mediterranean group countries have a foundation of common values on which to build. At the same time, there are some important differences between the two groups, which present both challenges, and opportunities for the fledgling cooperative.

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## Albania - Research Network on Religion

With the aim of developing a common research project focused on the comprehension of religious principles, the 'Women and Religion' initiative brought together female representatives from three belief groups in Albania: Muslims, Catholics and Orthodox Christians. Organised over six months by the Forum of the Alliance of Civilisations, Head of Anna Lindh Network in Albania, the participants focused attention on shared areas of importance for their faith communities, identifying 'understanding' and 'self-control' as leading values of a religious woman, despite the different doctrines on which practice is based. The representatives also concluded that there is a special need to recognise and foster women's religious literacy and that their beliefs can play a central role in promoting an appreciation of other cultures, other religions, and fostering harmony among them. One of the major outcomes of the initiative was the creation and strengthening of a network between women dedicated to promoting wider discussion on the role of faith in cross-cultural understanding.

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