

Muslim Brotherhood's Lobby in Europe: Reality and Benefits



Introduction:

The Muslim Brotherhood in Europe has exceeded beyond the issue of expansion and imposing presence. Presently, it has reached the stage of forming pressure groups whose mission is to influence official European policies and gain support and funding for its suspicious activities.

While this is happening under the pretext of “humanitarian action, combating extremism and supporting the integration process”, the group is in fact exploiting the climate of openness, freedom, democratic values and slogans of diversity on the one hand, the failure of European circles to differentiate between Islam as a religion and political Islam as an ideology on the other.

In this paper, we try to highlight the advocacy run by the Muslim Brotherhood in Europe, beginning by describing the nature of the Brotherhood’s presence. Then, identifying the most prominent tools of the group in exerting pressure and influencing EU institutions, while explaining its objectives and the methods used in this. To the manifestations of the Muslim Brotherhood’s penetration into European decision-making institutions and the documented evidence of the financial support obtained by sub-organizations from the EU and its institutions.

It remains to point out the fact that researching the European branch of the Muslim Brotherhood networks is a very difficult task due to the complex precautionary measures that the group follows in order to obliterate its movements and sources of funding, which sometimes reach disavowing the Muslim Brotherhood’s themselves - entities and individuals - from belonging to the group!

The nature of the Muslim Brotherhood's presence in Europe

In contrast to the rigid hierarchy that characterizes the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, Syria and other countries, the European organization takes a form that can be described as “jelly.” There is no declared and known structure for the group there, but rather it is made up of three tendencies united by a commitment to the group’s literature and goals, with different tasks and practices:

1. Official members of the Muslim Brotherhood in its various regional branches, such as Ibrahim Munir, Ali Sadr al-Din al-Bayanouni and others. They focus primarily on their local communities and events in their countries of origin, benefiting from the climate of freedom and democracy in Europe.

2. Active cadres in the organizations and associations established by the Muslim Brotherhood in Europe, such as the „Council of Muslims in Europe“ (formerly FIOE), „International Islamic Relief Organization“ (IRW) and the „Forum of European Muslim Student and Youth Organizations“ (FEMYSO). Members of these organizations often deny their ties to the Muslim Brotherhood, which makes the assessment of its influence and power a thorny issue for European governments.

3. Islamists close to the Muslim Brotherhood ideology, such as the members of the “Islamic Group” founded by Abu Al-Ala Mawdudi in the Indian subcontinent and the followers of the “Sururiyya” school, a mix of Salafi and Muslim Brotherhood ideology. The most prominent example is Tunisian Mohamed Ali Harrach, founder of “Islam TV” in Britain. Although there are internal differences between these currents and the Brotherhood, they are difference over crust, not doctrinal differences.

This pragmatism, or flexibility, has enabled the Muslim Brotherhood to maintain its presence in various political, social and legal environments, hostile sometimes.

The Muslim Brotherhood lobby in Europe

Lobby is a political term meaning a pressure group. The origin of the word is based on the reception hall in a hotel. As a term, the lobby can be defined as visible or hidden organized groups that seek to influence government decisions, legal legislation and elections, but do not plan to exercise official government influence, some of which work within their country and others that work for their country's interest in countries of global importance. Lobbying may be made up of money holders who influence public policy. The press and the media have a crucial role in the activity of their actors.

During the more than seven decades of its presence in Europe, the Muslim Brotherhood has created a network of organizations and associations that appear outwardly independent, but secretly support the group's agendas. Over time, political Islam organizations, especially those affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood, monopolized the representation of Muslim communities in European countries. Consequently, European governments and institutions became obligated to cooperate with these organizations, and in many cases, participated in supporting them and enhancing their presence, within the framework of values of freedom of belief and peaceful coexistence.

While the Muslim Brotherhood relied on Islamic institutions and associations as centers for spreading ideas and recruiting new members, exploiting them as tools for influence and political propaganda to mobilize Islamic communities to support some allied politicians, especially from left-wing parties. Some Muslim Brotherhood arms in Europe turned into a real "lobby" within the corridors of the EU and its institutions, especially the European Parliament and other EU decision-making institutions.

The following points can define the objectives of Muslim Brotherhood lobbying in the EU:

- Empowering political Islam groups in Europe and serving the group's self-interests by claiming that they are the official voice and the exclusive

representation of Islam and Muslims in those countries.

- Allied service: Qatar and Turkey and inciting countries against the Muslim Brotherhood's ideology, such as Egypt, the UAE and Saudi Arabia, through media disinformation and creating rumors. Indeed, thanks to Qatari money, this lobbying succeeded in passing several resolutions in the European Parliament. The latest was related to the boycott of the UAE Expo 2020, under the banner of "UAE violations of human rights".
- Disturbing any serious attempts to dry up the sources of Islamist terrorism, given that the group is the intellectual and ideological incubator for all jihadist groups.
- Attempting to influence legal legislation to prevent and obstruct any decision that is not in the Muslim Brotherhood's interest.

Pressure and influence mechanisms by the Muslim Brotherhood lobby:

- Direct representation of some politicians supported by it in the decision-making bodies, especially parliamentary and the executive bodies.
- Electoral support, through its ability to entice Muslim voters to vote for one candidate and overthrow another.
- Exploiting the climate of freedoms to spread propaganda, misinformation and media campaigns with the aim of convincing the public and arousing its interest in an idea or policy. Exploiting the concept of "Islamophobia" has become a prevalent behavior among the group's arms to evade any accusations it faces.
- Infiltrating some parties through the portal of supporting integration and promoting citizenship, and granting female Muslim Brotherhood members high positions in order to represent itself as a tolerant civilized organization.

Over the past years, the MB's tools of influence have greatly overlapped with entities funded by Qatar, until the two parties form a single system that adopts the same political and media positions. This was clearly

demonstrated in Brussels, which hosts the headquarters of the European Parliament, and ranks second after Washington in terms of the number of pressure groups working to influence legislation and executive bodies. As for Britain, it has historically embraced the leaders of the Muslim Brotherhood and gave them an opportunity for community participation at all levels. The group took full advantage of that opportunity, politically, economically and socially. This is done through a tight institutional system, which includes a system of associations, reaching nearly 60 organizations within Britain. Meanwhile, the volume of direct and indirect investments of the Muslim Brotherhood in Britain has increased, estimated financial fortunes range between 8-10 billion USD. Its companies and institutions obtained legal status, due to Britain's fear that the group's activities would turn into a covert activity to strike British interests and threaten its security.¹

The most prominent tools of Muslim Brotherhood lobbying in Europe

The Council of European Muslims:

The new name of "The Federation of Islamic Organizations in Europe" (FIOE), a pan-European Islamic body that forms a unified framework for the European Islamic organizations, institutions and associations that are members of it. The Federation included bodies, institutions and centers in 28 European countries, considered as the European wing of the global Muslim Brotherhood.

The Council of European Muslims was established in Britain in 1989 with a public body, a Shura Council, an executive office and clear and strong official relations with European official bodies, led by the European Union.

The FIOE headquarters moved to Brussels in May 2007 during the organization's annual meeting, in a neighborhood inhabited by Muslim

¹ <https://www.europarabct.com/?p=81082>

immigrants. However, FIOE is not on the list of Belgian companies, and organization officials claim it is “officially registered” in France, but cannot be found in the French Directory of Organizations.

The Union announced its separation from the international organization of the Muslim Brotherhood in January 2017. However, this separation remained ink on paper and was caused by speculation about the possibility of listing the group on terrorist lists after Donald Trump became US President at that time.

The Council includes dozens of associations, centers and institutions that work in various fields of advocacy, within and outside the borders of the European Union, in Britain, Russia, Ukraine and other countries.

The Belgian Muslim League (LMB):

A member of the Council of Muslims of Europe and one of the most important institutions of the Muslim Brotherhood. The association was founded in 1997, with the efforts of activists Moncef Shatar and Karim Azouzi. Today, the association controls more than ten mosques, owns headquarters in five Belgian cities, foremost of which are the capital Brussels, Anvers, Ghent, Liège and Verviers, run by Karim Chemlal. The association is also a platform for the founder’s grandson of the MB, Tariq Ramadan.

Forum of European Muslim Youth and Student Organizations (FEMYSO):

One of the most dangerous organizations affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood in Europe, uniting 33 associations in 20 European countries. The Forum was established in 1996 with the support of the “Federation of Islamic Organizations in Europe” (currently the Council of European Muslims), and the “Islamic Foundation” operating in Britain.

Headquartered in Brussels, FEMYSO says on its website that it has “developed useful links with the European Parliament, the European Commission, the Council of Europe, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the United Nations and a wide range of

other important organizations at European and international levels”.²

The Forum regularly publishes photos of its participation in meetings at the European Parliament or at the Commission. Hande Tanner, Head of Media at FEMYSO, is a member of the Council of Europe’s Youth Advisory Board.³

The European Forum of Muslim Women (EFOMW):

Brotherhood women play an important role in restoring the organization’s eroding popularity and presenting the organization in a civilized manner and in the image of peaceful Islamic institutions with social rather than political purposes. One of the most important examples of this is EFOMW, which is the Muslim Brotherhood’s face institutionalizing its female members.

The forum was established in 2006 in the Belgian capital Brussels, sharing cooperation links with the Al-Raed Foundation, which represents the Muslim Brotherhood in Ukraine, as well as other women’s institutions across Europe, especially France. The Foundation focuses primarily on adhering to the Muslim Brotherhood’s stances on the veil and the campaigns against it, in addition to exploiting the phenomenon of Islamophobia to promote the grievances of political Islam groups.

The forum’s first president was Noura Jaballah, the wife of the controversial Tunisian Muslim Brother Ahmed Jaballah, who serves as director of the „European Institute of Human Sciences“ in Chinon near Paris and vice-president of the Federation of Islamic Organizations in Europe. A prominent figure in EFOMW currently is Raghad Al-Tikriti, President of the Muslim League of Britain.

In August 2019, EFOMW announced that it had been granted consultative status at the United Nations Economic and Social Council, giving it more influence and “social stand

Cordoba Foundation:

2 <https://www.europarabct.com/?p=81082>

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It was established by Anas Al-Tikriti, a leader in the international organization of the Muslim Brotherhood in January 2005, in conjunction with his presidency of the “Islamic Society of Britain” before leaving this position “nominally” to his sister Raghad Al-Tikriti in January 2020. The foundation is registered as a market research company and public opinion polls, which raise the slogan of “dialogue of civilizations”, presenting themselves as an intellectual, research and advisory center.

The Foundation tried to penetrate the European Parliament, in order to become part of the parliamentary consultative processes to influence decision-making and legislation issued by the European Union, and then distort the countries opposed to the Muslim Brotherhood’s ideology. Cordoba also provided headquarters for Muslim Brotherhood delegations that visited London after the overthrow of Mohamed Morsi, in addition to organizing conferences and events with some Egyptian communities to incite them against the Sisi regime.

Muslim Council of Britain (MCB):

The largest and most important political support organization working on behalf of Muslims in Britain, the Muslim Brotherhood’s leaders established it in 1997 in London. The Council is an umbrella organization for more than 500 Islamic institutions spread throughout Britain, including mosques, schools, charitable, relief and educational societies.

Today, MCB includes a wide range of Islamist movements, including the Pakistani and Bengali wings of the Jamaat-e-Islami (founded by Abu al-Ala Mawdudi in 1941) are vying for the leadership of the council, along with the Muslim Brotherhood and some other movements.

Reasons and Factors contributing to the MB's Penetration into European Institutions

There are many, including:

- The decentralization nature of the organization in Europe and the possibility of hiding behind civil society organizations.
- The inflexibility of European governments in dealing with current political Islam challenges and their leniency with their activities and the extent of their impact.
- The challenges imposed by the refugee and immigrant crises on the countries of the EU, especially from the Muslim-majority countries. This prompted the group to employ this vital file for its own expansionist goals and to develop relations with European governments.
- Exploiting the polarization between the European right and left: As is well known, two currents are fighting in Europe, each with its own parties: A “right” conservative current and a “left” current that cares about human rights. The Muslim Brotherhood often mobilizes Muslims to activate their electoral votes in favor of the center-left parties, in return these parties support the Brotherhood politically.
- The employment of political Islam currents by some European governments: The decision-making circles in the West considered Islamists, in general, as a tool that could be used politically against Arab regimes. Therefore, the West included them in the beginning of the second half of the twentieth century, when most of the members of these groups migrated to Europe and US as a result of confrontations with Arab governments. It also allowed them to establish Islamic and human rights centers, which were used and employed against the ruling Arab regimes. The Egyptian and the Syrian regimes suffered the most from this crisis.⁴
- The European measures and legislation' failure: The EU adopts several

⁴ <https://www.europarabct.com/?p=81082>

criteria for classifying organizations as a terrorist organization and freezing associated assets. Despite the “late” European awakening, which culminated in a series of legislation in 2021 to combat terrorism and extremism in Germany, Austria and France, the group is still able to circumvent the legislation through the principle of “taqiyya” and the political and social cunning that characterizes its behavior since its founding in Egypt.

- The absence of mechanisms for the Europeans to distinguish between Islam and political Islam as an ideology. There is also no consideration to the extent to which certain organizations are represented in reality, especially since the position of these associations and organizations regarding freedom of religion, women’s rights, gays, non-Islamic Muslims and other minorities, the separation between religion and state is well known.
- The absence of dialogue between Western liberal democracies and the citizen as an individual. Instead, a relationship appears between the state and organizations that claim to “represent” Muslims before the government and its institutions. As we have seen on issues such as the Prophet Muhammad caricature or the veil, these representative organizations will operate according to their own agendas. “We the MB do not do social matters except to achieve a clear political goal,” says Gamal Murad, one of the most prominent faces of the Muslim Brotherhood in Austria and founder of „Liga Kulturverein“. ⁵

Manifestations of Muslim Brotherhood lobbying activities in European institutions

Despite accusations of supporting terrorism and extremism, adopting hate speech and encouraging the creation of a segregation of society, Muslim Brotherhood organizations still receive financial aid from European governments in the framework of programs supporting integration and communication with Muslim communities, combat racism/Islamophobia and so on.

Brotherhood-affiliated organizations also receive funds from European government aid agencies to implement projects in particularly difficult regions in Africa, the Middle East, and Asia⁶. This raises questions about how extremist associations with ideas that contradict the values of the European Union get huge sums of money spent on activities mostly aimed at undermining the values of the same societies, with taxpayers' money.

The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU, which emerged from the Treaty of Lisbon in 2009, obliges the countries of the Union to respect a certain set of principles, the most important of which are equality between men and women, freedom of thought and belief, choosing and changing religion, and even not believing in any religion. Despite this, Muslim Brotherhood associations and organizations benefit from EU funding and do not respect what is stated in its charters and do not meet the conditions for benefiting from subsidies, but they deceive the authorities by concealing their real activities or they hide under the banner of charitable work and the defense of human rights.

Some members of the European Commission often pointed out this fatal error, but the Foundation has always responded that "its projects are selected by experts according to specific rules and objectives that adhere to legal requirements". In other words, the Commission relies on the beneficiary's written commitment to respect the basic values of the EU

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and considers it sufficient, “which is evidence of its complete ignorance of the duality of the Muslim Brotherhood’s discourse and its ability to evade and art of showing a good face.” ⁷

Evidences of European support for some MB organizations

- The European Commission funded and supported the Forum of European Muslim Youth and Student Organizations (FEMYSO) to implement several campaigns, the most famous of which was the Hijab Support Campaign, which cost 340,000 euros. On November 17, 2021, Helena Daly, the European Commissioner for Equality, officially met with representatives of FEMYSO, which sparked a sharp controversy in European circles, considering that this helped Islamists to infiltrate official European institutions⁸. In the end, pressure from the French government resulted in a temporary halt to the campaign at the European level.
- The Directorate General of Disaster Management and Humanitarian Aid of the European Commission officially funds some of the activities of Islamic Relief around the world. The European Organization approved the Muslim Brotherhood Relief as a “humanitarian partner” for the period from 2021 to 2027, with a budget that has not yet been determined, despite the German authorities’ announcement of links between the organization and the Muslim Brotherhood.
- In 2019, the European Commission’s Internal Security Fund financed the European Islamic Union (EMU), which is classified as a terrorist organization in several Arab countries, with an amount of 90,367 euros, according to a report by the German newspaper “Die Welt”. ⁹
- The Weimar Institute for Humanities and Contemporary History, founded by the President of the European Islamic Union, Andreas Abubakar

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Rieger, has received European funding of 67.547 euros. Although the German authorities classified him as an “Islamist”, according to reports by the Constitutional Protection Authority “Internal Intelligence” in 2009, 2010 and 2017 being active in the circles of Islamic extremism.¹⁰

- The Islamic University of Gaza (IUG), described by Reuters as an “important cultural symbol of Hamas¹¹,” received from the European Union an amount of 88,338 euros in 2018 and 490,612 euros in 2019 to implement four different projects.¹²
- In 2012, the Directorate General of Migration and Home Affairs of the European Commission, DG Home, approved funding in the amount of 449,816 euros for a project entitled: “A Sharia-based Communication Approach to Preventing and Combating Contemporary Forms of Extremism Leading to Domestic Terrorism in the European Union¹³”. The main party among the many implementing the project was the “Islamic Association of the Friendly Society of Ireland (MAI)”, a member organization of the “Muslim Council of Europe”, having relations with the Islamic Cultural Center in Ireland, which in turn hosts the activities of the „European Council For Fatwa and Research”, founded by Yusuf al-Qaradawi.
- The Lokahi Foundation, affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood, has received funding for some of its projects and programs from the European Union (779,000 euros between 2017-2018). In 2019, Federica Mogherini, the then High Representative for Security Policy and Foreign Affairs in the European Union, launched the “Global Exchange of Religion in Society” initiative in partnership with the foundation.

10 <https://www.europarabct.com/?p=81082>

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Conclusion

We believe that there is a general ignorance among European politicians about groups affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood, the concept of political Islam as a whole, and the danger of the group in particular.

Maintaining security and peaceful coexistence in Europe in the long run requires the neutralization of political Islam groups from the European scene as a whole, finding an Islamic alternative that will be entrusted with the religious framing tasks of a European Islam that balances the requirements of the Islamic faith and the values of European civilization and secular democracy.