

Respect for Cultural Diversity on the Basis of Ethical Standards

Antoine MESSARRA

Diversity cannot be understood as a factor of wealth and prosperity, unless it is associated with a humanistic culture that adopts the respect for human rights. Antoine Messarra argues that raising awareness of the diversity across our communities and Mediterranean region should be complemented by the implications of its management within each society. From this perspective, the author traces a roadmap based on the concepts of normativity, religious diversity, and immunisation against the exploitation of fear and security.

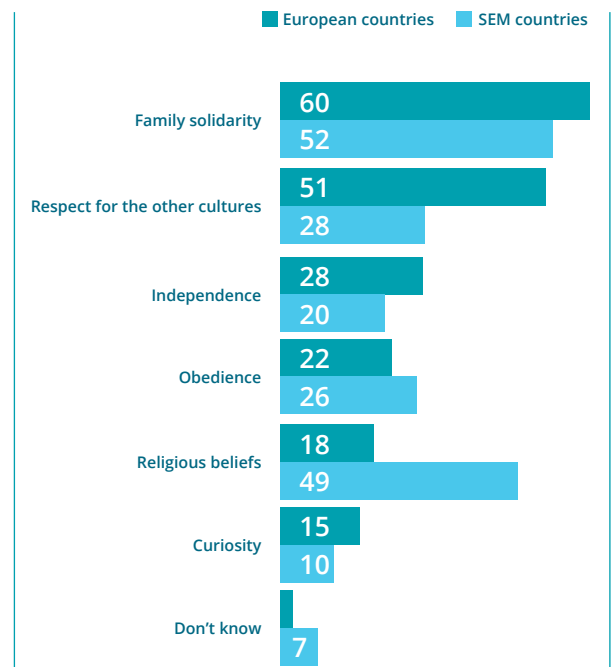
The best sample survey, with the most developed questionnaire requires multiple interpretations that sometimes go beyond the interpretation of numerical results and the crossing of data. In the second Anna Lindh/Gallup Poll on intercultural trends in the Euro-Mediterranean area (2012), there are complex notions of diversity, civic engagement, social connection and commitment to the values of friendship and democracy. In a world ravaged by the tyranny of the opinion, what people say and declare to think is not necessarily indicative of a thought, an actual behavior and a full awareness of a problem. Think, from the Latin etymology (*pensare*) is ponder, think, judge, with the highest level of clarity. The values of diversity and harmony between freedom and public order are deployed today in a world ruled by fear, fear of safety, security blackmail and manipulation of fear in various ways in the Euro –Mediterranean area.

Pluralism and Diversity, from the perspective of perception and management

The requirement of respect for cultural diversity reached a high and almost equal score for the entire Euro-Mediterranean area (84% in European countries and 82% in SEM countries). It is significant that this score is strongly associated with the requirement of freedom and rule of law (respectively: 75% and 79%). Indeed, a collective and several centuries long heritage of conviviality can be disrupted if fundamental rights are violated. This entails the avoidance of a purely culturalist approach to cultural and religious pluralism. The legal dimension of diversity shall include religious freedom, the exercise of worship, religious education, the management of cultural spaces. American, European, African and Arab constitutional jurisprudence is explicit on these issues to reconcile the practice of faith with the requirements of religious freedom and public order. It is also significant that family solidarity reaches a priority score of 60% in European countries and 52% in the southern and eastern Mediterranean region, which indicates the need to revitalise the social link, which is what makes a society. The requirement of 'respect for other cultures

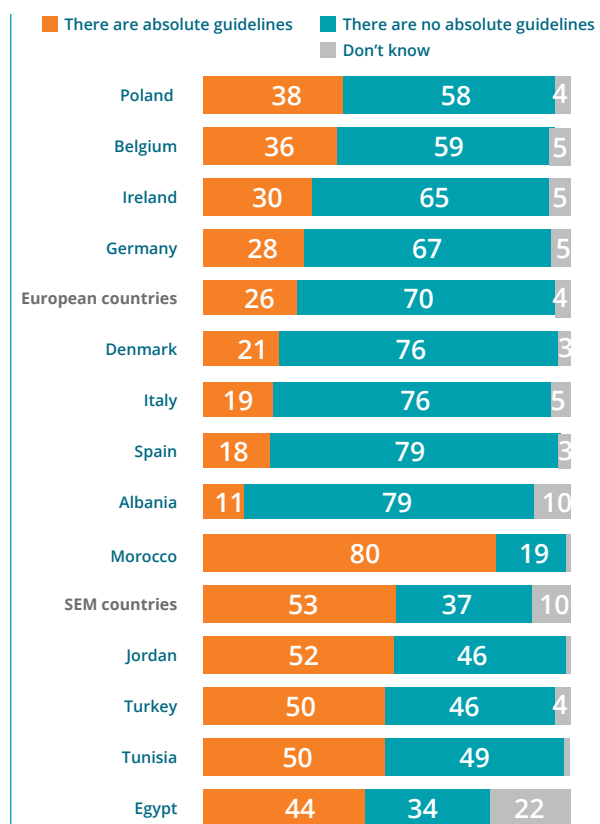
in the transmission of values to future generations' reached a higher score in Europe (51%) than in SEM (28%), which is explained by a tendency to closure on the self in the latter area. Religious beliefs is another element of differentiation between Europe and the SEM countries with only 18% of Europeans compared to 49% of the southern and eastern Mediterranean considering this a priority (reference to Chart 4.1).

Chart 4.1 Most important values to respondents when bringing up their children



Survey Question: In bringing up their children, parents in different societies may place different emphasis on different values. Assuming that we limit ourselves to six values only I'd like to know which one of the following six would you say is most important when raising children? And the second most important? **Base:** % of all respondents, of sum of 'Most important' and 'Second most important' by regions (© Anna Lindh / Gallup Poll 2012).

Chart 4.2
Opinion on the existence of absolute guidelines



Survey Question: Some people believe that there are absolute guidelines to what is good and bad, and what is truth. Others say that there are no absolute guidelines, things are relative and what we consider to be good or bad depends on the circumstances. What is your opinion?
Base: % of all respondents by country (© Anna Lindh/Gallup Poll 2012).

Further differentiation is found about the belief in the existence of universal norms governing human and social relationships and social structures. Certainly, this kind of question is unambiguous, because universality and relativity are not opposed, but consequential having the universality of principles to cope with the relativity of implementing rules. For example, the universal principle of the separation of powers in democracy is absolute, otherwise the system becomes tyrannical, but the modality of application of the principle are multiple.

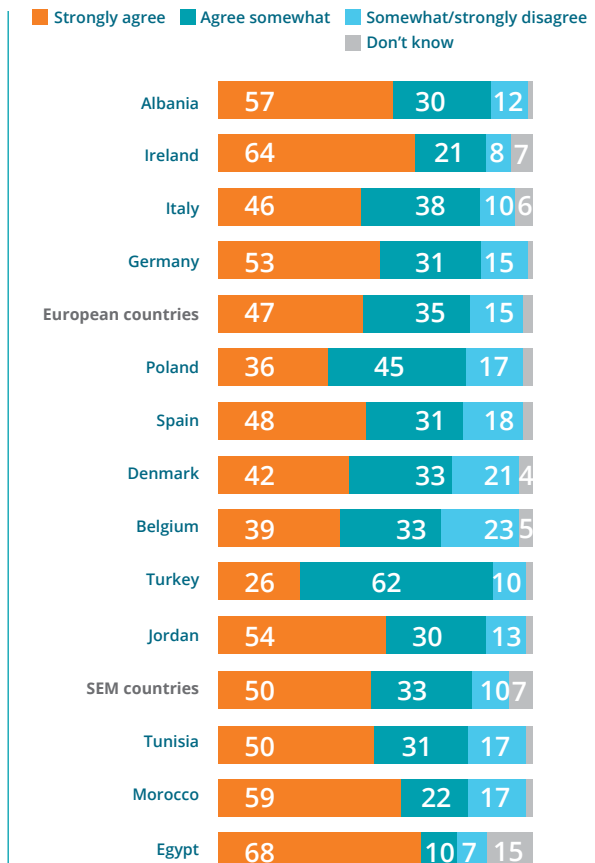
What does the bias on the issue of universality between European countries (only 26%) and southern and eastern Mediterranean countries (53%) signify? Is the contribution of humanity, the great philosophers, international conventions on human rights, international jurisprudence ignored, forgotten, denied under the eventual pretext of 'diversity' and 'respect of diversity'? Here we come to the heart of the problem of diversity and we need stop there (Chart 4.2), and to explore the related principles, rules, and standards.

What is different, from the Latin *diversus*, opposite, has several faces, several appearances. It is heterogeneous, disparate, multiple, mediocre, incoherent, in opposition... When does diversity become variety, richness, harmony? When you discover through diversity complementarity, upper and profound unity that ensures the harmony of the whole. In a tree, no-leaf is completely similar to another, by the size, shape, colour... What gives unity and harmony to this diversity, which appears at first sight chaotic, is the trunk that supports the tree, the sap that rises in the branches, soil, sun and other elements that feed together differently the whole tree. When we teach diversity, only to raise awareness about diversity without glimpsing through it that which gathers and unites, we help to understand certain religious and cultural phenomena but we do not bring people closer together. In the research and explanation of any form of diversity and of any unity, the sentence of Terence (Carthage, v. 190-159 av. J.-C.) must constantly inspire the work: 'I am a man, and nothing human is foreign to me' (*Homo sum: humani nil a me alienum puto*).

Between universal norms and diversity

The value of obedience, that reached a low score of 22% for Europeans and 26% for SEM, raises a concern. At least, we may arise many questions about the diversity of understanding of this concept through the translation of the questionnaire in several languages. Obedience can be interpreted as submission, but also as the respect of the rule, the norm and public order. The code, the norms, the benchmarks are a condition of the social link, of living together, of diversity as experienced and assumed, whether you are a believer, atheist, agnostic. Humanity, especially since the Enlightenment, the French Revolution, the international charters of human rights, the international constitutional jurisprudence has developed a set of standards that are rather the fruit of experience, the requirements for living together in an organised society. We speak boldly about diversity, custom, specificity, dialogue, recognition of differences and other considerations in fashion. We should refer to practices that arise, such as in France where policy decisions are expected to manage diversity: the case of women burqa (full-face veil), of female circumcision for religious or customary considerations, surrogate mothers, the homosexual unions ... Are we in the realm of the all permitted, liberalisation without limitation, anarchy, Nihilism, the denial of the very social reality, of what makes society? When respondents answer that the peoples of different cultures should have the same rights and opportunities to participate in public life, with a score of 90% in Europe and 84% in SEM, does this contradict the low score on the universal principles? Can we believe in the existence of universal and shared legal rules without believing in the religious, moral and ethical basis of these rules? Respondents with realism

Chart 4.3 Political, cultural and religious diversity as a basis for social prosperity



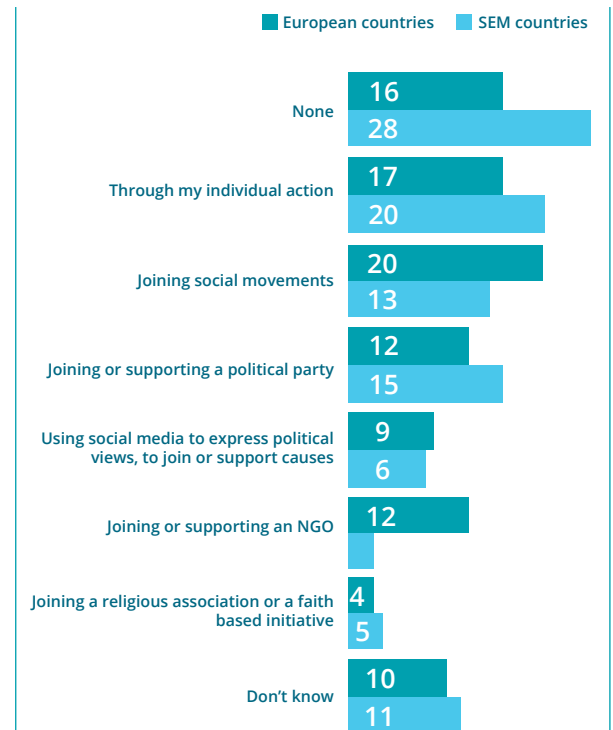
Survey Question: Could you please tell me, how much do you agree or disagree with the following statement: 'Cultural and religious diversity is important for the prosperity of your society'? **Base:** % of all respondents by country (© Anna Lindh/Gallup Poll 2012).

and while considering that cultural and religious diversity is a factor of stability apprehend that diversity that could be a threat to social stability, with 48% in Europe and 46% for SEM. (Chart 4.3) Unlike a dominant perception of young people without a compass, without reference, but basically thirsty for meaning, they become easy prey to clever manipulators and deceivers that provide the loan to think and eat. What is being done, as a family, in schools, universities and in the Euro-Mediterranean area, to cultivate critical thinking, the spirit of freedom, but freedom governed by law and social cohesion, to say nothing about morality or spirituality that may provoke the challenge or surprise. We are accustomed to road traffic. But everything else? The speed of gradient of this descent into the hell of obscurantism, oratorical silences, cautions of the analysis and white writing have their first source in family education, school, university, media that have apprehended too much the tradition to rush unreservedly in a wild relativism. It is customary in university education and in prestigious universities in the world, to seek, analyze, criticize, to show intellectualism and learning. The time has come to

have the audacity to think about questions of meaning, reference and purpose. When what was once called the 'Humanities' recede in school and university education, it is the ready-made intellectual that spreads the tyranny of opinion, intellectual and field terrorism. This is the trivialization of crime, of the attacks and the victims. It is the loss of the compass and landmarks that we live painfully. This is the age of manipulators who know how to fill the emptiness left by the bureaucrats of knowledge.

Democracy means primarily for respondents freedom in Europe and SEM, with a score of 46% and 49%. However, it is surprising that the rule of law is not seen as a priority, with a score of only 10% in Europe and 9% in the SEM. Also a decline is sensed in civic engagement. Joining social movements, political parties and support associations achieved an average total score 57% in Europe and 41% SEM (Chart 4.4). As for differentiation according to gender is not significant. The survey shows the increasing role of women in society over the last five years and the growing perception of that role, especially in SEM (63% for current role and 66% for that role in 5 years from now).

Chart 4.4 Most efficient ways of solving problems in one's society



Survey Question: How do you think you could most efficiently contribute to solving the problems in your country? **Base:** % of all respondents by regions (© Anna Lindh/Gallup Poll 2012).

Universal principles of human rights

We will focus on three issues that merit action in light of the Survey results and of the environment that explains the results. These are problems of normativity, religious diversity, and immunisation against the exploitation of fear and security.

Normativity: Diversity cannot be understood as a factor of wealth, harmony and prosperity unless it is associated with a humanistic culture that recognises and adopts the universal principles of human rights. The problem of universality and relativity deserves in the future more attention and to be understood through concrete practical cases.

Religious diversity beyond diversity: For the future there is a wide route to help religions find their soul ('faith' problem), to manage the public space where religion is expressed in the respect of liberties and public order (problem of 'law'), and to understand politics both as a game of power and management of general interest ('political' problem). Christianity is undergoing today a de-christianisation without reference in the name of a secularism often misunderstood. Islam, for historical reasons, has not thought enough about the practices of faith in the common public and shared space. Judaism must be distinguished from his Zionist ideology. Faith, law, politics, are not distinct in the mental structures, facing a popular academic trend that spreads confusion among atheists, believers, unbelievers, clerical, anticlerical, secularist intellectuals and citizens, the clash of civilizations will be around the corner with a wild and unbridled manipulation of the sacred.

Fear, safety and manipulation: There is the recognition and respect for differences, but there is also - in political mobilisation - a strong prosperous market, that of the ideology of difference. What to do to better immunise against the ideologies of difference? The obsession with security, as a prerequisite for national and interstate peace has setbacks. You have to study and renounce techniques of manipulation, exploitation and safety blackmail and engage in opposition to manipulation techniques. How the conflict becomes controversial? The debate is often falsely about identity. The identity skin is often an exploited cover. We have to seek common space just to move forward on intercultural dialogue. Certainly we cannot detect intentions, but we can renounce the manifestations of bad faith.

Populations of so-called consolidated democracies are afraid. Afraid for their well-being, security and peace in everyday life, their democratic achievements, their rights to social benefits, the leisure and vacations. A state and interstate grouping terrorism manipulate fear and the lack of courage and of democratic involvement

of people and of wealthy governments to expand and make of their neighboring states satellites and to generate overcautious democracies. Behind terrorism, that is the visible front, there is the blackmail to which more and more timid and frightened democracies submit to. The universality of human rights is threatened today despite all the achievements of civilization and globalization of justice and its normative jurisprudence, and this is mainly because of the extension of fanaticism, the ongoing Arab-Israeli conflict, the identity folds of the spread of terrorism and cultural relativism propagated by supermarket values.

It is the academic and social actors' task to focus more on the techniques of manipulation by governments and tyrannical interstate groups, authorities and contractors of security so that dialogue and mediation become more perceptive, lucid, focused and, therefore, more operational. To save the achievements of civilization requires courage. Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn in his commencement address delivered at Harvard University in 1978 criticizes the Western world deploring its moral collapse, excessive industrialization, the mercantile bazaar, especially the regression of courage. After the Second World War Albert Camus said so presciently 'Each generation doubtless feels doomed to remake the world. Mine yet knows it will not do it. But its task is perhaps greater. It is to prevent the world from coming undone.' (Camus, 1957)

Antoine MESSARRA is Professor at the Lebanese University and Saint-Joseph University, and member of the Advisory Council of the Anna Lindh Foundation.