

Tackling radicalisation through dialogue

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Acknowledging the pressures radicalisation imposes on multi-cultural societies and the relevance of engaging people into an anti-radicalisation strategy, Alpaslan Özerdem analyses people's perceptions of the efficiency of dialogue measures to deal with such threats. The author concludes that although there is a general agreement on the efficiency of the measures suggested by the Survey, there is a need to tailor-make these measures to fit the specific realities, conditions and perceptions of communities directly affected by radicalisation.

Living together in multi-cultural environments is a major challenge faced by many societies across the world. The 13 countries included in the Anna Lindh/Ipsos Survey are not an exception in this regard. In such environments, the horizontal trust relations between different community groups and the vertical trust relations between those communities and the state are often quite fragile and can be easily damaged by threats and acts of radicalisation, extremism and terrorism. Therefore, the radicalisation of youth and their participation in violent extremism is not only a concern for politicians, policymakers and security apparatuses, but for all segments of society. Radicalisation poses a serious challenge and direct risk for people's wellbeing, societal trust and community cohesion.

To tackle the challenge of radicalisation, a number of approaches and tools based on dialogue, exchange, education and training programmes have been developed and applied by policymakers and practitioners with varying degrees of success in terms of responding to a short- to long-term perspective. With this in mind, the results of the Anna Lindh/Ipsos Survey provides us with an excellent insight into the way such programmes are perceived by ordinary people who live in multi-cultural environments. Their understanding and perception is important as ultimately the success of the programmes will depend on whether community members will take ownership of these measures. If this is not the case, such interventions will remain as external, top-down initiatives with little real impact on the ground.

In the Anna Lindh/Ipsos Survey, respondents were presented with seven dialogue measures to prevent and deal with conflict and radicalisation; for each measure, respondents were asked whether they thought it would be an efficient measure or not. The following seven measures were included in the Survey: (1) Education and youth programmes to foster youth-led dialogue

initiatives; (2) Support of youth participation in public life; (3) Exchange programmes involving people across the Mediterranean; (4) Cultural and artistic initiatives; (5) Interreligious dialogue; (6) Trainings in diversity management and radicalisation prevention; and (7) Media training for cross-cultural reporting.

Measures to prevent and deal with conflict and radicalisation

The first observation that can be made from the Survey is that SEM countries appear to show a higher level of belief in the value and use of the different measures listed in the Survey (as can be seen from the higher percentages of 'very efficient' responses). On the other hand, looking at the sum of 'very efficient' and 'somewhat efficient' responses, both regions show a more similar level of belief in the value and use of the different measures in preventing and dealing with conflict and radicalisation. This first observation might be the result of a greater level of exposure to radicalisation in SEM countries than in the European countries included in this Survey, but overall and in line with the second observation, it can be concluded that the type of measures proposed in the Survey receive a positive evaluation from respondents in both regions.

In SEM countries, there is a clear desire for supporting youth in public life and for developing specific education and youth programmes to foster youth-led dialogue initiatives. These two measures receive the highest 'very efficient' ratings in SEM countries (64% and 63% respectively), which are characterised by a high percentage of young people in the population ('youth bulge') and where youth radicalisation is of a greater concern than in European countries. Nonetheless, in the European countries, the two measures focusing on young people rank highest (44% 'very efficient' responses for education and youth programmes and 41% for support of youth participation); as such, it can be

Chart 4.1

Efficiency of dialogue: youth-focussed actions and exchange programmes



concluded that respondents in both regions would like to see the youth as the primary target group of measures to prevent and deal with conflict and radicalisation.

Some of the results may also be an indicator of specific needs in each region, such as differences in the need for independent/objective media reporting. In European countries, media training for cross-cultural reporting is ranked lowest of all the measures included in the Survey (30% 'very efficient' responses), while in SEM countries, 54% of respondents answered that this would be a very efficient measure. It is also important to note that there seems to be less confidence in inter-religious dialogue programmes in Europe, where 30% of respondents think this measure would be 'not efficient' or 'not at all efficient', while this percentage is just 21% in SEM countries. Although the difference is not very large, it could be an interesting indicator to analyse further in light of other survey results with respect to the general environment of intercultural dialogue in Europe.

Variation across countries

Moving from the more general Survey findings to perceptions of respondents on the efficiency of the measures to prevent and deal with conflict and radicalisation in a national context, the Anna Lindh/Ipsos Survey also provides a set of interesting results; in the following paragraphs, the analysis focuses on the sum of 'very efficient' and 'somewhat efficient' responses. Starting with the measures of (1) education and youth programmes to foster youth-led dialogue initiatives, (2) support of youth participation in public life,

and (3) exchange programmes involving people across the Mediterranean, there does not seem to be a clear tendency for rating this type of programmes as either high or low across SEM and European countries, as all three measures receive both high and low ratings from the countries in both regions.

Algeria and Tunisia, among the SEM countries, and Italy and Croatia, among the European countries, seem to be the most enthusiastic about youth-focussed actions and exchange programmes. However, it is also important to note that Israel and Palestine score lower than other SEM countries, while Poland and France score lower than the European average. The recent terrorist attacks in France may be considered as a possible reason for this score, but a similar reasoning cannot be made for Poland (Chart 4.1). Finally, the overall conclusions for these three types of programmes are that the lowest ratings for all of the three programmes is in the mid-60s, and this is an overall positive indicator for how such programmes are perceived by ordinary people across all countries included in the Survey.

As it was the case for the previous three types of programmes, Poland and France score lower than other European countries on the four remaining measures, while Tunisia, Algeria, Italy and Croatia continue to have the highest ratings. Respondents in Israel consider cultural and artistic initiatives more beneficial than respondents in Palestine, but both countries scored the same for inter-religious dialogue. It is also interesting to note that the Netherlands, which is traditionally known

for its openness to different cultures, scores only just under or above the European average for most of the programmes concerned. Finland seems to score differently on the types of programmes with a high level of enthusiasm for diversity management training (79%) and inter-religious dialogue (78%), while the rating of cultural and artistic initiatives was much lower (61%).

Support for dialogue measures across all layers of society

With the age factor in mind and looking at the sum of 'very efficient' and 'somewhat efficient' responses, it can be concluded that there is not much difference between the age groups in both European and SEM countries across all dialogue measures, not even for the measures focusing on young people (education and youth programmes to foster youth-led dialogue initiatives, and support of youth participation in public life). For both of these measures, the older the respondents were in Europe, the more likely they were to think that these measures would be 'very efficient', while this level of belief in the value and use of the measures was more evenly distributed across age groups in SEM countries (Chart 4.2).

While the age factor does not seem to play a role, someone's level of interest in news and information from the other region does make a difference. Although SEM respondents score the measures higher at all levels of interest, the margins are much narrower between the country groups at the 'high' level of interest and much wider at the 'low' level of interest. For example, among European respondents with a 'high' interest in news

and information from SEM countries, 48% think that media training programmes are 'very efficient'; among SEM respondents with a 'high' interest in news and information from European countries, this percentage is 57% – a difference of 9 points. In the 'low' level interest group, however, respondents in SEM countries are more than twice as likely than those in European countries to think that media training programmes are 'very efficient' (54% vs. 21% respectively). In Europe, someone's level of interest plays an important role in shaping their belief in the value and use of the different measures, while in SEM countries, the scores are very similar, regardless of someone's level of interest in news and information from European countries.

When it comes to individuals' level of tolerance towards people from a different cultural background (to assess respondents' level of tolerance, a measure was created combining responses to the questions of whether respondents would mind having a person from a different cultural background as a work colleague or as neighbour, that their children were to go to school with children from a different cultural background or that a close relative would marry someone from a different cultural background), respondents in SEM countries with a high level of tolerance have a much stronger belief in the efficiency of the different dialogue measures than respondents in European countries with a similar level of tolerance. For example, this group's ratings in the SEM countries is 67% for exchange programmes and 63% for inter-religious dialogue programmes, while their ratings in European countries was 39% and 36% respectively. Even for respondents in the 'low' category of level of tolerance, the ratings are higher in SEM countries than

Chart 4.2
Efficiency of dialogue: results by age group

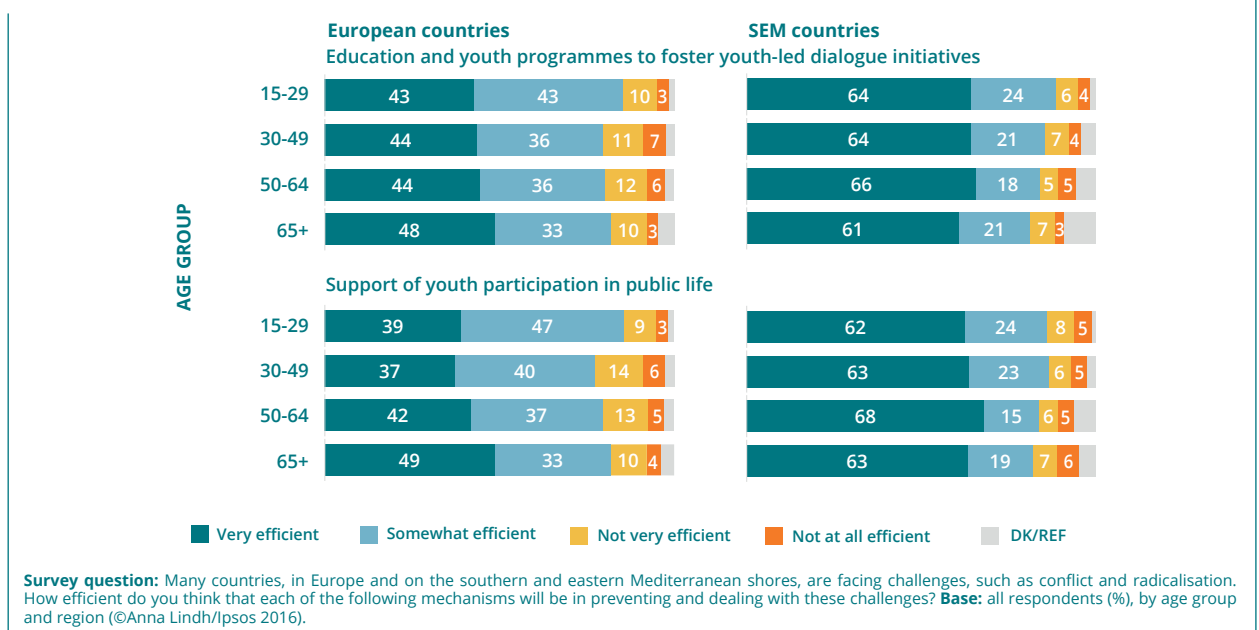
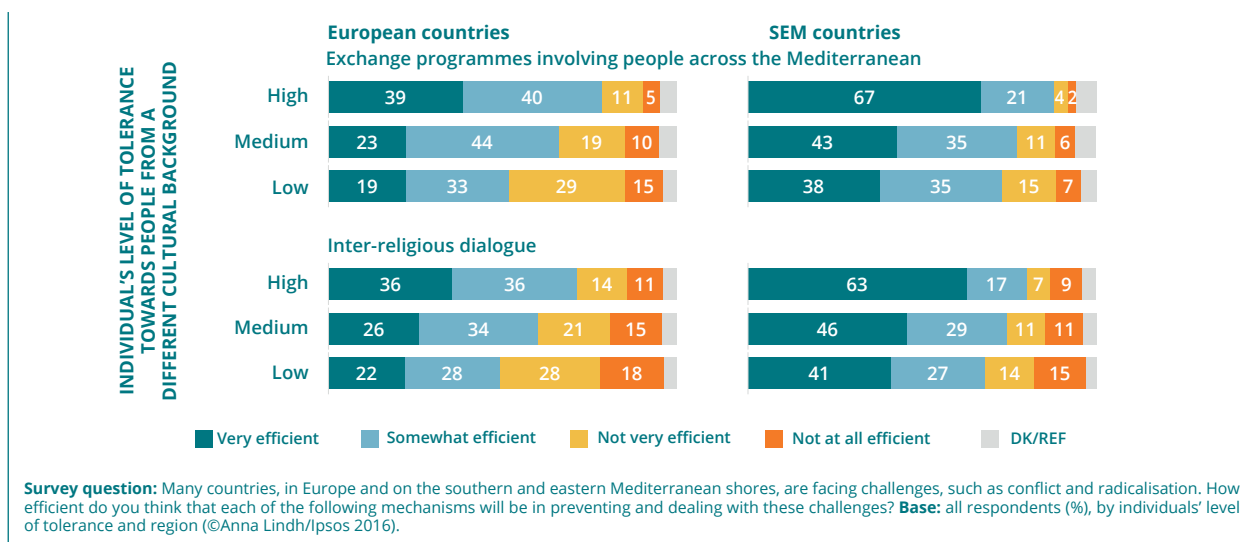


Chart 4.3
Efficiency of dialogue: results by individuals' level of tolerance



in European countries. Interestingly, for those with 'medium' or 'low' levels of tolerance in SEM countries, the belief in the efficiency of these programmes is still high (e.g. 38% 'very efficient' responses for exchange programmes and 41% for inter-religious dialogue). In contrast, in the European countries, between 33% and 47% of respondents with a 'low' level of tolerance scored the different measures 'not very efficient' or 'not at all efficient' in terms of preventing and dealing with conflict and radicalisation (Chart 4.3).

Need to tailor-make initiatives

To conclude, respondents' perceptions about the effectiveness of various anti-radicalisation programmes are positive in both regions, but respondents in SEM countries tended to be somewhat more positive about their value in dealing with conflict and radicalisation. There are also important conclusions to be drawn from the Anna Lindh/Ipsos Survey in terms of the specific type of measures to be implemented. In both regions, the two measures focusing on young people ranked highest, but it was noted, for example, that in the European countries, media training for cross-cultural reporting ranked lowest, while in SEM countries trainings in diversity management and radicalisation prevention was in last position.

However, it is also important to note the variations across the countries within each region that make drawing general conclusions at the overall regional level difficult. For example, Finnish respondents tended to be positive about most measures, while their rating of cultural and artistic initiatives was much lower; the latter measure was scored high by respondents in Jordan, who in turn believe less in the value of exchange programmes. Moreover, there are also differences within each community that need to be considered.

Although perceptions about the effectiveness of anti-radicalisation measures are positive across most groups in society, in the European countries, in the group with a 'low' level of tolerance towards people from a different cultural background, between a third and half of respondents did not believe in the measures' efficiency in preventing and dealing with conflict and radicalisation. Although the Anna Lindh/Ipsos Survey suggests that there is significant value in undertaking the type of anti-radicalisation measures identified in the Survey, in both SEM and European countries, these measures will need to be tailor-made to the specific realities, conditions and perceptions of communities directly affected by radicalisation.

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