



Ministry for Diaspora Affairs
and Combating Antisemitism

The Muslim Brotherhood Across Europe



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Research Department
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Table of Contents

Executive Summary	2
Introduction.....	6
The Establishment of the Pan-European Structure.....	8
National Chapters.....	10
Ties to the Middle East.....	11
Identification of Organizations Affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood.....	12
Key Organizations in Europe	14
Federation of Islamic Organizations in Europe (FIOE) / Council of European Muslims (CEM)	14
European Council for Fatwa and Research (ECFR)	23
Forum of European Muslim Youth and Student Organizations (FEMYSO).....	31
The Europe Trust.....	39
The European Institute of Human Sciences (IESH)	42
Union of Good.....	49
Interpal	51
Al-Aqsa Foundation.....	54
Islamic Relief Worldwide (IRW).....	59
Sources.....	66

Executive Summary

“Addressing delegitimization and antisemitism requires a broad, systemic approach encompassing the identification of ideological infrastructures, organizational networks, and operational patterns that extend beyond isolated incidents.”

(From the decision of the Ministerial Committee on National Security Affairs, Decision No. B/188, 08 March 2017)

Within this framework, the Ministry for Diaspora Affairs and Combating Antisemitism systematically documents activities by those engaged in delegitimization, including the Muslim Brotherhood's operations globally, and particularly in Europe. This focus on the Muslim Brotherhood is a consequence of the direct and indirect links between the organization's activities in its various branches, and the ongoing processes of radicalization in Europe which results in campaigns directed against the State of Israel, attacks on Israeli symbols, and harm to Jewish communities.

The Muslim Brotherhood promotes a radical vision of Islam that at its core contradicts the values of liberal democracy, pluralism, and social integration. This vision serves as the ideological and organizational base of support for terrorist organizations such as Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad, which explicitly deny the State of Israel's right to exist and to target Jews worldwide.

The main areas of focus of the report are:

1. **Direct risk to the security of Jewish communities** – incitement, violent demonstrations, incidents near mosques and on campuses, and a more extreme public discourse that threatens the safety of Jews and their sense of security in the public sphere.
2. **Indirect and ongoing support for terrorist organizations** – including Hamas, through networks of charitable institutions and umbrella organizations such as Interpal, Al-Aqsa, and the Union of Good, even after Western countries have imposed restrictions or partial bans.
3. **Normalization of antisemitism and religious–political incitement** – the promotion of antisemitic discourse through digital platforms, religious rulings, and statements by senior figures associated with the movement's ideology, contributing to legitimizing hostility toward Jews and Israel.
4. **Systematic delegitimization of the State of Israel in the European arena** – through advocacy groups, cooperation with pro-Palestinian organizations, shaping public opinion, promoting sanctions boycotts, and divestment efforts, and emboldening public political discourse denying Israel's right to self-determination and sovereignty.
5. **Covert influence on public and community institutions** – infiltration into advisory bodies, religious councils, educational frameworks, and youth organizations, including FEMYSO, which serve as platforms for shaping narratives and political identity among young people and communities.
6. **This report is the first in a series of reports to be published to contribute to the ongoing mapping, analysis, and response to these radical ideological infrastructures.**

General Background

The Muslim Brotherhood is one of the oldest and most influential Sunni Islamic organizations in the world (founded in Egypt in 1928). Its central objective is the establishment of a society governed by Islamic law, *Sharia*. The movement

advocates a gradual process of Islamization, in both the Middle East and the West, combining religious, social, and political efforts to reshape society in accordance with its radical interpretation of Islam.

The Muslim Brotherhood's activities in specific locations

Activity in the Middle East

- The movement's overarching goal is a fundamental transformation of the social and political structures in the states in which it operates. Accordingly, several Arab countries—including Egypt, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, and Jordan—have designated the Muslim Brotherhood as a terrorist organization. These governments accuse the movement of promoting extremism and undermining state stability. In this context, the prolonged struggle between Egyptian governments under Presidents Mubarak and Sisi against the movement, as well as the rise of a Brotherhood-affiliated figure, Mohamed Morsi, who served as Egypt's president from 2012 to 2013 is of special relevance.
- Qatar's relationship with the Muslim Brotherhood has been shaped through strategic ambiguity in its foreign policy: Qatar has cultivated close ties with Islamist networks associated with the movement while denying publicly giving them direct support. Despite these denials, Qatar provides political refuge and a political base for senior Hamas figures, including members of its political bureau. Additionally, Qatar uses the state-funded media network Al Jazeera to disseminate the movement's ideology worldwide.
- In the Palestinian Authority and the Gaza Strip, the Brotherhood's ideology finds its expression in the terrorist organization Hamas, which seeks to impose strict Islamic norms in the civilian sphere and pursues ongoing confrontation and the eradication of Israel in the military sphere.

Activity in Europe

- In Europe, the Muslim Brotherhood operates through "soft" methods that emphasize a façade of moderation and pragmatism in order to advance its objectives. Despite this outward "moderate" posture, the organization consistently rejects the principles of liberal democracy and Western values, which do not align with its radical ideological aims, including efforts, overt and covert, to "Islamize" the continent as a whole. This façade means that the public appearance is "moderate," while the long-term objectives aim to alter norms and legal frameworks ("legalistic Islamism.")
- The Brotherhood's network in Europe functions as a network with many focal points: each country has autonomous local leadership, while pan-European coordination occurs among the affiliated organizations.
- CEM/FIOE function as strategic hubs; their subsidiary institutions provide religious, educational, financial, and youth-oriented support structures.
- European states maintain an ambivalent position towards the Brotherhood: recognition and dialogue alongside security warnings; the absence of a uniform classification framework results in policy inconsistencies.
- Funding sources are diverse and cross-border; real estate serves as a financial anchor; historically, there was substantial reliance on Gulf donations, now the organization primarily relies on Qatar and Turkey.
- An indirect/inductive link exists between some of these bodies and Hamas: even the activities of non-designated organizations contribute to an environment of radicalization.
- The organization exerts significant influence on the local Muslim youth and university campuses through FEMYSO, fostering an ideologically aligned "European Muslim elite."
- Implications for Israel include: international delegitimization, indirect fundraising for adversaries, rising antisemitism, and increased radicalization across European public spheres.

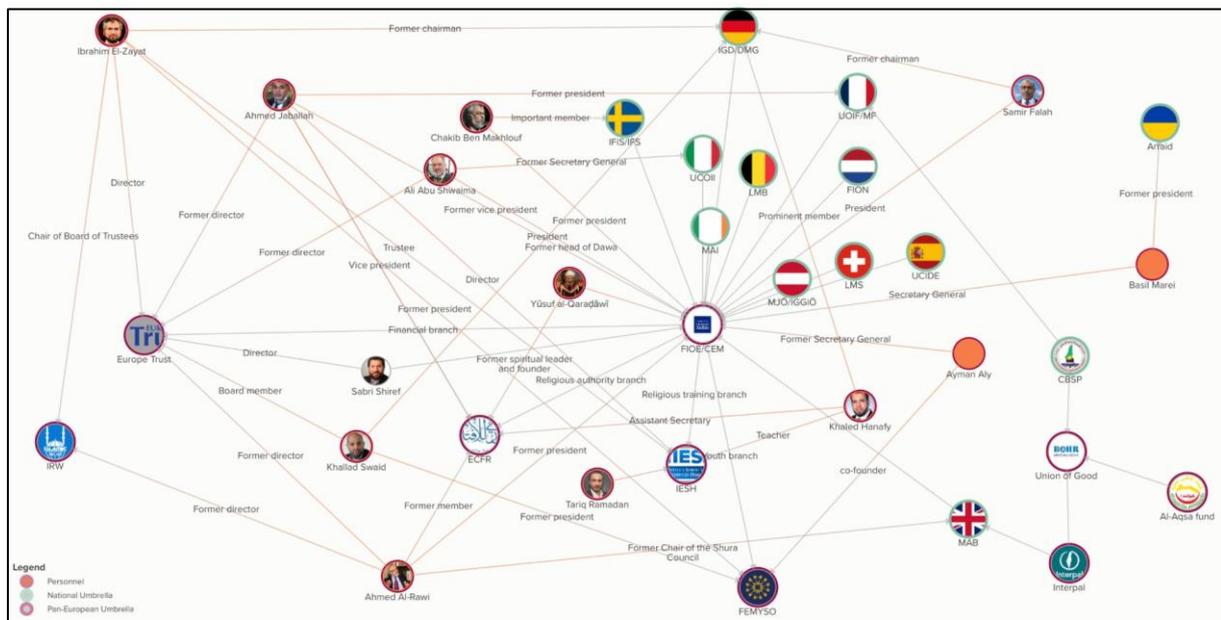
Main Dimensions of Muslim Brotherhood Activity in Europe

Historical Background:

- In the 1970s, the Muslim Brotherhood (hereafter: "the Brotherhood") first recognized that European authorities were seeking partners and representatives within the continent's growing Muslim communities. The Brotherhood's presence in Europe thus came to be viewed as a significant strategic opportunity.

Today:

- At present, there is an extensive European network of organizations that are directly or indirectly linked to the Muslim Brotherhood.
- Because the Brotherhood constitutes a diffuse ideological and informal influence network, explicit documentary evidence identifying an organization as part of the Muslim Brotherhood is often difficult to find. Nevertheless, connections can be inferred based on several indicators, such as shared ideological principles, individuals affiliated with the movement who lead or founded organizations, and patterns of activity consistent with Brotherhood doctrine.



Link to the map: <https://embed.kumu.io/8f571532ffcf4932619232614840e317>

Introduction¹

How the network "works":

In practice, the "upper echelon" of the European Brotherhood constitutes a small, closed, and cohesive Islamist clique whose objective is to exert control over organized Islam across the continent. Even today, not only do most of the surviving founders of the network continue to hold senior positions within several of its prominent organizations, but their spouses, children, and relatives by marriage also frequently assume senior roles within parts of the network, form interlinkages, and, in some cases, intermarry.

Intelligence organizations, and Western European states more broadly, are aware of the risks posed by the Brotherhood movement. There is a consensus among European security services that defines the Brotherhood network as inherently anti-democratic, operating with the aim of effecting a fundamental transformation of societal structures and systems of governance.

Characteristics of Activity - European Level and National Level

1. Organizational model: In each country, there exists a national umbrella organization alongside local institutions, mirroring the European-level framework and the general organizational structure of the Brotherhood. At the pan-European level, coordination is carried out by Council of European Muslims (CEM) / Federation of Islamic Organizations in Europe (FIOE), within which organizations operate according to an identical structure, applied at the level of the European Union.
2. Core institutions: Council of European Muslims (CEM) / Federation of Islamic Organizations in Europe (FIOE) leads activity in the pan-European arena; European Council for Fatwa and Research (ECFR) focuses on religious legal rulings; European Institute of Human Sciences (IESH) focuses on the training of imams; Forum of European Muslim Youth and Student Organizations (FEMYSO) is a youth organization with familial ties to the Brotherhood's leadership; and The Europe Trust addresses funding-related matters.
3. Leadership: Limited in scope. Individuals hold dual roles at both the national and European levels, thereby ensuring coordination.
4. Operational strategy: Legality and public legitimacy alongside the advancement of a long-term Islamist agenda; dual messaging.
5. Sources of funding: In the past - the Gulf; at present - an emphasis on Qatar/Turkey, real estate, and local donations. It should be noted that the European Union also provides various forms of funding that flow to different organizations.
6. Relations with authorities: Dialogue and formal cooperation in many countries; an ambivalent approach on the part of the authorities.

7. Geographic distribution: Prominent presence in France, the United Kingdom, Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium, Austria, Switzerland, Scandinavia, and Spain.

Their presence in Europe began in the 1960s, when several prominent Brotherhood figures from the Middle East settled in European countries in order to escape persecution. At the outset, they constituted a small and dispersed group of activists whose movement did not reflect a centralized plan; rather, circumstances led them to the West in an incidental manner. Accordingly, small groups of Brotherhood members who had originally arrived from the Muslim world established independent institutions and organizations inspired by the Brotherhood, reflecting the structures of those in their countries of origin, albeit on a much smaller scale.

The small organizations established separately by these migrants soon developed beyond even their most optimistic expectations. For example, Brotherhood-affiliated student frameworks evolved into organizations that sought to address the religious needs of the rapidly growing Muslim populations in Europe. Their mosques - often constructed as multi-purpose community centers - attracted large numbers of worshippers. In accordance with the complex organizational model formulated by Hassan al-Banna, they established youth and women's chapters, schools, and think tanks. Generous funding received from wealthy donors in the Arab Gulf enabled them to operate on a scale far exceeding what their limited numbers would otherwise have permitted.

As a result, most European countries became home to a small chapter of the Muslim Brotherhood, possessing its own form and organization, and adopting - on a significantly smaller scale - the structures and modes of operation of the larger parent chapters in the Middle East. In practice, a French chapter of the Muslim Brotherhood developed, alongside German, Swedish, Spanish chapter, and others. Each operates independently in selecting its objectives and operational tactics, in a manner similar to the chapters in Jordan, Syria, or Tunisia. For example, the Muslim Brotherhood network in Austria focuses on influencing the Austrian Muslim community, Austrian policymakers, and Austrian public discourse, using tactics and frameworks it deems most appropriate to the Austrian context. The same applies to the British, Swiss, Italian, Ukrainian, and other chapters.

During the 1970s, the Brotherhood first came to understand that European authorities were seeking partners and representative bodies within the increasingly growing Muslim communities in Europe. Consequently, the Brotherhood in Europe began to perceive its presence on the continent - where Muslim communities continued to expand - as a significant opportunity. As a result, the isolated Brotherhood groups across Europe intensified their contacts with one another and established networks, most of them informal, spanning the continent. While continuing to support, both rhetorically and in practice, the efforts of their counterparts to establish Islamic states (as they define them) in the Muslim world, they increasingly focused their attention on their new reality in Europe, setting as their objective the presentation of their interpretation of Islam to Muslim communities across Europe.

The Establishment of the Pan-European Structure

Over time, this informal network of connections also sought to establish formal pan-European structures. It appears that the first pan-European organization created by the Brotherhood was the Islamic Council of Europe, which was financially supported by the Muslim World League and regularly convened and brought together several pioneers of political Islam ideology on the continent. The Council's activity declined in the mid-1980s; however, the European Muslim Brotherhood network, which had by then become more firmly established, went on to create a more stable and substantive body operating at the pan-European level: the Federation of Islamic Organizations in Europe (FIOE), which in 2020 changed its name to the Council of European Muslims (CEM).

Over time, the Federation gave rise to several bodies serving different purposes: the Forum of European Muslim Youth and Student Organizations, The Europe Trust, the European Council for Fatwa and Research, and the European Institute of Human Sciences. Although these bodies are technically independent, they maintain deep interconnections and are controlled by a small network of prominent Muslim Brotherhood leaders in Europe and beyond, clearly indicating that they are part of the same effort to establish a formal pan-European structure.

In practice, the "upper echelon" of the European Brotherhood constitutes a small, Islamist, closed, and cohesive clique whose objective is to exercise control over organized Islam across the continent. Even today, not only do most of the surviving founders of the network continue to hold senior positions within some of the leading organizations, but their spouses, children, and relatives by marriage also frequently assume senior roles within parts of the network, form connections, and, in some cases, intermarry with one another.

The effort to create pan-European structures served two purposes. The first, characteristic of the Muslim Brotherhood everywhere, was to render interactions among its members more organized and professional in order to expand its influence. The second was to establish bodies capable of projecting a perception of representativeness of European Muslims toward European policymakers and the European media.

With regard to the first objective, while the dynamics vary to some extent from one country to another, it can be stated that across Europe, the Muslim Brotherhood has succeeded in establishing a sophisticated network of mosques, charitable organizations, schools, lobbying and civil rights organizations, and many other types of institutions that address the needs of local Muslim communities. From daycare centers to funeral homes, from halal certification providers to media outlets, the Brotherhood seeks to cater to as many aspects of the lives of Muslims in Europe as possible and, through this, to exert influence over them.

These efforts have not necessarily persuaded the majority of Muslims in Europe to adopt the Brotherhood's worldview. However, there is little doubt that other Muslim organizations do not possess the resources required to compete with the Brotherhood in terms of influence over Muslim communities in Europe. Numerically, Brotherhood activists in fact constitute a small minority - amounting to only a few hundred individuals in each European country. Nevertheless,

owing to their commitment to their cause, their capabilities, and the extensive financial resources on which they were able to rely over decades, they have accumulated significance that far exceeds their limited size.

In a similar manner, the Brotherhood has often attained disproportionate influence within the European establishment, including among politicians, government agencies, local authorities, media outlets, and others. Although circumstances differ from country to country, when European authorities engage with Muslim communities, it is highly likely that many - if not all - of the organizations or individuals involved belong to Brotherhood networks. Exceptions can be identified, and conditions evolve differently across states; however, overall, it is evident that no other Islamist movement has achieved the level of visibility, political influence, and access to the European establishment that the Brotherhood has attained over the past decades.

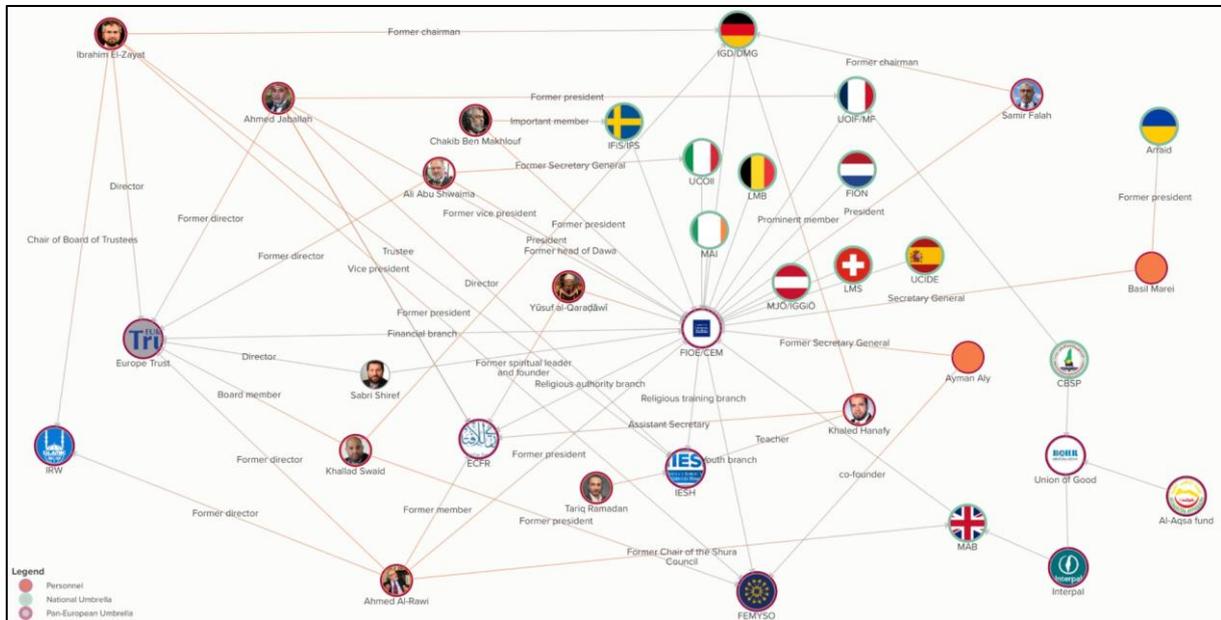
National Chapters

At the state level, a model has taken shape whereby, in each country, a national umbrella organization brings together dozens of local institutions, while the pan-European structure unites these same organizations. This pattern is reflected, for example, in the case of the Union of Islamic Organizations of France (UOIF), which over the years has become the primary representative body of institutions affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood in France. UOIF brings together approximately 280 organizations and associations, including a broad network of mosques, community centers, and organizations operating in the fields of education, charity, youth, and more.

UOIF operates according to a federative model. Local associations join the umbrella organization as members and undertake to comply with its statutes and objectives. Each affiliated association maintains an independent local leadership that manages community and mosque affairs on the ground; however, it forms part of the national network and benefits from representation and support provided by UOIF. This model includes a tiered structure of affiliation: there are local associations whose leaders also serve as representatives of UOIF, and others whose cooperation is looser in nature. Accordingly, UOIF maintains a core group of affiliated organizations that are largely subject to its guidance, alongside a second circle of institutions that are ideologically aligned and operate in cooperation with it, but without full organizational dependence. It is important to note that, formally, each association is registered as an independent legal entity under French law, and not as a chapter or subsidiary of UOIF.

Accordingly, the subordinate organizations enjoy relative autonomy in day-to-day management (each mosque independently manages its schedule, sermons, community activities, and so forth), while operating in accordance with the guiding line of the umbrella organization, participating in its nationwide initiatives, and deferring to its authority on matters of principle. UOIF, for its part, serves as a coordinating and steering body: it organizes nationwide conferences and events, formulates positions on public issues (such as the question of the hijab in educational institutions) on behalf of its members, and represents their interests in engagements with the French government and authorities.

The pan-European institutions are structured to incorporate representatives from each country, and it is often the case that the same individuals hold parallel roles at both the national and European levels. For example, presidents of the Federation of Islamic Organizations in Europe (FIOE) have frequently been selected from among the leaders of national umbrella organizations such as UOIF. This duality ensures that FIOE and the national organizations operate in coordination and harmony. Decisions and policies are formulated jointly and subsequently implemented in each country by the relevant local organization. Overall, the relationship between FIOE and the national umbrella organizations is structurally similar to the relationship between any national umbrella organization and the local bodies affiliated with it - in both cases, a mechanism of central guidance and coordination exists alongside autonomy in routine operations.



Link to the map: <https://embed.kumu.io/8f571532ffcf4932619232614840e317>

Ties to the Middle East

The question of ties between the networks operating in Europe and those in the Arab world is complex. On the one hand, it is evident that when the first Brotherhood presence in Europe was established, activists replicated many of the organizational structures and modes of operation characteristic of the Brotherhood in the Middle East. Even today, the internal structure and operational methods of the Brotherhood in Europe are almost identical to those of the parent chapters in the Arab world.

Nevertheless, the fact that Brotherhood networks in Europe are built according to the model of those in the Arab world does not imply subordination. It is clear that the European Brotherhood looks to the Brotherhood networks in the Middle East - which are older, larger, and significantly more developed - and maintains ongoing communication and coordination with them. However, this does not mean that Brotherhood organizations in Europe routinely receive operational directives from the Middle East regarding which strategy to adopt or how to advance their objectives. Rather, it is more accurate to describe them as autonomous members of a global family.

This assertion is supported by numerous Brotherhood leaders themselves. The former General Guide (Murshid) of the Brotherhood in Egypt, Muhammad Akef, described in a 2004 interview how the movement transcends the need for formal frameworks and official affiliation: "We do not have an international organization; we have an organization through our perception of things (ideology). We are present in every country - wherever there are people who believe

in the message of the Muslim Brotherhood. In France, the Union of Islamic Organizations of France (MF/UOIF) does not belong to the Brotherhood organization. They operate according to their own laws and rules.”

Similarly, in a 2005 interview, Akef explained that “a person who operates in the global arena and believes in the path of the Muslim Brotherhood is considered part of us, and we are part of him,” and that “these organizations and institutions (in Europe) are independent and autonomous. We do not control them. The Brothers abroad are the ones who control them. The structures associated with Yusuf al-Qaradawi are Brotherhood organizations managed by Brothers from different countries.” In a similar vein, in a 2008 interview, Muhammad Habib, the former First Deputy Chairman of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, confirmed that “there are entities that exist in many countries across the world. These entities share the same ideology, principles, and objectives, but they operate under different circumstances and contexts. Therefore, it is logical that there be decentralization in action, such that each entity operates in accordance with its own circumstances and the challenges it faces, and within its own framework.”

Identification of Organizations Affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood

The issue that complicates the discussion in Europe surrounding the Brotherhood network - unlike the situation in the Middle East - relates to identification. In Middle Eastern states, there is generally little dispute regarding who is a member of the Muslim Brotherhood and which entities constitute chapters of the movement. Even in Arab countries where the Brotherhood network has been outlawed and membership entails severe penalties, there is limited ambiguity as to who is affiliated with it. Although the Muslim Brotherhood has not been designated as a terrorist organization in any European country, and an individual’s membership in the movement, or in an organization controlled by or affiliated with it, is not in itself unlawful, the dynamics in Europe are markedly different. With the exception of a small number of individuals originating from the Middle East, nearly all those connected to the movement deny any affiliation and have made considerable efforts to downplay or conceal their ties.

In practice, no European state has adopted a uniform framework for identifying actors operating in Europe that are connected, in various ways, to the Brotherhood network that is accepted across all branches of government. There is no official policy document or clear guidance issued to governmental bodies detailing how organizations affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood should be identified, assessed, and engaged. This situation results in critical inconsistency - not only between states, but also within individual countries - where approaches differ from ministry to ministry, from municipality to municipality, and even between departments within the same institution. Non-governmental actors, such as media outlets, religious organizations, and civil society bodies, are similarly divided and confused in their processes of identification, assessment, and engagement.

Despite these challenges, the identification and assessment of Brotherhood-related actors in the European context remains an important task, primarily due to their disproportionate influence. Undoubtedly, ties to the parent chapters in the Middle East constitute an important indicator; however, they are not the key criterion for determining whether an organization can be defined as part of the Brotherhood network. The identification of an organization operating in

a European country as belonging to the Brotherhood is not necessarily achieved by uncovering possible ties to any Middle Eastern state. Rather, such a determination is more accurately made by examining the degree of its affiliation with the Brotherhood chapters in the specific European country in which it operates.

A more effective approach to identifying and assessing whether an organization (or an individual) operates as part of the network is based on the understanding that the European Brotherhood network constitutes a particularly dense network of institutions and activists, interconnected through personal, organizational, financial, familial, and ideological ties. Key indicators include:

- **Governance structure:** The presence of activists identified with the Brotherhood on the board of directors or in senior management positions within the organization.
- **Financial ties:** Funding from sources identified with the Brotherhood, or the transfer of donations to charitable organizations affiliated with it.
- **Cooperation with other Brotherhood entities:** The holding of joint events, conferences, or projects with parallel organizations within the same country or abroad.
- **Invitation of Brotherhood-affiliated speakers:** Frequent or exclusive appearances by representatives identified with the Brotherhood at major events.
- **Activity in the knowledge domain:** Translation, publication, dissemination, and promotion of literature authored by writers identified with the Brotherhood.
- **Membership in transnational Brotherhood structures:** Such as Council of European Muslims (CEM) / Federation of Islamic Organizations in Europe (FIOE) and their affiliated bodies, for which extensive evidence (some of which will be presented below) clearly indicates that they were established and are in practice managed by Brotherhood members.

Key Organizations in Europe

Federation of Islamic Organizations in Europe (FIOE) / Council of European Muslims (CEM)

Background

A short history of FIOE/CEM, published in Arabic only in January 2020 on the organization's Facebook page, acknowledged that the establishment of FIOE in 1989 constituted the culmination of decades of "Islamic activism." The text recounts a narrative that largely mirrors the story of the arrival of the Muslim Brotherhood in Europe, employing terminology commonly used by the Brotherhood, and explains that "Islamic activity began in Western Europe in particular in the early 1950s through a number of students and workers who arrived from various Arab and Islamic countries and settled in the West."

"These," the text continues, "particularly the students among them, led the organization of Islamic activity in Europe through a number of bodies and associations at the level of European states such as France, Germany, Spain, the United Kingdom, and the Netherlands, among others, until 1984, when a number of them convened a symposium in the Spanish capital, Madrid." In the words of FIOE, "Madrid was the point of departure for the creation of European Islamic activity, which began from the idea of institutionalizing the Islamic presence." Five years later, in November 1989, FIOE was formally established by an association of 19 Islamic organizations across the continent.²

The Federation - whose senior officeholders over the years clearly indicate that the organization constitutes a well-connected network of Muslim Brotherhood activists across Europe and the Arab world - was initially registered in Leicester, United Kingdom (at the Markfield Islamic Centre). In 2007, an official headquarters office was inaugurated in Brussels, in the heart of the European Union district. In 2020, FIOE changed its name to the "Council of European Muslims," while continuing to operate according to the same organizational and ideological framework. According to its own definition, the Federation is "a non-profit organization that provides a working framework for its member organizations in order to achieve shared objectives in the service of Muslims in European societies".³

European intelligence officials note that "in every European country, the organization that is a member of FIOE is the central body of the Muslim Brotherhood's militia in that country." In other words, the Federation serves as a liaison between the global Brotherhood leadership and activity in each country - it coordinates strategy and content at the pan-European level, and its guidance is implemented locally by the national federations and associations.⁴ Accordingly, a report by the Dutch Security Service (AIVD) described the Federation as "the umbrella organization of the Muslim Brotherhood in Europe, with a guiding role within the European Brotherhood movement, determining the central policy implemented locally by the national federations." Security reporting in Germany, Spain, and additional countries

similarly corroborated that the Federation constitutes the directing framework of the Brotherhood network on the continent.⁵

During the 1990s, as part of the consolidation of the Muslim Brotherhood in Europe - and in addition to the union of the national federations - FIOE, seeking to provide a comprehensive social, religious, educational, and economic response, initiated the establishment of several dedicated pan-European umbrella institutions in key fields:

1. **A body for empowering the next generation**, established based on FIOE's recognition that it is necessary to cultivate the next leadership generation and to instill in young people an affinity with political Islam and with the movement's values.
2. **A religious body for the issuance of religious legal rulings and the shaping of religious life in the Diaspora.** The rationale for its establishment was twofold: an ideological need to create a unified religious authority that would guide Muslims in a "proper" manner and prevent divergent influences and conflicting fatwas; and a pragmatic need to provide an immediate response to the religious-legal needs of Muslim communities.
3. **A body for the training of religious functionaries and spiritual leaders**, established due to "the challenge of a shortage of local ulama (religious scholars) with a full understanding of conditions in Europe."
4. **An economic body**, established with the declared aim of ensuring stable and independent funding for the movement's projects.

Vision and Strategy

Many Muslim immigrants in Europe found themselves in an unfamiliar reality, marked by linguistic and cultural gaps, exposure to secular influences, and, at times, a lack of basic religious education. The Brotherhood movement identified within this population a target audience that was "seeking direction and receptive to religious messaging," and which, in the absence of qualified religious leadership, was liable to lose its way. The Federation seeks "to protect the religious, social, and cultural interests of Muslims in Europe," and its declared objectives include "preserving the Muslim presence in Europe and presenting Islam properly" to society at large.⁶

In other words, the Muslim Brotherhood has sought to formulate a model of life in which Muslims in Europe would be able to adhere to their faith and Islamic way of life while simultaneously participating in European society - avoiding full assimilation into secular society, pursuing cautious integration, and maintaining a long-term objective of influencing European society and Islamizing it.⁷ The Federation views itself as a coordinating body guiding Muslims "to be faithful to their religion while at the same time active citizens in European democracies," thereby filling a leadership vacuum and becoming the "missing leadership of the Islamic nation" in the Diaspora, in the words of Yusuf al-Qaradawi, who also coined the concept of "conservatism without isolation, and openness without disintegration".⁸

Moreover, the Federation was intended to address an organizational-political need of the Brotherhood network: the establishment of a unified umbrella framework that would coordinate among all organizations identified with the

Muslim Brotherhood across the continent, outline a shared strategic line, and represent a unified voice in engagements with European governments and institutions. The movement sought to harness freedoms of religion and association in the West in order to operate openly in advancing the Islamic project (da'wa) from within the democratic system itself.⁹ Many assess that the Muslim Brotherhood in Europe identified a historic opportunity of a blank slate: an ideological and institutional vacuum within Muslim Diaspora communities, the absence of effective competition from other Islamist currents, and a liberal tolerance that enables them "to implement the da'wa freely." On this basis, FIOE actors aspired to become the "preferred partner" of European governments and elites on matters relating to Islam, in the belief that such cooperation would strengthen their legitimacy in the eyes of the Muslim public and expand their influence.¹⁰

Leadership

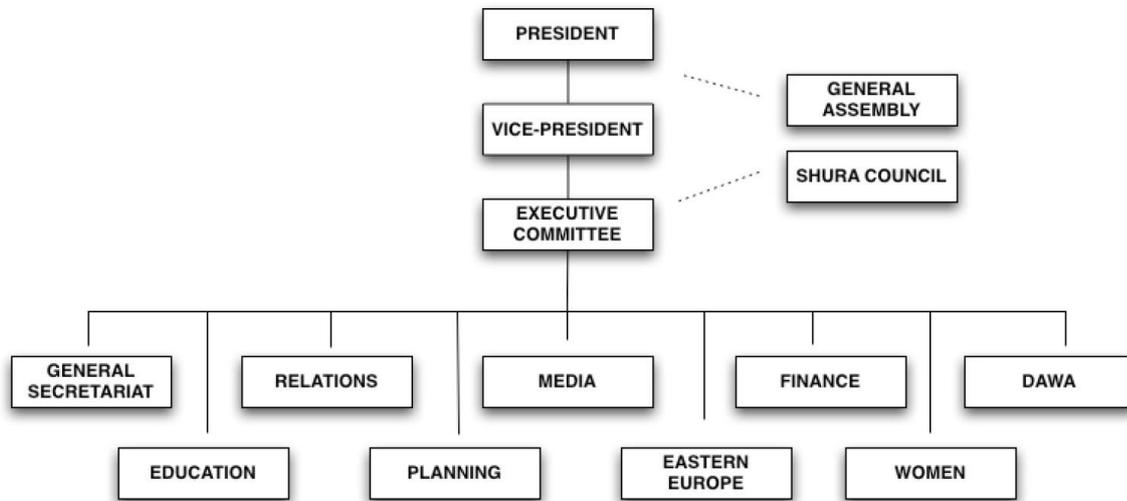
As noted, the founders and leaders of FIOE emerged from the ranks of Muslim Brotherhood leaderships in their countries of origin. Throughout its years of activity, the identity of the Federation's senior officeholders has illustrated the organization as a well-connected network of Brotherhood activists across Europe and the Arab world. Its first president was Ahmad al-Rawi (Iraq), followed by prominent leaders such as Chakib Ben Makhoulouf (a Swedish national of Moroccan origin), who served as president for two terms until 2014. According to reports by Swedish security services, Ben Makhoulouf coordinated the Federation's activities in line with guidance from the Muslim Brotherhood leadership in Egypt, and articulated his strategic vision in Arabic: "We do not want to draw attention to the fact that we are Islamizing the West, because that does not serve our objectives... Islam will prevail and enter every home".¹¹

In 2014, Abdallah Ben Mansour (France) was elected president. Ben Mansour previously served as Secretary General of the Union of Islamic Organizations of France (UOIF) and possessed extensive experience in European institutional engagement. He led the process of rebranding the Federation as the "Council of European Muslims" in 2020, and was also elected to serve as Chairman of the reconstituted Council during the terms 2014-2018 and 2022-2024.¹² In 2018, Samir Falah (Germany) was elected as the 11th president of FIOE, while simultaneously serving as president of the national umbrella organization of the Muslim Brotherhood in Germany, thereby exemplifying a common and deliberate dual role. Many senior FIOE figures concurrently hold key positions in national Brotherhood organizations, ensuring close personal coordination between the European and national levels.^{13 14} Another example is Dr. Ayman Ali, who served as Secretary General of FIOE while simultaneously being a member of the Guidance Bureau of the Muslim Brotherhood in Cairo and a political advisor to former Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi.¹⁵ His dual status as a trusted figure within the global leadership and a senior actor in the European arena illustrates the channels created by the Federation between the Brotherhood network in the Middle East and its activity in Europe.

Structure and Governance

The Federation's organizational structure mirrors the organizational model of the Muslim Brotherhood movement in the Middle East: a hierarchy comprising a Shura (plenary) council and an executive leadership, a network of national

chapters operating under general “guidelines,” and professional committees addressing religion, education, advocacy, and related fields. Within Federation of Islamic Organizations in Europe (FIOE) / Council of European Muslims (CEM),



the Shura Council (plenary) of representatives of member organizations convenes once a year, elects the president of the Federation, and decides on work plans and binding resolutions. The elected president then appoints a small executive leadership (executive committee) responsible for implementing the decisions and directing activity on the ground.¹⁶

The Federation has succeeded in attaining a significant degree of legitimacy within the political-institutional space in Europe. From a geographic perspective, FIOE’s footprint spans most countries of Western, Northern, and Central Europe that host large Muslim populations. The organization maintains a particularly significant presence in France, the United Kingdom, Germany, Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands, Austria, Switzerland, Scandinavia, and Spain - where its members exert control over major mosques, community federations, Islamic educational institutions, and student organizations. In several Eastern European and Nordic countries as well (such as Poland, Hungary, Bosnia, Albania, and Finland), FIOE maintains representation through organizations identified with Brotherhood ideas, albeit on a smaller scale. In most cases, the Federation does not operate formal chapters; rather, it works through national member organizations that operate under local names without public declarations of affiliation with the Muslim Brotherhood, in accordance with the movement’s “low-profile” strategy in Europe.¹⁷

The Federation does not intervene in the day-to-day management of each Muslim organization in Europe. Instead, it focuses on setting overarching policy, coordinating regional initiatives, and providing joint representation through ongoing communication and general guidance. It circulates recommendations to member organizations, organizes assemblies and workshops for all levels (leadership, imams, youth, women’s frameworks, etc.), and produces shared educational and religious content. The guiding line is formulated by the Federation’s leadership (the president and the

executive committee) and approved at the annual assemblies, after which it is recommended for adoption by member organizations.

An illustrative example of this mechanism is the European campaign against the publication of cartoons depicting Muhammad (2005-2006), during which FIOE's leadership disseminated joint guidance to its member bodies on how to respond officially and maximize impact - including the organization of coordinated protest rallies in multiple countries and the initiation of legal actions - while cooperating with external Muslim organizations such as the Qatar Council of Scholars. This capacity, also demonstrated in public initiatives such as the "One Million Signatures" petition calling for "legislation against insulting the Prophet of Islam" (2006), positions FIOE as a cross-border actor with significant power and influence.¹⁸

Legitimization and Engagement with European Institutions

Over the years, the Federation has been careful to cultivate a moderate public image. In many of the countries in which it operates, it is legally registered as a non-profit organization; its representatives consistently present themselves as respecting state laws and, in some cases, have even cooperated with police and authorities during public events (such as organizing demonstrations under official permits, etc.). In addition, it has issued sweeping condemnations of terrorism and violent extremist activity, promoted discourse of tolerance and coexistence (at least outwardly), and emphasized the positive contribution of Muslims to European society.¹⁹ As a result, this tactic proved largely effective, and political systems across Europe tended to "accept" the image of moderation presented by Federation of Islamic Organizations in Europe (FIOE) / Council of European Muslims (CEM), perhaps in the hope of leveraging it to stabilize communities and prevent violent radicalization.²⁰

Consequently, in many cases European governments came to view the Federation as a potential partner in representing the "Muslim community," and regarded Federation-affiliated organizations as moderate and constructive actors for advancing Muslim integration. This was reflected in the establishment of formal channels of dialogue and consultation between government bodies and Federation representatives. In France, for example, the Union of Islamic Organizations of France (UOIF) (affiliated with the Federation) was a member of the state-sponsored French Council of the Muslim Faith (CFCM); in Germany, the Islamic Community in Germany (IGD) was a prominent member of the Islam Council (Islamrat), which conducted dialogue with the government; and in the United Kingdom, the Muslim Association of Britain (MAB) cooperated with local authorities on various social initiatives. In a significant number of countries, the FIOE-affiliated body thus became the de facto representative of local Islam in the eyes of governmental actors - a situation that the Muslim Brotherhood actively encouraged as a means of gaining recognition and influence.²¹

The European Union itself likewise adopted a policy of dialogue with "representative" Muslim organizations. Beginning in the 2000s, EU actors viewed FIOE as a partner, and Federation representatives were invited to participate in a number of meetings and consultative frameworks on matters of religion and culture. For example, representatives of

the Federation and its youth council, Forum of European Muslim Youth and Student Organizations (FEMYSO), took part in initiatives of the European Commission addressing prejudice, in parliamentary discussions on religious issues, and in forums of the Council of Europe dealing with religion and human rights. In several instances, organizations affiliated with FIOE also received European financial support, such as EU grants for youth organizations or funding for projects in the fields of education and welfare, further strengthening their legal standing.²²

Parallel to its positive interface with governmental institutions, one of the central factors underpinning the Federation's legitimacy is its compliance with legal and judicial definitions and its ability to make astute use of the protections afforded by the liberal system in order to block punitive measures against it. Unlike violent jihadist chapters and terrorist organizations, the Federation and its member organizations are not prohibited by law. As of 2025, no European state has designated Federation of Islamic Organizations in Europe (FIOE) / Council of European Muslims (CEM) as a terrorist or illegal organization, nor has the European Union included them on any "blacklist".²³ This situation stands in contrast to several Arab states (for example, Egypt and the United Arab Emirates), which have outlawed the Muslim Brotherhood; however, in Europe, as long as there is no evidence of involvement in terrorist activity, the rule of law ensures their freedom to operate.

In recent years, there has indeed been a rise in awareness among European decision-makers regarding the true nature of the Brotherhood network and the potential risks it poses. In several countries (Austria, for example), public measures have been taken - such as the establishment of dedicated research and intelligence units focusing on "Islamist milieus" - reflecting an understanding of the need to expose and deter the Brotherhood's influence activities. Nevertheless, although security services closely monitor the activities of FIOE (through both overt and covert means), they are often compelled to limit their response to monitoring reports and to classifying the organization as "extremist" or "anti-democratic," without the adoption of legal measures.

Against this background, German security authorities coined the term "legalist Islamists" (Legalisten) in reference to the Brotherhood network, in order to describe institutions and individuals whose activities are conducted within the bounds of the law, yet who advance a subversive long-term agenda. Whereas terrorist organizations are outlawed and their operatives arrested, the tools available in relation to these "legal" organizations are largely confined to covert supervision, intelligence monitoring, and the issuance of warnings to governmental authorities. Even in countries where awareness of the potential threat is increasing, it remains the prevailing view that as long as Brotherhood activists operate under the freedoms of expression and association, their activities - such as preaching, fundraising, mosque construction, the establishment of schools, political participation, etc. —are not in themselves illegal.²⁴

This situation effectively grants the Federation democratic legitimacy: it is entitled to operate as a social, religious, and educational institution, to manage assets, raise funds, and organize events - all within the framework of the law, so long as it does not call for violence. Senior Federation figures have learned to leverage this reality; as noted, they

emphasize their efforts in favor of coexistence, while in internal discourse they continue to advance an Islamist agenda - and to date, European law protects their right to da'wa and religious propaganda.²⁵

Modern intelligence reports underscore this dilemma. The Muslim Brotherhood in Europe operates within the framework of fundamental democratic rights and exercises a "constitutional right to promote an Islamist agenda." In this context, European democracies de facto allow Federation of Islamic Organizations in Europe (FIOE) / Council of European Muslims (CEM) and its affiliated bodies to consolidate themselves as legitimate socio-political actors, even though their hostility to core democratic values is well known to security services.²⁶ Some describe this as a "grey zone" in which the Brotherhood operates: despite risk assessments by intelligence services, liberal systems of governance tend to tolerate non-violent ideological activity, even when its objectives undermine the foundational values of liberal democracy.²⁷

Accordingly, notwithstanding the rise in awareness and the warnings issued by security authorities, not only is the organization's activity not prohibited by law, but it also generally does not lose its legitimacy in the eyes of the establishment. Governments continue to invite representatives of the Council to public discussions, appoint individuals affiliated with it to advisory bodies, and treat it as an "address" for engagement with the Muslim community.²⁸ Thus, for example, despite a 2015 UK government report stating that the charity Muslim Association of Britain (MAB), which is linked to FIOE, had "become an important part of the Brotherhood and Hamas structure in the country," British authorities continued to regard it as a partner. In France, although intelligence services identified the Union of Islamic Organizations of France (UOIF) as affiliated with the Brotherhood, successive governments over the years included it in the official religious council (until relations deteriorated in recent years). In Germany, some federal states continue to fund educational projects in cooperation with organizations affiliated with FIOE, despite repeated warnings by the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution in its annual reports.²⁹

It can therefore be concluded that the official approach toward FIOE is ambivalent: on the one hand, official reports (such as a 2020 report by the French Ministry of the Interior) warned that "the Muslim Brotherhood is developing in Europe a policy aimed at promoting a separate Islamic citizenship," undermining social cohesion; on the other hand, European institutions continue to seek dialogue with the organization in the hope of leveraging it as a moderate actor capable of influencing young people away from violence.³⁰

Potential Threats

Despite its lawful and overt activity, European security documents describe Federation of Islamic Organizations in Europe (FIOE) / Council of European Muslims (CEM) and similar bodies as a long-term threat to the social order - one that operates through "soft" and legitimate means, yet steadily erodes societal values. A 2021 government report in Austria stated that "although the Brotherhood is not involved in terrorism, its activity is legal but not legitimate - its objectives contradict democratic norms." Intelligence agencies in Sweden, Germany, France, and the Netherlands reached similar conclusions, noting in their reporting that "without exception, all European security services hold a very

negative view of the Brotherhood movement on the continent.” Documents produced within an EU project further emphasized that “the activity of non-violent Islamists often disappears from public debate, despite the fact that it threatens the European way of life in the long term.” The following are several prominent potential threats:

Ideological Subversion and Incompatibility with Democratic Values

A consensus among European security services defines the Brotherhood network as inherently anti-democratic, operating with the objective of effecting a fundamental transformation of societal and governmental orders. All seven principal security services in Western Europe that have issued formal assessments over the past two decades have stated that the organization pursues objectives and values that are “problematic, subversive, and non-democratic, and that run counter to fundamental rights and Western society.” A 2021 report of the European Parliament cited Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi, who clarified that “the conquest of Europe will be achieved through peaceful means, by way of da’wa and ideology - not by the sword.”

The Brotherhood’s overarching objective of establishing Islamic governance under Sharia law stands in direct contradiction to the principles of liberal democracy. There is concern that, in the future, should the demographic and political weight of Muslim communities increase, the movement’s demands to adapt legislation to Sharia-based values (for example, in the fields of family law, subordination to religious law, and related matters) will intensify.³¹ Austria’s security service warned that “the political system to which [the Brotherhood] aspires resembles a totalitarian regime that does not recognize popular sovereignty or the principles of freedom and equality - an outlook that is incompatible with the constitutional order.” The presence of a movement with such a vision within the European social fabric is therefore defined as a potential long-term threat to the constitutional order, women’s rights, pluralism, and tolerance in Europe.³²

Social Fragmentation and Harm to Integration

Critics of Federation of Islamic Organizations in Europe (FIOE) / Council of European Muslims (CEM) argue that although the Federation declares support for integration, in practice its activities encourage separatism and create barriers between Muslims and the broader population.³³ Brotherhood-affiliated organizations preach caution with regard to full social engagement (in order “not to disintegrate”), develop separate educational and cultural frameworks (such as Islamic youth clubs and private schools), and promote a narrative according to which Muslims constitute a distinct community with its own superior values. These approaches may reinforce trends of ghettoization and make it more difficult for Muslims to feel fully part of the wider society. For example, German intelligence authorities note that Brotherhood organizations “foster separation and work to deepen religious identity at the expense of national identity,” thereby “undermining migrant integration and increasing polarization”.³⁴

In addition, the Federation presents itself as the exclusive representative voice of Muslims, a posture that results in the marginalization of alternative perspectives. Liberal or moderate Muslim communities that are not affiliated with the

Brotherhood often find themselves sidelined and lacking representation with the state, while FIOE advances conservative - and at times radical - positions in their name. This process diminishes the prospects for religious reform and the development of a modern European Islam, by entrenching the dominance of the rigid school associated with the Muslim Brotherhood.

Covert Influence and Gradual “Takeover”

One of the principal concerns expressed by security authorities relates to the Brotherhood’s strategy of carrying out an “internal takeover” of public institutions and representative bodies in Europe. While jihadist groups pursued overt violence and failed, the Brotherhood - according to assessments - has chosen a more sophisticated path: the gradual penetration of democratic mechanisms and representative frameworks in order to accumulate power and influence.³⁵ Reports point to attempts by Brotherhood network activists (at the national level) to be elected to Muslim representative bodies (such as religious councils and mosque boards), to be appointed as “advisors” on religious matters to authorities, and even to integrate into local or national politics - while deliberately keeping their true identity ambiguous. Belgium, the Netherlands, Sweden, and additional countries have reported cases in which associations supported by Federation of Islamic Organizations in Europe (FIOE) / Council of European Muslims (CEM) sought to obtain government funding while their underlying objective was to strengthen the movement itself.³⁶

The organization employs the language of rights and cooperation in order to “remain below the radar” as a loyal partner, while in practice accumulating resources and authority that provide it with an advantage over competitors within the Muslim community.³⁷ A scenario viewed as threatening by some researchers is that, should this trend continue, “the organization will come to exert decisive influence over religious life and even over the political representation of Muslims in Europe,” potentially enabling it to influence policy and legislative measures - such as demands for adjustments to Sharia-based requirements in areas including education systems, legal frameworks, and related fields. A Member of the European Parliament recently warned that “for every European citizen who adopts the Brotherhood’s vision, democracy is weakened at the margins,” as this could render demands for Islamic rule a tangible political issue if large groups were to embrace them.³⁸

Radicalization and Links to Terrorism

Although FIOE itself has not been designated as a terrorist organization by any Western state and has consistently denied any connection to terrorism, its close ties with Brotherhood actors in the Middle East expose it to indirect linkages with extremist organizations. In an overall assessment, intelligence bodies estimate that even without direct involvement in terrorism, the Federation may generate a “radicalization-supportive” environment, in which the normalization of anti-Western positions, antisemitism, or the justification of “armed resistance” in arenas such as Gaza may, over time, prepare young people for violent radicalization. Moreover, intelligence reporting indicates that some organizations affiliated with FIOE have, in the past, been found to be involved in suspicious activity. For example, in

Germany and Belgium, associations linked to the Federation were identified as having maintained contacts with elements of Al-Qaeda - primarily in the areas of fundraising or the recruitment of volunteers for conflicts abroad.³⁹

European Council for Fatwa and Research (ECFR)⁴⁰

Background and Objectives

The European Council for Fatwa and Research (ECFR) is a supranational body of Muslim jurists that issues collective religious legal rulings (fatwas) for Muslims living in Europe. The Council was established in 1997 in London at the initiative of Federation of Islamic Organizations in Europe (FIOE) / Council of European Muslims (CEM), and its headquarters are currently located at the Islamic Cultural Centre in Dublin. The idea for establishing the body emerged from a series of jurisprudential seminars held in the early 1990s (1992 and 1994) by Muslim clerics in Europe, which examined the lives of Muslims on the continent and the adjustments required in Islamic law in light of their status as a minority. The Council presents itself as an independent body offering "pragmatic" religious rulings for Muslim minorities. In practice, however, European intelligence services, academic researchers, and several governments identify it as the supreme religious authority of the Muslim Brotherhood in Europe. It should be noted, nevertheless, that no Western government has banned the Council's activities.

The Council set itself the ambitious objective of becoming the central source of religious authority for Sunni Muslims in Europe, in order to assist them in "reconciling their desire to adhere to Islamic law while living in non-Muslim societies," through the issuance of fatwas addressing the needs of Muslim communities in the European context. The Council's rulings are intended to guide Muslims in a "comprehensive life program for the individual, the family, society, and the state" - a formulation reminiscent of the program articulated by Hassan al-Banna, the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood. The fatwas address, inter alia, issues of family, finance, education, and the interaction between Muslim minorities and European states in light of the principles of Islamic law (Sharia).

Beyond the issuance of fatwas, the Council pursues additional objectives, including the unification of religious scholars living in Europe (although studies have shown that most members of the Council reside in the Middle East and have limited direct connection to Europe), the publication of research on issues arising in Europe "in a manner that fulfills the objectives of Sharia," and the preservation of the supremacy of Sharia. For example, in a section of the Council's application titled "European Norms and Their Impact on Issues Concerning Muslim Women," the Council states that European norms lack value when they contradict Islamic injunctions - for instance, with regard to full equality in inheritance between women and men - and other related matters.

Structure and Leadership

Since the Council's first convening in 1997, attended by fifteen scholars, internal bodies supporting its work have been established. At the first General Assembly, a draft constitution for the Council was adopted, and a plenary body (a General Assembly of all members) and a General Secretariat for day-to-day administration were created. At the second

session in 1998, it was decided to establish two additional chapters in France (Paris) and the United Kingdom (Manchester) in order to address part of the workload that had accumulated between sessions. Within the framework of the European Council for Fatwa and Research (ECFR), permanent and ad hoc committees operate, including a Fatwa Committee responsible for drafting religious rulings, a Research, Translation, and Publications Committee, a Planning and Information Committee, and a Dialogue and Communications Committee. In addition to these committees, local fatwa committees and local chapters - such as the Fatwa Committee in the United Kingdom and the Theological Council in France - disseminate ECFR rulings to local mosques.

Council members convene for a regular session at least once a year, usually in European Union capitals - sometimes at the headquarters in Dublin and sometimes in other European cities. Over the years, a substantial proportion of the sessions have been held in various locations across Europe and in Turkey, with Istanbul alone hosting eight Council sessions between 2006 and 2018. During these sessions, papers are discussed, fatwas are issued, and official documents are adopted; the Council's decisions are usually published in Arabic and occasionally in additional European languages. The Council's work is not conducted on a continuous daily basis, aside from its office in Dublin and its publishing activity, and it does not maintain permanent operational teams or year-round organized activity. As a result, the core of its activity is concentrated around the periodic sessions and the discussions conducted therein.

The Council includes religious scholars from diverse backgrounds and legal schools - Maliki, Hanbali, and even Salafi - reflecting the pragmatism of the Muslim Brotherhood in building an umbrella organization that represents diversity within the Muslim community in Europe, while seeking to exert control over the development of contemporary Islamic thought on the continent. As Rashed Ghannouchi himself stated: "Some members belong to the Brotherhood and some do not, but what matters is the ideology, not the organizational label."

The Council selects its own members, and as of 2024 it comprises approximately forty "full" members, about one third of whom reside outside Europe yet retain voting rights - thereby ensuring continued influence by senior Brotherhood figures from the Middle East. The Council's bylaws, approved at the first meeting in London (1997), set out the criteria for "full" membership: appropriate legal education (academic or equivalent), good conduct and adherence to the principles of Sharia, residence on the European continent, broad knowledge of Islamic fiqh and an understanding of the European environment, and approval by an absolute majority of Council members. The bylaws also allow for the election of a limited number of representatives who are not residents of Europe, provided that they do not exceed 25 percent of the membership. In practice, however, these criteria have almost never been applied.

At present, the overwhelming majority of Council members - particularly at the leadership level - are openly or indirectly affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood movements in their respective countries. For example, all six representatives of France on the Council are affiliated with the Union of Islamic Organizations of France (UOIF), the umbrella organization of the Brotherhood in France. Already within the founding composition, two prominent Brotherhood figures were elected as Chairman and Vice Chairman: Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi and Faysal Mawlawi

(head of the Muslim Brotherhood movement in Lebanon). Al-Qaradawi led the Council from its establishment and for more than two decades thereafter. In addition, other figures from the Brotherhood movement in the Middle East headed the Council from its inception, despite residing outside Europe. Following Qaradawi's retirement in 2018, the Council struggled to maintain cohesion and subsequently formed a new leadership composed of approximately 30-35 members. The current leadership composition likewise includes senior figures identified with the Brotherhood, among them:

- **Dr. Abdullah al-Judai** - President of the Council (since 2018). Born in Iraq and based in the United Kingdom, al-Judai is a scholar of Islamic law and an author. He also serves as a member of the International Union of Muslim Scholars, previously headed by al-Qaradawi, and participates in additional fatwa bodies in the United Kingdom (such as the British Fatwa Committee). He was involved in the establishment of the British chapter of the Council and serves as a bridge between ECFR and the Muslim community in the United Kingdom.
- **Dr. Ahmed Jaballah** - Vice President. A religious scholar and French thinker of Tunisian origin, regarded as one of the senior leaders of the Muslim Brotherhood in France, and a former president of UOIF. Jaballah was also among the founders of European Institute of Human Sciences (IESH) and currently serves as the Institute's rector. His experience enables him to contribute to jurisprudential rulings, particularly in the fields of education and academia.
- **Sheikh Suhaib Hasan** - Vice President. A scholar and imam based in London, of Pakistani origin. Hasan is among the early graduates of the Islamic University of Medina in Saudi Arabia and was a founder of the Islamic Sharia Council in the United Kingdom - a body functioning as a religious court for family matters for Muslims in England. He is also known for his ties to Salafi circles, yet is involved in the Muslim Brotherhood network in the United Kingdom. His extensive jurisprudential experience grants him authority primarily in the fields of personal status law and classical Sharia rulings.
- **Sheikh Hussein Halawa** - Secretary General of ECFR. Halawa, born in Egypt, has served since 1996 as the chief imam of the Islamic Cultural Centre of Ireland (ICCI) in Clonskeagh - the institution hosting ECFR's headquarters in Dublin. He is a key figure in Irish and European Islam and is regarded as close to the Muslim Brotherhood. Halawa also serves as Secretary General of the Council of Imams of Ireland, while his daughter, Fatima Halawa, is active in Forum of European Muslim Youth and Student Organizations (FEMYSO), reflecting intergenerational continuity within the Brotherhood network. As Secretary General, Halawa is responsible for the Council's administration, the organization of sessions, and managerial operations, and serves as a liaison between ECFR and parallel bodies in the Muslim world.
- **Dr. Khaled Hanafy** - Assistant Secretary General. Hanafy is a younger-generation cleric, born in Egypt and residing in Germany, and also serves as head of the German chapter of IESH. In addition, he chairs the Council of Imams and Scholars in Germany - a body comparable in essence to the British Sharia Council. Dr. Hanafy is regarded as a leading figure within the Brotherhood network in Germany, with particular expertise in Islamic

finance jurisprudence and in issues relating to refugees and integration. His appointment to ECFR's leadership reflects a broader trend toward expanding the representation of a younger, Europe-based generation within the Council's leadership.

Alongside these senior figures, the Council also includes leaders from the broader Muslim world, among them Rashid Ghannouchi (Tunisia), Dr. Ali al-Qaradaghi (Qatar), Dr. Jasser Auda (Qatar/West), Dr. Salman al-Ouda (Saudi Arabia), Sheikh Issam al-Bashir (Sudan), Salim Shikhi (Libya), and Dr. Abdelmajid Najjar (Tunisia/France). In the current composition, only a minority of Council members are native-born Europeans. This fact, together with the reality that the Council's leaders for many years resided in Qatar and Lebanon rather than in Europe, has repeatedly given rise to claims that the Council is "European in name only" and is deeply influenced by the Arab world. Nevertheless, in the current period the Council has sought to incorporate a stronger local European perspective into its leadership and jurisprudence, with the aim of reinforcing its legitimacy as a European institution rather than merely an extension of Middle Eastern clerical authority.

Beyond the clear personal and institutional linkage to Federation of Islamic Organizations in Europe (FIOE) / Council of European Muslims (CEM) and its affiliated bodies, the connections between ECFR and the Brotherhood network are also reflected in patterns of funding and physical infrastructure. As noted, the Council operates from the Islamic Cultural Centre in Dublin, which was historically established and financed by the Al Maktoum Foundation in the late 1990s. The Foundation funded both the construction of the mosque and centre in Dublin and the operational costs of ECFR conferences across Europe until 2012. This financial support enabled the establishment of the Council's initial institutional infrastructure. Following changes in the position of the United Arab Emirates toward the Muslim Brotherhood after 2012, Dubai-based involvement declined, and funding from alternative sources - including charities based in Qatar and Turkey - became more prominent in supporting the Council's activities.

In addition, the Council provides religious-legal rulings that are relied upon by various bodies operating within the Brotherhood-affiliated ecosystem in Europe. For example, organizations such as Islamic Relief Worldwide (IRW) have, at times, referenced ECFR rulings in matters related to financial conduct. More broadly, Islamic institutions, charitable organizations, and educational frameworks draw upon the Council's fatwas on issues including electoral participation and the wearing of religious attire in the workplace, thereby deriving religious legitimacy for their activities.

Jurisprudential Approaches and Ideology

The ideological orientation of the European Council for Fatwa and Research (ECFR) is shaped largely by the thought of Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi. Al-Qaradawi coined the concept of *al-wasatiyya* ("the middle path"), which he presented as a form of "moderate Islam," reflecting a position that seeks to balance between secular extremism and religious extremism. According to al-Qaradawi, this approach offers a synthesis that combines the immutable principles of Islam with the changing conditions of time and place. While ECFR's jurisprudential line presents itself as moderate and adapted to the Western context, it nevertheless maintains fidelity to the long-term objectives of political Islam, within

the framework of the gradualist strategy articulated by Hassan al-Banna. This dual-layered approach - pragmatic accommodation alongside the preservation of a conservative ideological core - characterizes many of the Council's rulings. Fatwas are issued in the name of the Council through a collective process, which both shields individual scholars from personal accountability and confers institutional authority on the decisions.

Under al-Qaradawi's leadership, the Council adopted the doctrine of *fiqh al-aqalliyyat* (jurisprudence for minorities), developed in the 1990s by al-Qaradawi and Dr. Taha Jabir al-Alwani in order to assist Muslims in Western-societies in maintaining their religious commitments within a secular environment. This doctrine holds that Muslim minorities living in non-Muslim states require a distinct and flexible jurisprudential framework tailored to their specific circumstances. In practice, it seeks to provide creative legal solutions to situations in which traditional Islamic law comes into tension with state law or the norms of the majority culture. To this end, it draws on Islamic legal principles such as *maqasid al-sharia* (the higher objectives of Sharia), *hiyal* (legal stratagems), and the doctrine of *darura* (necessity), in order to permit practices otherwise prohibited, such as interest-bearing mortgages or participation in secular elections. As scholars have noted, this represents not only a jurisprudential adaptation but also the construction of a broader framework for socio-political interaction grounded in religion, whose ultimate purpose is to strengthen the internal cohesion of Muslim minorities, increase their political influence within society, and advance *da'wa* (Islamic outreach) with the aim of promoting the gradual Islamization of Europe through non-violent means.

Publications, Accessibility, and Influence

The Council disseminates its decisions and rulings through various channels, including its official website, an academic journal, and compilations of fatwas published in book form. In the past, decisions were also published in FIOE's monthly magazine *Al-Europiya* and on the well-known IslamOnline website, particularly during the period of Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi's active involvement. Some Council sessions and interviews with its members have been broadcast live on Al Jazeera and other satellite television channels, and have also received coverage in European mainstream media outlets such as the BBC and The Guardian.

In order to increase accessibility among younger audiences, the Council launched a mobile application in 2019 entitled *Fatwa Euro*, which aggregated its religious rulings; this initiative generated significant controversy, as discussed below. Even after the application was removed, its content was preserved and continued to circulate via websites and YouTube channels.

The extent of ECFR's tangible influence on the daily lives of Muslims in Europe remains subject to debate. A study conducted in Germany in 2017 found that most imams and worshippers in the mosques examined were either unaware of the Council's existence or did not rely directly on its rulings. This finding suggests that the Council's influence is largely indirect, exercised through community leadership and educated elites. At the same time, connections with European Union bodies afford Brotherhood-affiliated actors access to decision-makers and influence

over discourse relating to Islamophobia, integration, and counterterrorism, through what has been described as “soft penetration.”

Although ECFR’s bylaws require the translation of fatwas and research into European languages, in practice most content is available only in Arabic. Translations into English are published only occasionally, and into French in isolated cases. This limits the accessibility of the material to the broader European public and reinforces perceptions that the Council is not primarily addressing local Muslim communities, notwithstanding its use of modern dissemination tools, while its approach remains rooted in classical Islamic theology.

Threats, Fatwas, and Controversial Incidents

The Mobile Application: In 2019, the Council launched the EURO FATWA mobile application, intended to make its religious rulings accessible to the general public. The application was first presented at the annual conference of the French umbrella organization Union of Islamic Organizations of France (UOIF), but immediately generated significant controversy following the inclusion of a foreword written by the Council’s former president, Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi. The foreword attributed negative characteristics to Jews in sweeping terms, including a statement asserting that “Muslims had brought shame upon Islam and behaved similarly to Jews who ruled that theft was permissible,” and also contained expressions praising jihad.

Following public exposure of the antisemitic content, Google Play removed the application in the United Kingdom on the grounds that it violated platform policies relating to hate speech. British media outlets described it as “the Muslim Brotherhood’s radicalization app.” Apple likewise faced criticism for having allowed the application to remain available, despite the fact that at one stage it was ranked among the top 100 most-downloaded applications in the App Store in several European countries. Subsequently, security services in a number of German federal states issued formal warnings against the use of the application, cautioning that its content was linked to Muslim Brotherhood ideology and could serve as “a component in the radicalization process” of young Muslims. Taken as a whole, the episode raised concrete concerns that the Council’s materials - including those disseminated through digital platforms - may contain incitement against religious groups, in particular antisemitic content, and may contribute to the promotion of extremism in Europe.

Legitimization of Terrorism: Over the years, senior figures of the European Council for Fatwa and Research (ECFR) have, on several occasions, issued statements that justify violence in the name of Islam. Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi, who served as President of the Council for more than two decades, was widely known for his public support of Hamas suicide attacks against Israeli civilians, which he described as legitimate acts of martyrdom. He further legitimized the participation of women in such attacks and explicitly excluded Israeli civilians from the category of non-combatants.⁴¹ In addition, al-Qaradawi employed sharply sectarian rhetoric and, in other contexts, called for jihad in Syria. Statements of this nature led countries such as the United Kingdom and France to deny al-Qaradawi entry, out of concern that his preaching could encourage escalation and polarization among local Muslim populations.

Al-Qaradawi's deputy, Sheikh Faisal Mawlawi of Lebanon, likewise published a fatwa on the IslamOnline website that explicitly permitted suicide attacks against Israeli civilians as acts of defense. He further ruled that the mutilation of enemy soldiers' bodies could be permissible as an act of retaliation, applying this reasoning specifically to American soldiers in Iraq. Such statements, issued by senior figures within a Europe-based religious jurisprudential body, constitute de facto justification for terrorism and, in certain cases, for war crimes.

Accordingly, notwithstanding the Muslim Brotherhood's efforts to present its ideology as moderate and peace-oriented, it is evident that it does not constitute a genuine barrier against jihadist violence and, at times, may contribute to creating an enabling environment for it. Although al-Qaradawi distanced himself from Al-Qaeda, he openly praised organizations such as Hamas and supported their actions. These messages - glorifying violent resistance under specific conditions - undermine claims that the Brotherhood serves as a safeguard against terrorism and instead function as factors that encourage and intensify radicalization. Moreover, European intelligence reporting has indicated that ECFR scholars serve as religious authorities for Hamas outreach committees, and that the Council's fatwas are cited in the organization's instructional materials.

The Hijab: The Council consistently defines the hijab as a religious obligation. A 2002 fatwa ruled that women in Europe are required to cover their hair, on the grounds that doing so presents them as "serious and respectable women." The Council further stated that head covering constitutes a religious obligation agreed upon by religious consensus. The Council's approach to women is also reflected in another fatwa stipulating that a woman must obtain her husband's consent in order to cut her hair, on the grounds that the husband is the one who "benefits from her hair."

Attitudes toward Non-Muslims: Another ECFR fatwa states that a Muslim should not live among non-Muslims if doing so requires compromising or relinquishing Islamic identity, unless no alternative exists.

Capital Punishment for Apostasy: The most controversial ECFR fatwa in the Western context permits the death penalty for those who leave Islam. The ruling states that the execution of an individual who renounces Islam falls solely under the authority of an Islamic state, that the punishment is intended to protect the collective from harm, and that it does not infringe upon freedom of expression or belief, on the grounds that the individual's actions are deemed to harm the broader community and the state.

Cultivation of a Victimhood Narrative and Hostility toward Secular Society: The leadership of ECFR and many of its members consistently promote a narrative portraying Muslims in Western societies as being under threat and subject to "oppression" by secular society and by state authorities. This narrative is used to justify separation and heightened caution toward full social integration. It is combined with religious messaging that places Sharia law above state law. For example, Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi wrote that "the call for secularism among Muslims is in fact atheism and a rejection of Islam, and accepting it as a system of governance in place of Islamic law constitutes disbelief in its entirety." The implication of such statements is a sweeping delegitimization of democratic-secular systems of

governance: any Muslim who accepts the supremacy of state law over Islamic law is thereby portrayed as acting in defiance of religious doctrine.

Rulings of this nature may undermine the loyalty of some Muslims to their European states and create an identity conflict between lawful citizenship and religious affiliation. Beyond this, ECFR promotes the doctrine of jurisprudence for minorities, which encourages Muslims to maintain a degree of value-based distinctiveness and separation from broader society, and to prefer autonomous Islamic communal frameworks whenever possible. In this manner, ECFR's ideology - although it does not explicitly advocate violent rebellion - may nevertheless create an environment in which radicalization can emerge.

Undermining Principles of Equality and Human Rights: Despite its "moderate" public image, senior ECFR figures have repeatedly articulated positions that conflict with widely accepted European human rights standards. For example, al-Qaradawi stated that homosexuals are subject to the same severe punishment prescribed for adultery, an assertion widely understood as implying capital punishment under Islamic law. In another instance, al-Qaradawi issued rulings permitting female genital mutilation on grounds of "modesty" and ritual purity, defended the practice as consistent with Islam, and argued that it should not be categorically condemned - despite the clear medical and legal consensus that the practice constitutes a grave violation of girls' rights and bodily integrity.

Such positions depart sharply from European standards of human rights and equality. Critics of the Council have argued that these views undermine the European human rights framework from within. For example, the French newspaper *Le Monde* examined ECFR's activities as early as 2007 and concluded that the Council promotes a "traditional" and non-reformist interpretation of Islam that is incompatible with principles of gender equality and religious freedom in France. Governmental bodies have expressed similar concerns. The French Senate's 2020 inquiry committee on Islamist radicalization emphasized that while the activities of bodies such as ECFR are not illegal, they nevertheless undermine the foundations of the secular republic by disseminating transnational ideologies, promoting intolerance toward other minorities (including Jews and LGBT communities), and challenging the authority of the state.

Forum of European Muslim Youth and Student Organizations (FEMYSO)

FEMYSO is an umbrella organization that currently operates as the broadest framework for the association of Muslim youth and student organizations in Europe. The organization describes itself as the “de facto voice of Muslim youth in Europe,” seeking “to be a model European institution that brings together Muslim youth for networking and the exchange of ideas, develops them to realize their full potential, and works closely with its member organizations and other partners to build a better Europe for all”.⁴²

The process leading to the establishment of FEMYSO began with a pan-European youth conference held in June 1995 in Stockholm under the title “Islam in Europe.” The conference was organized by Muslim youth groups from Sweden, the United Kingdom, and France (SUM, YMUK, and JMF).⁴³ The Stockholm event was funded by the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and included numerous European Muslim researchers and activists who were not affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood, alongside many participants who were clearly identified with the Brotherhood. Ultimately, the conference generated unease among some participants, who had not been aware of its underlying objectives and had agreed to take part due to the sponsorship of the Swedish government. The prominent French scholar Gilles Kepel acknowledged this dynamic in an interview with a Swedish newspaper at the time: “I was surprised to see how the youth conference was dominated by Islamists,” Kepel stated. “They are well organized, intelligent, and have networks across Europe. Thanks to this, they managed to take control of the youth conference, even though they are a minority among Muslims in Europe”.⁴⁴

The conference led to a follow-up meeting in Leicester in June 1996, attended by representatives of 19 youth organizations from 11 countries. At this meeting, convened in the town of Markfield - home to the Islamic Foundation - the foundations were laid for the launch of FEMYSO.⁴⁵ Federation of Islamic Organizations in Europe (FIOE) formally initiated the establishment of FEMYSO at that conference, in cooperation with the Saudi-based organization World Assembly of Muslim Youth (WAMY). Following the drafting of bylaws and operating procedures, FEMYSO was registered in 1996 as a non-governmental organization headquartered in Brussels. The establishment process and internal FIOE documents clearly indicate that FEMYSO was created as a dedicated arm of the Muslim Brotherhood network in Europe, as part of its “specialization strategy” - the creation of sectoral organizations (youth, women, religious preachers, and others) under the FIOE umbrella.⁴⁶

Beyond serving as a federation of youth and student organizations, FEMYSO functions as a leadership cultivation network in which members of the second generation of the Muslim Brotherhood in Europe develop international connections and political experience, while being prepared for future leadership roles within Brotherhood-affiliated organizations in their respective countries. In addition, some activists go on to pursue political careers at the national level, underscoring the organization’s capacity to serve as a springboard for broader public activity. A French intelligence report published in 2025 explicitly identified FEMYSO as the “youth arm of the CEM” and described it as “a training structure for potential senior figures within the Muslim Brotherhood movement”.⁴⁷

Leadership and Ties to the Muslim Brotherhood

First, World Assembly of Muslim Youth (WAMY), mentioned above, was one of the principal NGOs established by Saudi Arabia in the 1960s and 1970s to disseminate its ultra-conservative interpretation of Islam. Although the organization was generously funded by the Saudi government and wealthy donors from the Arab Gulf, it was staffed primarily by members of the Muslim Brotherhood. For decades, WAMY provided substantial financial support to a wide range of Muslim organizations - most of them under Brotherhood control - across the world.⁴⁸ Since its establishment, FEMYSO's office in Brussels has been located at the same address, occupying half a floor, while the other half was for many years used by WAMY offices. The lease was financed by a senior Brotherhood figure in Belgium, Bassam Khattab. Thus, from its earliest stages, FEMYSO functioned as a Brotherhood arm operating in practice under the authority of the umbrella organization Federation of Islamic Organizations in Europe (FIOE) and financed with the assistance of external actors integrated into the Brotherhood network.⁴⁹

Moreover, since FEMYSO's founding, the composition of its leadership has consistently reflected a clear pattern of affiliation with the Muslim Brotherhood network in Europe. Its first president, Ibrahim al-Zayat, simultaneously served as head of the "Youth and Students" portfolio within FIOE. German authorities described al-Zayat as "the spider in the Islamist web," due to his central role in the organization Islamic Community in Germany (IGD), which they identified as "the most important organization of Muslim Brotherhood supporters in Germany." He played a key role in establishing the Forum as a pan-European arm of the movement, leveraging his extensive connections with Brotherhood institutions at the international level.⁵⁰

FEMYSO's leadership has consistently included family members of prominent Muslim Brotherhood figures. Already in the first executive lineup, alongside al-Zayat, were young individuals from leading Brotherhood families, including Hadiya Himat, daughter of Ghaleb Himat (former president of IGD, who was accused of terrorism financing after 9/11), and Khaled Swaid, son of Hassan Swaid (one of the founders of IGD). Academic studies and intelligence reports confirm that these family ties continue to shape FEMYSO to this day, ensuring ideological and organizational continuity. This second generation - educated, professionally mature, and fluent in European languages - leverages its familial background while maintaining close and ongoing links to the broader Muslim Brotherhood network.⁵¹

Throughout FEMYSO's years of operation, the composition of its leadership has continued to reflect its close proximity to the Muslim Brotherhood. A comprehensive analysis of executive board rosters (2003-2020) found that approximately one fifth of board members were descendants of first-generation Muslim Brotherhood leaders in Europe, while an additional roughly 60 percent were central activists - most often heads of youth cells - within Brotherhood frameworks in their respective countries. The remaining board members were generally Muslim activists from parallel Islamist currents (for example, the Turkish Millî Görüş movement or Jamaat-e-Islami). Michel Privot, a former Belgian activist who later left the Brotherhood and served as FEMYSO's Secretary-General in 2003, described this pattern as follows: "Some are 'sons and daughters of' exiled Brotherhood dynasties - parents who were political

refugees as a result of their activity in the movement, whose children now operate in Europe while leveraging the family name and the symbolic capital it has accumulated. Alongside them are a number of individuals who are not Brotherhood members but come from similar movements (Milli Görüş, Jamaat-e-Islami, and others).⁵²

The following are several prominent figures from recent years:

- **Intissar Kherigi:** Served as President of Forum of European Muslim Youth and Student Organizations (FEMYSO) in 2013. Kherigi is the daughter of Rached Ghannouchi, head of the Tunisian Ennahda movement and one of the global leaders of the Muslim Brotherhood. Under her leadership, in the executive board elected in 2013, all four senior officeholders were sons or daughters of leading Islamist families in Europe.⁵³
- **Hajar El-Kaddou:** Served as First Vice-President under Kherigi (2013). Dr. El-Kaddou, born in Ireland, holds a PhD in the field of energy and has a record of activity in interfaith initiatives and charitable organizations. Beyond her personal achievements, she is also the daughter of Nouh El-Kaddou, a Muslim Brotherhood figure in Ireland. Her father serves as director of the Islamic Cultural Centre of Ireland (Clonskeagh, Dublin) and as a trustee of the Europe Trust foundation.⁵⁴
- **Youssef Himat:** Served as Second Vice-President in 2013. Youssef is the son of Ghaleb Himat, one of the most senior historical figures of the Muslim Brotherhood in Europe (mentioned above as a former head of IGD and a close associate of Youssef Nada). His older sister, Hadiya, had already served on FEMYSO's leadership in the late 1990s, meaning that two members of the same family took part in shaping the leadership of the younger generation. The family constitutes, in effect, an aristocratic lineage within the Brotherhood network: for decades, Ghaleb Himat was a close partner of Youssef Nada - often described as the "foreign minister" of the global Muslim Brotherhood - and together they managed financial institutions that served the movement. Against this background, the integration of family members into FEMYSO's leadership is unsurprising.⁵⁵
- **Anas Segroni:** Served as Treasurer of FEMYSO. Anas comes from a leading Muslim Brotherhood family in France: his father, Mohamed-Taïeb Segroni, and his mother, Hela Khomsi, are among the senior figures of Union of Islamic Organizations of France (UOIF). His mother, Khomsi, also headed the "Muslim Women's League in France" and was among the founders of European Forum of Muslim Women (EFOMW), the umbrella organization for Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated women's groups in Europe. In recent years, Anas himself has emerged as a rising figure: he headed the Muslim Students of France (EMF) and currently oversees youth affairs on behalf of UOIF in France.⁵⁶
- **Kauthar Bouchallikht:** A young Dutch activist who previously served on FEMYSO's leadership. She gained prominence when she was elected to the Dutch Parliament in 2021. Bouchallikht's father headed Islamic Relief Worldwide (IRW) in the Netherlands for nearly two decades.⁵⁷ Her participation in FEMYSO and subsequent entry into Dutch politics illustrates both critics' claims regarding Brotherhood "infiltration" of the political sphere through ostensibly moderate youth activists, and the value-based tensions this trajectory can generate.

For example, when it emerged that Bouchallikht had previously attended an event at which conservative views were expressed, she was publicly required to clarify her positions on LGBT issues and antisemitism.

- **Hania Shalal:** The current President of FEMYSO (elected in December 2023). Shalal is a young French activist who previously served as the first national president - and the first woman to hold that position - of the Muslim Students of France (EMF). She has adopted a firm public communications line in defending the organization against allegations of Brotherhood affiliation, stating in response to reports linking FEMYSO to the Muslim Brotherhood that the organization has no ideological or structural ties to any such movement. Alongside Shalal, the 2023-2025 leadership includes additional figures with backgrounds connected to the Brotherhood network: the new Secretary-General, Omar Abu-Kalbein, comes from a Muslim charitable organization in the United Kingdom; and the new head of fundraising, Ibrahim Ali from Italy, concurrently serves as president of the Islamic Youth Movement in Italy.⁵⁸

It should be noted that these familial dynamics - whether within FEMYSO or in other national or pan-European bodies of the network - have long been a source of internal friction within Brotherhood circles. While some of the “children of the Brotherhood” appointed to leadership positions are undoubtedly capable, many activists without familial ties contend that such appointments lack transparency and that these individuals are favored over equally or more qualified activists solely because they do not belong to prominent families.

Structure

FEMYSO comprises 32 member organizations from 22 countries. The majority consist of youth chapters of local Islamic federations identified with the Muslim Brotherhood movement. The organization’s central headquarters is located in Brussels, in close proximity to European Union institutions - a location that facilitates lobbying activities and representation in dealings with European institutions.^{59 60} FEMYSO holds participatory (consultative) status with the Council of Europe and participates as a member of the Council’s Advisory Council on Youth, a body that shapes pan-European youth policy. In addition, the organization is recognized as a member of the European Students' Union, where it is perceived as representing the voice of Muslim students across the continent.^{61 62 63}

FEMYSO’s internal structure includes a General Assembly, an Executive Committee, and a Board of Trustees. The Executive Committee is headed by a President elected for a two-year term and is responsible for formulating work programs and leading day-to-day activities.⁶⁴ Notably, the organization’s official website currently lists the names and addresses of only 30 organizations, despite claiming a total membership of 32.⁶⁵

Country	Organization Name
Albania	Ardhmeria - The Future
Belgium	Council of European Muslims - Youth Department
Bosnia and Herzegovina Czech Republic	Ligue des Musulmans de Belgique - Youth & Students Asocijacija za kulturu obrazovanje i sport - AKOS Muslimský Svaz Studentů a Mládeže

Finland	Nuorten Muslimien Foorumi – NMF
	Nuoret Muslimit – NUMU
France	Étudiants Musulmans de France – EMF
Germany	Islamische Gemeinschaft Millî Görüş – IGMG – Youth & Studetns
Gibraltar	Muslim Youth of Gibraltar
Hungary	Muslim Ifjúsági Társaság – MIT
Ireland	Muslim Association of Ireland – Youth
	Muslim Youth of Ireland
	Islamic Cultural Center Ireland – Youth
Italy	Giovani Musulmani d'Italia – GMI
Moldova	Society of Islamic Culture Assalam
Netherlands	Moslimstudenten Associatie Nederland – MSA Netherlands
North Macedonia	Forumi Rinor Islam – FRI
Norway	Norges Unge Muslimer – NUM
	Stowarzyszenie Studentów Muzułmańskich w Polsce –MSAP
	Muslim Students Union in Romania
	Všeobecný zväz moslimských študentov v Slovensko –GUMSS
	Asociacion de Jovanes Musulmanes en Valencia
	Göteborgs Unga Muslimer
	Council of Ukrainians Muslims
	Federation of Student Islamic Societies – FOSIS
	Muslim Association of Britain Youth – MABY
	Muslim Scout Fellowship – MSF
	The Islamic Society of Britain – ISB
	Islamic Foundation Youth – IF-Y

Activities

The organization operates as a pan-European umbrella framework that maintains ongoing partnerships with institutions of the European Union and the Council of Europe, primarily in the fields of combating discrimination, education, youth policy, and the promotion of civic participation. Representatives of the organization regularly take part in conferences, hearings, and discussions within the European Parliament and the European Commission, submit position papers, and respond to formal consultations on a wide range of issues - from freedom of religion to counter-terrorism policy.^{66 67} The organization is consistently invited to the European Youth Event (EYE) held at the European Parliament in Strasbourg and, in recent years, has established working relationships with progressive Members of the European Parliament, primarily from the Socialists and Democrats (S&D) group and the Greens/European Free Alliance (Greens/EFA).^{68 69} In parallel, the organization maintains extensive cooperation with Council of Europe bodies, including the European Youth Foundation, the Youth Department, the Conference of International Non-Governmental

Organizations (INGOs), the Advisory Council on Youth, and the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI). Within the framework of these partnerships, the organization has led workshops on intercultural and interfaith dialogue, as well as initiatives aimed at combating Islamophobia.⁷⁰

The organization's advocacy activities rely on a combination of public campaigns and an active media presence, particularly on social media platforms. FEMYSO promotes a narrative that portrays Muslims in Europe as a marginalized group and as victims of institutional discrimination, while calling for broader recognition of Muslim practices in the public sphere. Campaigns initiated by the organization include "Forgotten Women," conducted in cooperation with the European Network Against Racism (ENAR), which addressed the impact of Islamophobia on Muslim women, as well as the European Day of Action against Islamophobia, held in September 2022 at the European Parliament with the participation of Members of Parliament.^{71 72} In 2013, the organization launched the IMAN project - a monitoring and response network addressing incidents of Islamophobia - aimed at providing legal assistance to victims, training police officers to identify hate crimes, and supporting civil society organizations in their engagement with state authorities.⁷³ The initiative, implemented in several European countries, was funded by the Open Society Foundations and by the European Commission.⁷⁴

In addition to its advocacy activities, FEMYSO is also involved in projects addressing environmental issues, identity, and political participation. For example, the organization led the "Green Up My Community" campaign, aimed at encouraging environmental engagement while preserving Islamic identity, and took part in European Parliament initiatives to increase youth voter turnout, including the "Your Voice, Your Choice" campaign ahead of the 2019 elections and the "This Time I'm Voting" initiative.^{75 76} Beyond this, the organization offers a comprehensive training framework for Muslim youth in Europe. This includes the "Build My NGO" program, which developed management and advocacy skills among more than 250 young participants from 18 countries; ongoing cooperation with the Council of Europe to hold educational seminars on topics such as human rights and democratic participation; and annual summer schools that combine the shaping of Muslim identity with practical tools for civic engagement at the European level.⁷⁷

One of the most prominent examples of the organization's activities is the hijab-related campaign launched in 2021 in cooperation with the Council of Europe and jointly funded with the European Commission. The campaign, conducted under the hashtag "WE_CAN_4HRS," featured posters bearing slogans such as "Beauty is in diversity, just as freedom is in the hijab" and "Happiness is in the hijab," presenting the wearing of the hijab as an expression of personal freedom and as part of Europe's cultural diversity. The workshops from which the campaign emerged were organized by FEMYSO together with the Council of Europe, building on a decade of cooperation between the two bodies. However, the campaign sparked a public outcry in France - a country in which the hijab is a highly contentious issue due to the principle of secularism. Politicians from across the political spectrum condemned the messages, and the Minister Delegate for Citizenship, Sarah El Haïry, stated that France had lodged a strong protest that led to the campaign's

immediate removal.⁷⁸ The Council of Europe subsequently issued an apology and clarified that the messages reflected the views of the workshop participants rather than the institution's official position.⁷⁹

Funding

In addition to funding originating from the Europe Trust and the European Muslim Brotherhood network, FEMYSO collects membership fees from its affiliated organizations and conducts online fundraising campaigns through platforms such as LaunchGood.⁸⁰ Alongside these sources, a substantial portion of FEMYSO's operational funding derives from a combination of European public resources and foreign funding. FEMYSO's annual reports consistently cite support from the European Youth Foundation of the Council of Europe, the European Commission, the Open Society Foundations, and the Turkish Ministry of Youth and Sports. For example, according to data published by the European Commission, between 2007 and 2021 FEMYSO received cumulative grants exceeding €200,000 from European Union budgets under youth, education, and anti-discrimination programs.⁸¹

Additional funding has also originated from Turkey and Qatar, which in recent years have become the principal patrons of the global Muslim Brotherhood network following the decline of Saudi and Emirati support. By way of illustration, the League of Muslims of Belgium (LMB), whose youth organization is affiliated with FEMYSO, reportedly received a donation of more than €1 million from Qatar and approximately €150,000 from Kuwait, according to a 2016 report. These funds supported the League's Islamic centers and associated activities. Turkish involvement is reflected in investments by the Government of Turkey - through the Presidency of Religious Affairs (Diyanet) and aid agencies such as the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TIKA) - in mosques and Islamic communities in Europe identified with the Muslim Brotherhood or with the Milli Görüş movement. The European Milli Görüş organization, whose youth division is a member of FEMYSO, has benefited from political and financial support from the Turkish governing establishment.⁸²

Ideological Impacts and Threats⁸³

Although FEMYSO presents itself as a youth organization engaged in rights, equality, and dialogue, security and governmental authorities in several European countries regard it - and parallel organizations within the Muslim Brotherhood network - as a subversive threat to the democratic order and to open society. The Government of France, for example, formally protested European Union engagement with Forum of European Muslim Youth and Student Organizations (FEMYSO), describing it as "an Islamist organization that attacks France and infiltrates our institutions".⁸⁴ The concern stems from the view that, under the banner of minority rights discourse, the organization in practice advances an Islamist ideology. The following are several examples of potential threats inherent in FEMYSO's activities:

- **Dual rhetoric and anti-democratic ideology:** Testimonies from within the network point to a gap between the public messaging of FEMYSO activists - emphasizing democracy, dialogue, and tolerance - and internal messaging that remains dogmatic and intolerant. Mahmoud Aldiba, a senior Muslim Brotherhood figure in

Sweden and one of the founders of the local youth network, wrote in an open letter upon deciding to leave the movement: “The problem is the dual message, which is the most damaging. They conduct official dialogue with Christian and Jewish groups, yet internally spread fear of them. They speak about democracy, but in practice do the opposite. [...] In official forums they speak about democracy to achieve objectives, but within the organization there is a deep aversion to democracy, equality, and freedom of expression.” By way of example, the League of Muslims of Belgium (LMB), the local umbrella organization affiliated with FEMYSO, hosted preachers such as Tarek al-Suwaidan from Kuwait, the author of an antisemitic encyclopedia entitled *The Jews*.⁸⁵ In other words, platforms associated with FEMYSO-affiliated organizations are also used to disseminate extremist messages under a moderate facade.

- **Cultivation of grievance and problematic propaganda:** FEMYSO frequently emphasizes Islamophobia and racism in Europe, at times in a confrontational manner toward democratic states. For example, when France led the cancellation of the hijab campaign at the Council of Europe, the President of Forum of European Muslim Youth and Student Organizations (FEMYSO) responded with a sharply worded video accusing France of being “the capital of prejudice in the West” and claiming that its “number one cultural export is racism”.⁸⁶ Such rhetoric, coming from an organization that benefits from European public resources, illustrates the tension between the values of the secular republic and FEMYSO’s agenda. The promotion of a victimhood narrative and attacks of this kind can be viewed as propaganda that deepens societal rifts, encourages Muslim youth in Europe to develop alienation toward their liberal surroundings, and may lead to self-segregation under the auspices of Brotherhood-affiliated organizations. Counter-radicalization studies have indicated that sustained discourse of this nature may serve as fertile ground for some youth to gravitate toward more radical pathways.
- **Recruitment and channeling of youth into affiliated network institutions:** As a youth arm, FEMYSO also functions as a conduit for directing young people into the deeper institutional frameworks of the Muslim Brotherhood, thereby ensuring organizational continuity. For example, a young individual may begin with social activism within FEMYSO, where they are exposed to the movement’s ideas, and subsequently advance to studies at institutions such as IESH, eventually becoming a committed ideological representative. In this manner, researchers argue, the network cultivates a “European Muslim elite” aligned with the Brotherhood’s worldview.⁸⁷ It should also be noted that FEMYSO has repeatedly invited Tariq Ramadan - one of the movement’s leading ideologues in Europe and a grandson of the movement’s founder - to lecture at seminars and conferences, a fact that reflects the intellectual line being transmitted to younger generations.⁸⁸ Thus, while FEMYSO does not openly call for violence, it operates as an “ideological incubator” that shapes attitudes and contributes to the radicalization of positions over time.

The Europe Trust

The Europe Trust, also known as the European Trust, constitutes an integral pillar within the organizational ecosystem of the Muslim Brotherhood in Europe. The organization was established by, and operates in coordination with, Council of European Muslims (CEM) / Federation of Islamic Organizations in Europe (FIOE) and other pan-European chapters, including European Council for Fatwa and Research (ECFR), Forum of European Muslim Youth and Student Organizations (FEMYSO), and European Institute of Human Sciences (IESH), among others, serving as a strategic source of funding for these bodies. Of the five organizations that form the core of the Muslim Brotherhood's pan-European structure, the Europe Trust - established in the late 1990s (1996/1997) - is the least public-facing and the least well known. This is likely due to its role as a dedicated financial arm whose primary function is to discreetly fund the remainder of the structure. The organization was established and is managed by senior leaders of the Muslim Brotherhood and provides ongoing financial support to its various affiliated entities.

Leadership and Ties to the Muslim Brotherhood

The Europe Trust maintains clear institutional and ideological ties to the Muslim Brotherhood movement. Even the contact details previously published by FIOE - postal boxes and telephone numbers in Markfield, United Kingdom - were later found to be those used by the offices of the Europe Trust itself. Senior figures within the movement have not concealed this affiliation in the past: the former President of Federation of Islamic Organizations in Europe (FIOE), Dr. Samir Falah, confirmed in 2015 that the Federation had assisted in the establishment of the Europe Trust. Similarly, Dr. Ayman Ali described the organization as "part of our organization".⁸⁹

Moreover, FIOE explicitly emphasized this relationship in its earlier publications. For example, a 2004 statement published on the Federation's website listed The Europe Trust among the "key organizations" and stated that "the organization was established with the aim of supporting and advancing our work by providing stable financial reserves. The organization has succeeded in taking significant steps in investing its funds and in examining high-yield opportunities in order to secure the financing of various projects and organizations across Europe. Financing Islamic work in Europe and promoting the stability of Islamic organizations is one of the central challenges we face. To this end, FIOE sought to establish a strong fund that would assist in financing this work throughout Europe".⁹⁰

The leadership of The Europe Trust is composed almost entirely of key figures from the Muslim Brotherhood network in Europe. Senior individuals have, over the years, held management positions within the Europe Trust concurrently with senior roles in Federation of Islamic Organizations in Europe (FIOE). Notable figures include:

- **Dr. Ahmed al-Rawi** - Served as Chair of the Europe Trust until 2006, while simultaneously serving as President of FIOE until 2007 and overseeing the Federation's financial portfolio.
- **Fouad Alaoui** - Member of the Europe Trust leadership; formerly Secretary General of the Union of Islamic Organizations of France (UOIF).

- **Ayman Ali** - Served as a director of the Europe Trust; formerly Secretary General of FIOE and a senior figure within the Muslim Brotherhood community in Austria, prior to returning to Egypt where he later served in the government of Mohamed Morsi.
- **Ibrahim el-Zayat** - Served as a director of the Europe Trust and previously headed Forum of European Muslim Youth and Student Organizations (FEMYSO). El-Zayat is regarded as one of the most influential Muslim Brotherhood activists in Germany.
- **Dr. Ahmed Jaballah** - Director of the Europe Trust; previously responsible for the “da’wa” (Islamic outreach) portfolio within FIOE, served as Vice-Chair of European Council for Fatwa and Research (ECFR), and as Director of the Paris campus of European Institute for Human Sciences (IESH).
- **Ali Abu Shwaima** - Member of the Europe Trust leadership; formerly headed the “da’wa” department of FIOE and served as editor of its official magazine, Al-Europiya.

Beyond this group of six prominent senior figures, a significant number of additional individuals are known to have held management positions within The Europe Trust, many of whom are identified as leading figures within Muslim Brotherhood communities in their respective countries. For example, in the United Kingdom, several members of the Trust’s board simultaneously served in senior leadership roles within Muslim Welfare House (MWH) and Muslim Association of Britain (MAB). Additional examples include Nouh al-Kaddo, Director of the Islamic Cultural Centre of Ireland in Dublin, which also serves as the headquarters of the European Council for Fatwa and Research (ECFR), as well as counterparts in Poland, Ukraine, Italy, and other countries - each maintaining a direct affiliation with the Muslim Brotherhood network. In other words, the Europe Trust effectively functions as an executive and financial arm of Federation of Islamic Organizations in Europe (FIOE), established and managed behind the scenes by the leadership of the Muslim Brotherhood in Europe in order to provide financial support to the network’s activities as a whole.

Moreover, unlike Federation of Islamic Organizations in Europe (FIOE) and Forum of European Muslim Youth and Student Organizations (FEMYSO), which include some leaders who are not part of the inner circle of the Muslim Brotherhood in Europe, nearly all individuals who have held managerial positions within the Europe Trust are among the most senior members of the movement on the continent, or are prominent figures closely connected to the Muslim Brotherhood in the Middle East - particularly in the Gulf region, where the history of the Muslim Brotherhood has been characterized by large-scale fundraising and financial resource mobilization.⁹¹

Activities and Geographic Presence

The Europe Trust operates as an investment fund, with a primary focus on real estate. According to information submitted to the UK Charity Commission, profits derived from its real estate investments are used “to provide grants to organizations that advance its objectives,” with the trustees defining the organization’s purpose as “the promotion of the Islamic religion.” The underlying strategic concept is to leverage investment returns in order to create a support fund for educational, religious, and social projects affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood network. An analysis of

corporate records indicates that the Europe Trust finances projects - primarily real estate acquisitions for the construction of mosques or community centres - for organizations within the pan-European Muslim Brotherhood network. Beneficiaries include, inter alia, various branches of European Institute of Human Sciences (IESH), the Muslim Association of Britain (MAB), and INSSAN in Berlin. Additional activities include assistance in financing the acquisition of buildings for local Muslim communities affiliated with the network, as well as the provision of loans or grants to non-profit organizations operating in the fields of welfare, culture, and education in line with the movement's ideology. Investments in income-generating real estate, including student housing and community properties, are regarded as relatively secure and yield stable returns. This model contributes to the establishment of a sustainable funding source for the ongoing activities of Islamic network organizations across Europe.

The organization is registered and operates from the United Kingdom, but functions as a pan-European entity with chapters and subsidiaries in several European countries. Over the years, the Europe Trust has established a range of subsidiaries and affiliated entities with varying degrees of linkage - ranging from bodies that are technically independent but connected through shared addresses, board members, and activities, to entities under its full control.

In the Netherlands, Europe Trust Nederland (ETN) operates as a technically independent organization that was registered in the city of Zaandam in 2006; however, its statutes reveal its subordination to the Europe Trust. ETN is managed by prominent activists from the Muslim Brotherhood milieu in the Netherlands, owns several of the country's largest Islamic centres, and has received substantial funding from donors linked to the Muslim Brotherhood from the Gulf region.⁹²

A similar dynamic exists in Belgium, where a comparable association was established in 2009 in the city of Liège. The sole representative of the Belgian entity is Mouncif Chettir, one of the founders of the Belgian LIIB, an organization that is a member of Federation of Islamic Organizations in Europe (FIOE). The statutes of LIIB stipulate that, in the event of the organization's dissolution, all of its assets shall be transferred to The Europe Trust. This provision indicates a relationship of dependency between the entities and points to the existence of a closed circuit in which local assets and infrastructure ultimately pass under the control of the network's central financial body.

In addition to these chapters, the Europe Trust holds assets in several other European countries. In the United Kingdom itself, the organization has accumulated a substantial real estate portfolio, including 47 student apartments in the city of Leeds in northern England. In France, a real estate company named SARL Enterprises Property Trust Europe was established in 2008 in Montpellier and is managed by Salah Bouabdallah, a member of the board of the Europe Trust in the United Kingdom. In Germany, the building that serves as the headquarters of Deutsche Muslimische Gemeinschaft (DMG), the central organization within the Muslim Brotherhood milieu in the country, is owned by the Europe Trust. In this manner, the Europe Trust centralizes its economic activity through local entities that enable an on-the-ground presence and provide responses to the needs of Muslim communities, while preserving a pan-European vision.⁹³

Through this approach, the Europe Trust contributes to strengthening the physical and economic infrastructure of organizations affiliated with the network and ensures their long-term financial resilience. At the same time, it maintains control and influence over various entities across Europe by preserving structures that guarantee that assets and resources ultimately remain under its authority. It should be noted that the organization operates in a relatively discreet manner and does not publicly disclose details regarding donations or beneficiaries, which is consistent with its role as a trust fund for the network rather than as a public-facing charitable organization.⁹⁴

The European Institute of Human Sciences (IESH)⁹⁵

The European Institute of Human Sciences was founded in 1990 in the village of Château-Chinon, in the Nièvre department of France, at the initiative of FIOE and its French affiliate, UOIF. The purpose of its establishment was to train local Muslim imams and religious leaders with an understanding of the social and cultural context of Europe, thereby addressing the shortage of religiously qualified personnel familiar with the living conditions of Muslim communities in Western countries. IESH became the first institution in Europe dedicated to the training of imams with a specifically European orientation and, from the outset, was defined as one of the central institutions of higher education within the network of the Muslim Brotherhood movement on the continent. Indeed, already in the institute's first governing council, prominent figures from the movement served in senior roles - most notably Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi, who acted as president of the institute's Council of Scholars in its early years. In this way, from its inception, IESH functioned as a complementary component to the establishment of ECFR. While ECFR initially provided immediate religious guidance through senior jurists based outside Europe, the institute was created in order to cultivate a new generation of religious leaders emerging from within European Muslim communities themselves.

Structure

Since its establishment in France, the European Institute of Human Sciences (IESH) has developed into a network of Islamic educational institutions operating in several countries. The original campus in Château-Chinon covered approximately 110 dunams and included extensive facilities - student dormitories, a library, a mosque, classrooms, a sports hall, and others - and trained around 200 students annually in Qur'anic studies, Islamic theology, and the Arabic language. In 1999, an urban chapter was inaugurated in Saint-Denis, which over time became the main center of IESH activity in France and currently operates evening programs and distance-learning courses. In addition, training initiatives were reported in other locations in France, although today most training activity is concentrated in the Paris-area chapter.

In the late 1990s and the 2000s, IESH expanded to additional countries. In 1997, a chapter was established in the United Kingdom (in the county of Ceredigion, Wales), housed in a historic rural property. Subsequently, additional IESH chapters were opened in Birmingham (2007) and London (2009). In Germany, an IESH institute was established in Frankfurt under the name EIHW in 2013, and in 2015 a chapter was opened in Helsinki. All of these chapters are grouped within a federation known as the Union of European Institutes of Human Sciences and Islam (UIESHI), which serves as an overarching framework for coordinating curricula among the various chapters. It should be noted that UIESHI is registered as an association in France and, due to its networked structure, the institute continues to operate in a decentralized manner despite local developments. Thus, for example, even following the closure of the Château-Chinon campus as a result of measures taken by the French authorities, the chapters in the Paris area and outside France have continued to operate as usual.

Leadership and Key Figures

As noted, Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi headed IESH in its early years. Alongside him was Sheikh Faisal Mawlawi, leader of the Muslim Brotherhood in Lebanon and Deputy Chairman of ECFR, who served as the first Dean of IESH during the 1990s. Another prominent figure is Dr. Ahmed Jaballah, one of the founders of UOIF in France and at one stage its president, who was among the founders of IESH and later served as Director of the institute's Paris chapter. Abdullah Ben Mansour, a Tunisian national who served as President of FIOE in 2014 and was among the founders of UOIF, also served for many years as a senior lecturer at IESH. Over time, individuals from across Europe identified with the Muslim Brotherhood joined the institute's board of directors and teaching staff, including Ibrahim el-Zayat from Germany, who served as a member of IESH's initial Board of Trustees during the 1990s.

Today, the Director of IESH is Mohamed Karmous, a Swiss-French citizen of Tunisian origin, who previously served as Vice President of FIOE and is considered a full member of the Muslim Brotherhood. Karmous's wife, Nadia, gained public attention due to her activism in defense of preacher Tariq Ramadan, the grandson of Hassan al-Banna, founder of the Muslim Brotherhood. The Dean of the institute is Dr. Larabi Bachiri from Algeria, who has been involved in IESH's management since its early years and currently serves as the public face of the institution. Bachiri is identified with the ideological line of UOIF and, in 2012, met with al-Qaradawi in Turkey at an event documented by Al Jazeera, with the aim of raising financial support for the institute.

In addition to these figures, several individuals associated with chapters outside France should be noted. In the United Kingdom, the institute (known there as the European Institute of Human Sciences) was managed by Khadem al-Rawi, the brother of Ahmed al-Rawi, former President of FIOE. The teaching staff included Sheikh Abdullah al-Judai, an Iraqi-British religious jurist who served as President of ECFR following al-Qaradawi's tenure, as well as Sheikh Salem al-Shikhi, a senior Libyan cleric identified with the Muslim Brotherhood in his country and a member of ECFR. In Germany, the head of IESH in Frankfurt is Dr. Khaled Hanafy, who concurrently serves as Deputy Secretary General of ECFR and Chairman of the Council of Imams and Islamic Scholars in Germany (RIGD). Alongside him, Dr. Taha Amer serves as

Head of the Faculty of Islamic Studies in Frankfurt; he is also a member of RIGD and an imam at the Central Islamic Mosque in Frankfurt.

Activities

As noted, the IESH curriculum is designed to train a “European imam” - a religious leader who combines traditional Islamic knowledge with an understanding of contemporary reality, governance, and the legal order in Europe. The full course of study typically spans approximately six to seven years and consists of several core components:

- **Quranic Studies** - A program of approximately two years aimed at achieving full mastery of the Quran, including memorization and recitation techniques. This component is considered a fundamental prerequisite for an imam who leads prayer.
- **Arabic Language** - Intensive study of classical and modern standard Arabic, as Arabic is the language of the primary religious sources and often serves as a shared language of communication among students arriving from different European countries.
- **Islamic Theology and Law (Sharia)** - A three-year core program covering the main fields of Islamic jurisprudence and theological principles, comparable to curricula taught in Islamic institutions in Muslim-majority countries. The theological studies combine classical legal doctrine with modern disciplines (such as Western law, philosophy, social sciences, and history), with the aim of preparing students to adapt religious rulings and guidance to the social and legal context of Europe. Moreover, the program provides graduates with knowledge of the legal system and statutory framework of their country of residence. For example, the imam-training track developed in France also includes foundational courses on French law and democratic principles. Institute trainees likewise participate in practical seminars, community-based internships, and additional applied training components.

Upon completion of the program, graduates typically receive an IESH diploma, which is not necessarily equivalent to a formally recognized academic degree but does enjoy a certain level of community legitimacy. That said, some IESH programs have received official academic recognition over the years. For example, in 2009 the IESH Paris campus obtained academic approval from the Rectorate of the University of Créteil for its programs in Arabic language, Arabic literature and culture, and Muslim theology. In addition, the institute has received recognition from actors in the Islamic world: in 2013, it was designated “Quran Institute of the Year” by the Muslim World League. Nevertheless, precise figures regarding the number of students and graduates are not published publicly. According to internal assessments and intelligence sources, by 2016 approximately 500 graduates in theology and an additional 180 graduates in Quran memorization programs had been trained at the Château-Chinon site alone. By 2020, thousands of graduates of the IESH network (across all of its chapters) were already active in educational, religious, and social frameworks throughout France and Europe.

Beyond operating full academic programs (as described above), the institute also offers partial study tracks, evening courses, and distance-learning frameworks, enabling individuals with family or employment obligations to acquire theological education gradually. Alongside the core training track, IESH organizes seminars such as summer courses in Arabic and theology for beginners, as well as study days focused on religion and society. These seminars are sometimes conducted in cooperation with local mosques and Muslim organizations across Europe, and at times include guest lecturers from the Muslim world. The institute also runs summer camps and youth activities during school holidays, aimed at strengthening the Islamic identity of young people and instilling religious and moral values. These camps are open to the general public and are officially declared as youth activities under state supervision (for example, IESH youth activities in France are reported as required to the Departmental Directorate for Social Cohesion and Population Protection - DDCSPP).

Ideological Impacts and Threats

With regard to the religious ideology imparted by IESH, the institute's leadership publicly declares a moderate approach adapted to the European context. According to its management, the institute adheres to a "middle path" approach and emphasizes the need to adapt religious interpretation to the realities of modern life and to the legal and cultural environment in France and Europe. Statements delivered to the French Parliament by IESH representatives indicate that the curriculum places emphasis on principles of Islamic jurisprudence that allow flexibility - such as the principle of independent legal reasoning, understood as the intellectual effort to adapt legal rulings to changing circumstances - and on the historical precedent that, already in the medieval period, religious scholars adjusted rulings to the conditions of their time. According to the institute's leadership, "this capacity for adaptation is inherent within Muslim theology itself" when confronting the challenges of a given era and environment; accordingly, the curriculum is designed to train students to live as law-abiding Muslim citizens even within a secular state.

However, while IESH administrators deny any connection to extremism and claim that the institute serves instead as a "bulwark against radicalization and terrorism" through moderate education, substantial evidence has emerged indicating the transmission of a conservative - and at times rigid - Islamist ideology among students, behind the facade of moderation and the outward emphasis on "respect for republican values" promoted by the institute's leadership. Security and governmental authorities in several countries have warned that the content and positions advanced at IESH at times conflict with core democratic values, individual rights, and secular norms. Indeed, there are known cases of graduates or students of the institute who later pursued extremist trajectories. Instances in which preachers affiliated with IESH delivered hate speech have reinforced concerns that the organization covertly cultivates views hostile to tolerance and coexistence - such as the case of the imam Hassan Iquioussen, an associate of UOIF, who for years delivered antisemitic and chauvinistic sermons.

The institute can thus be viewed as a vehicle for disseminating the worldview of the Muslim Brotherhood movement, which seeks to construct a distinct form of “European Islam” that, on its face, does not directly clash with democracy, yet in practice aims to gradually reshape Western societies from within.

Accordingly, education at IESH is intended to cultivate a generation of religious leaders capable of operating within the legal and social framework of Europe while maintaining ideological loyalty to the objectives of the Muslim Brotherhood and to the long-term vision of transforming Islam into a dominant public and legal force in the future. Beyond serving as imams within migrant communities in Europe, IESH graduates pursue careers such as religious instruction, preaching, and academia, or serve as Muslim chaplains in prisons, hospitals, and military institutions; some also participate in national-level religious advisory bodies.

An internal FIOE document even expressed pride that, through IESH and a group of similar institutions, it is possible to cultivate “graduates who will operate within the framework of European laws, while at the same time carrying the vision of Islam in accordance with the ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood.” In other words, the institute seeks to train imams who are integrated into European communities and society, yet see themselves as agents guiding long-term change in the values of society. The emphasis placed by the institute’s educational program on fostering a distinct Islamic way of life within Europe is reflected, for example, in encouraging students to maintain a religious code of dress and conduct in the public sphere, and in the view that the Muslim community should aspire to cultural autonomy (separatism) and to separate systems in areas such as personal status law, education, and similar fields. French authorities summarized this as an effort by the Muslim Brotherhood “to infiltrate all layers of society, to enter public life and even political life, with the aim of the day when the state will be governed by the laws of Allah rather than the laws of human beings.”

In France, intelligence services view the institute as a “significant axis” of the Muslim Brotherhood current, which, while presenting moderate rhetoric, cultivates extremist conservative perceptions among its students. A report submitted to the Government of France in May 2025 stated that IESH trains its imams for a “hard Islam,” and that inspections conducted at the site found, in certain instances, study materials and books in the institute’s library that “encourage jihad, antisemitism, and the justification of violence against women” - findings which, according to the authorities, indicate an “archaic, fundamentalist, and misanthropic conception of Islam” concealed behind moderate public rhetoric.

Inspections further found that a small but troubling proportion of the institution’s students are under security-service monitoring. According to the reports, of approximately 200 students studying each year in the village of Chateau-Chinon, an average of around 20 appeared in intelligence systems with an “S” marker - a French designation for individuals suspected of links to radical Islamism. Intelligence authorities in Germany, Austria, and additional countries likewise classify IESH as part of a “political Islamism network” that may challenge the democratic order. In the public sphere, political leaders and researchers have warned that the “Islamophobia” rhetoric promoted by figures linked to

the Muslim Brotherhood (for example, FEMYSO) is intended to silence criticism and to shield institutions such as IESH from scrutiny by portraying any inquiry into their positions as a racist attack.

Funding

From its earliest days, IESH relied financially primarily on external donations from the global Muslim Brotherhood network - namely, grants from states and charitable bodies in the Muslim world, supported and channeled through European foundations linked to the Brotherhood movement. The majority of resources originated from private and institutional donations from Gulf states and Muslim Asia. According to one of the institute's founders, at the time of its establishment in 1990, "there were no tensions between the supporting states as there are today, and therefore we approached Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates." In other words, the four main Gulf states contributed to the founding fund, indicating broad interest in the Muslim world in the project of training a European imam.

Subsequently, Qatar appears to have assumed a central role in financing IESH. According to intelligence and journalistic documents, Qatar Charity transferred increasing sums over the years to support the institute and projects associated with it. In 2007, for example, a representative of Qatar Charity (Sheikh Ahmed al-Hamadi) arrived at the village of Chateau-Chinon and delivered a donation of €250,000 in a single transfer to the institute's president, Mohamed Karmous. According to the investigative book *The Qatar Papers* (2019) by journalists Christian Chesnot and Georges Malbrunot, the total volume of Qatari donations to IESH continued to grow over the years, reaching millions of euros.

Saudi organizations also transferred grants to Quran memorization programs and student scholarships at IESH (though usually indirectly, through organizations operating in Europe). A specific example of the mechanism for transferring foreign funding emerges from a case documented by the French authorities: in August 2021, the director of IESH, Larabi Bechiri, met in Paris with an unidentified Saudi national who provided €40,000 in cash for the institute. That Saudi individual, who was under surveillance, transferred the funds to a third, unidentified person before returning to Saudi Arabia, in an apparent attempt to conceal the undeclared donation. Although the institute's management emphasizes that all donations undergo vetting to ensure they are not conditioned on curricular or content-related demands - and although they claim that donations attempting to influence the curriculum (such as an Iranian offer of funding in exchange for control over content, which was rejected) were refused - this case and others heightened concerns that reliance on funds from foreign states could introduce undesirable political influence into the system for training imams in Europe. These concerns contributed to the opening of an investigation in France on suspicion of illegal foreign funding and money-laundering offenses linked to IESH.

As a result of the investigations, in 2021 the French bank working with the institute closed its current account due to "intense and unusual financial activity raising suspicion of undeclared foreign funding." Under the French law enacted in 2021 to combat foreign influence on Islam, any foreign donation exceeding €10,000 is subject to mandatory

reporting. The intelligence report found that IESH had allegedly failed to comply with this obligation, leading to the opening of a criminal investigation at the end of 2024. Accordingly, alongside the inflow of foreign resources, the institute has also relied on financial support from the local Muslim community and operates on a mixed funding model combining tuition fees, private donations, and crowdfunding campaigns. For example, a crowdfunding campaign in 2023 raised approximately €218,000 for the institute (compared to only about €9,000 in 2022), indicating increased engagement by local donors following reports of financial difficulties and investigations. The main private donors in Europe include Muslim businesspeople, mosque trustees and community figures, as well as established Islamic charitable organizations operating across the continent.

Union of Good⁹⁶

“Union of Good,” also known as the “Charity Coalition,” is a financial umbrella organization established with the declared purpose of providing humanitarian assistance, rehabilitating infrastructure, and supporting those in need in Palestine. While some documents indicate that it was established in October 2000, shortly after the outbreak of the Second Intifada, other sources cite its establishment in May 2001. This apparent “contradiction” in fact reflects the organization’s developmental trajectory. It was not initially founded as a permanent body, but rather emerged as the “101 Days Campaign” - a time-limited initiative intended to raise funds rapidly in order to support Palestinians in the context of the Intifada. The success of the initial campaign, which raised more than USD 8 million, led Hamas leadership and its partners to recognize the potential of this fundraising model and the need to institutionalize it. Accordingly, the temporary initiative was transformed into a permanent and structured entity under the name “Union of Good,” a process that was completed in 2001.

Despite its declared humanitarian purpose, intelligence investigations and analytical assessments reveal that the humanitarian charity facade served as a central mechanism for evading oversight, and that the organization’s primary objective was “to strengthen Hamas’s political and military standing in the West Bank and Gaza.” In practice, Union of Good functions as a financial intermediary for Hamas. Funds raised are transferred through a sophisticated mechanism that facilitates the movement of funds between charitable organizations and networks managed by Hamas in the West Bank and Gaza. The transfer of funds occurs through several channels, ranging from the direct financing of terrorist activity (for example, through financial support provided to the families of “martyrs” and security prisoners) to the reinforcement of Hamas’s civilian infrastructure (through direct transfers to Hamas offices, funding of charities that form part of Hamas’s da’wa network, provision of welfare services, financing of Hamas summer camps, and more). The purpose of this activity is to create economic dependence of the population on Hamas and to enable the organization to consolidate its position and strengthen its control in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

The Doctrine of “Financial Jihad”

In a 2004 document by the Meir Amit Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center, the activity of Union of Good is described as part of a broader conceptual model known as “financial jihad” (al-jihad bil-mal). This doctrine expands the meaning of jihad - traditionally defined as “holy war” - to also include financial support for jihad fighters and affiliated entities, which is considered of paramount religious importance. The document illustrates the connection between charity and the financing of terrorism through religious citations, such as the religious ruling of Ayatollah Khomeini permitting the use of zakat funds (Islamic almsgiving) to finance armed struggle against Israel, and the call by Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi, founder of Union of Good, to provide financial donations to the “mujahideen” (holy fighters).

This doctrine is not merely a slogan but a sustainable mechanism for the financing of terrorism. Zakat (charity) is a religious obligation incumbent upon every Muslim. The legitimization of using zakat funds to finance terrorism or armed struggle against Israel ensures a steady flow of funds grounded in religious belief. It provides donors with

religious justification and transforms the act of donation into a supreme religious commandment, perceived as a form of “sacred struggle.” Moreover, it enables effective concealment of subversive financial activity and makes it difficult for law enforcement authorities to distinguish between legitimate charitable activity and the financing of terrorism.

Leadership

Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi, who also served as chairman of the organization, is described in intelligence documents as the founder of the organization (and as the “spiritual leader of Hamas”). The organization’s current operational director is Essam Yusuf, a central figure in the British organization Interpal. Additional members of the leadership include senior Hamas figures such as Sheikh Hamid al-Bitawi, a Hamas operative in Nablus, as well as prominent figures from the global Muslim Brotherhood network, including Faisal Mawlawi. These ties to figures within the Muslim Brotherhood network - which in practice also constitute ties to FIOE and its affiliated entities - provide the organization with access to extensive financial, human, and organizational infrastructure and largely explain its ability to survive and regenerate.

Structure

Union of Good is, in effect, an umbrella organization for a decentralized network of more than fifty Islamic charities and foundations operating worldwide. This global deployment enables the organization to exploit regulatory differences between states and to carry out financial transfers in an evasive manner. Moreover, by fragmenting its activity among dozens of organizations spread across multiple continents, the network - which includes key entities, some of which have themselves been designated as terrorist organizations or banned from operating by various states - can continue to function even when one of its components is blocked in a particular country. Thus, for example, despite significant enforcement actions taken against the Al-Aqsa Foundation in Germany and the Netherlands, the remainder of the network continued to operate.

Below is a table detailing some of the principal member organizations of the network in Europe, their locations, and their legal status:

Organization Name	Country
INTERPAL / Palestinian Relief and Development Fund	United Kingdom
Al-Aqsa Charitable Foundation / Al-Aqsa Charitable Society / Al-Aqsa Humanitaire	Belgium, Germany, the Netherlands and Denmark
CBSP / Charitable Committee for Supporting Palestine	France
Muslim Hands	United Kingdom
Human Appeal	United Kingdom (also active in Bosnia)
Human Relief Foundation	United Kingdom
Families Relief	United Kingdom
Muslim Aid	United Kingdom
Islamic Relief	United Kingdom
Sanabil Al-Aqsa / Sanabil Al-Aqsa Charitable Foundation	Sweden
Palestine Relief Society / ASP – Association de Secours Palestinien	Switzerland
The Charitable Support Committee	Switzerland

Palestinian Association in Austria (PVOE)	Austria
Associazione benefica di solidarietà con il popolo palestinese	Italy
Innocents	Norway
Education Aid for Palestine (EAP)	United Kingdom

Sanctions

The United States designated Union of Good as a terrorist organization in November 2008 pursuant to a presidential executive order. This designation led to the freezing of its assets and a prohibition on any activity with the organization by U.S. citizens. Israel had already blocked the organization's activities in 2002 and formally declared it illegal in 2008. In April 2010, the Israeli Minister of Defense signed an order designating thirty-six foundations affiliated with the organization as unlawful associations, a move described as "the most extensive action ever taken in Israel against Hamas's global support network."

Despite these far-reaching sanctions, no direct legal action has been taken in Europe against Union of Good as an organization. Enforcement measures have been applied only against some of the charities registered under its umbrella. In parallel, the network has actively employed tactics such as name changes and the establishment of new organizations in order to evade monitoring. Its organizational structure - based on personal relationships rather than a formal hierarchy, consistent with organizations linked to the Muslim Brotherhood - further complicates efforts to dismantle the network.

Interpal

The organization Interpal was established in the United Kingdom in 1981 under the name "The Palestine and Lebanon Relief Fund" and expanded against the backdrop of the growing activity of Islamic relief organizations in the West during the 1990s, in the period following the Oslo Accords and in the shadow of the First Intifada. In November 1994, the organization was re-registered under its current name, "The Palestinian Relief and Development Fund."⁹⁷ Since its establishment, the organization has presented itself as a humanitarian and "non-political" charity, focusing on assistance to Palestinians in the Palestinian Authority territories as well as in refugee camps in Jordan and Lebanon.⁹⁸

The organization is registered as a charity in the United Kingdom and has become one of the most prominent foundations in the country providing assistance to Palestinians. Its declared objective has been to support the needy, the poor, sick children, and orphans, and to alleviate the suffering of those affected by military activity. As early as the 1990s, it facilitated the transfer of large sums of money raised in the United Kingdom and elsewhere to companies and charitable organizations operating in the Palestinian Authority territories.⁹⁹ Despite its humanitarian image, as early as 2006 a BBC report stated that "Interpal's donations helped make Hamas what it is today."¹⁰⁰

Methodological Clarification

It is important to distinguish between the British charity Interpal and the social media platform Interpals (Interpals.net). These are two entirely separate entities. The British charity, whose full name is “The Palestinian Relief and Development Fund,” is registered with the UK Charity Commission. By contrast, Interpals (Interpals.net) is a website whose purpose is unrelated to humanitarian aid.

Structure and Leadership

Despite a 2009 investigation by the UK Charity Commission that instructed Interpal to sever its ties with the Union of Good, Interpal formally denies any connection to the Muslim Brotherhood.^{101 102} However, in 2020 a leading London-based research institute published a comprehensive 100-page report on foreign (Qatari and Turkish) funding of the European Muslim Brotherhood network. Beyond exposing the scope of this funding, the report also revealed “the manner in which British, European, and Qatari organizations are interconnected through partnerships and overlapping roles held by several of their key personnel,” among them Interpal.^{103 104} These links shed light on the organization’s actual character, beyond its claims of purely humanitarian activity.

Ibrahim Hewitt has served as Chairman of Interpal’s Board of Trustees since 1997. Hewitt, a British national who converted to Islam in 1981, is known for statements and writings that advocate an extremist interpretation of Islamic law. He has publicly supported Islamic punishments such as the stoning of adulterers and the execution of homosexuals, and has referred to the Holocaust of European Jewry as the “so-called Holocaust.”^{105 106} In addition to his role at Interpal, Hewitt also serves as a senior editor at the pro-Palestinian media outlet Middle East Monitor (MEMO), a media platform associated with Muslim Brotherhood circles in the United Kingdom.¹⁰⁷

Another central figure is Dr. Essam Yusuf (Mustafa), who serves as Managing Trustee of Interpal and is one of its founders. Yusuf is widely regarded as the primary liaison linking Interpal to the broader networks of Hamas and the Muslim Brotherhood worldwide. According to the UK government and U.S. intelligence sources, Yusuf simultaneously served, alongside his role at Interpal, as Secretary-General of the Union of Good.¹⁰⁸ Indeed, a report by the U.S. Department of the Treasury stated that in 2007 he served on Hamas’s Executive Committee under the leadership of Khaled Mashal.¹⁰⁹ Yusuf operated openly alongside Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi during the latter’s tenure as head of the Union of Good, thereby reinforcing the organizational linkage between Interpal and the European Muslim Brotherhood network.¹¹⁰

In addition, there are close personal ties between Interpal’s leadership and that of the Palestinian Return Centre (PRC) - an organization focused on disseminating anti-Israel propaganda, including promotion of the “right of return” narrative and portraying Israel as an “apartheid state.” Israel declared the PRC illegal in 2010; nevertheless, the organization continues to operate in the United Kingdom and is associated with Hamas and the Muslim Brotherhood. For example, Ghassan Faour, a member of Interpal’s Board of Trustees, is also a senior activist within the PRC.¹¹¹

At the local level, a document seized by Israeli security forces detailed the list of organizations with which Interpal cooperated, including Al-Islah Charitable Society and the Islamic Charitable Society of Hebron, among others.¹¹² In practice, funds transferred to these “charitable societies” were used to support Hamas’s civilian and operational infrastructure, including financial assistance to the families of terrorists, prisoners, and “martyrs,” thereby contributing directly to the strengthening of Hamas’s political power and the execution of its terrorist activities.¹¹³

Strategic Transformation

The designation of Interpal by the United States in 2003 as a “Specially Designated Global Terrorist” organization led, albeit gradually, to severe financial difficulties. A 2004 investigative report described Interpal primarily as a “pipeline” that transferred funds from the West to Hamas’s civilian infrastructure through Palestinian charitable organizations in the Palestinian Authority territories, which functioned as part of Hamas’s da’wa infrastructure.¹¹⁴ Indeed, until the end of the previous decade, Interpal was able to raise millions of pounds annually in Europe, some of which originated from donors outside the United Kingdom via subsidiary organizations within the Union of Good network.¹¹⁵

However, an examination of recent data indicates the collapse of this financial model. Beginning in 2018, the organization’s financial operating conditions deteriorated significantly as a result of legal and public pressure. The organization UK Lawyers for Israel (UKLFI) and law enforcement actors launched an aggressive campaign against Interpal, which led banks and online payment platforms to block the organization’s accounts. Within approximately two years, nearly all financial transfer channels were severed: credit card companies terminated clearing services for Interpal, donation websites removed the charity from their platforms, and Facebook disabled the donation button on Interpal’s page. At the height of this process, in April-May 2020, all bank transfers, standing orders, and SMS donations to the organization were completely halted.¹¹⁶

This dramatic disruption caused a steep decline in the organization’s revenues and severely undermined its ability to receive donations and transfer funds effectively. Data from the UK Charity Commission reveal an exceptionally sharp drop in Interpal’s income: in 2018, the organization’s revenue stood at approximately £7.03 million; in 2019 it fell to approximately £5.54 million; and by 2023, income had collapsed to just £92,581.¹¹⁷ This decline of more than 98% within five years confirms that Interpal’s traditional funding model collapsed as a result of the sanctions and legal actions taken against it. The organization no longer maintains a bank account, a fact that severely restricts its ability to receive donations and prevents it from achieving its stated financial objectives.

As a result, the organization was forced to change strategy. Rather than continuing attempts to transfer large sums of money, Interpal has transformed into a political and advocacy-oriented platform. Its ties with organizations such as PRC and MEMO, and the public campaigns it conducts - such as the 2024 “Never Again” campaign - indicate that its activity has shifted from covert financing of terrorist infrastructure (which has become extremely difficult) toward the promotion of ideology, political lobbying, and the delegitimization of Israel and its Western adversaries. These efforts are aimed at influencing policy in the British Parliament and shaping public opinion, in direct contradiction to the

organization's past claims that it is not involved in political activity. The organization now leverages its self-portrayal as a "victim" of hostile financial and political systems in order to mobilize support and amplify pro-Palestinian and anti-Israeli narratives.

Current Activities and Ideological Threat

The UK Charity Commission has repeatedly stated that it has found insufficient evidence directly linking Interpal to terrorist activity.¹¹⁸ Moreover, Interpal has prevailed in several defamation lawsuits against British media outlets that accused it of supporting Hamas. Accordingly, Interpal exploits the remaining comparative advantage at its disposal - its status as a recognized charitable organization operating at the heart of the United Kingdom - to function as a platform for disseminating radical and extremist political messages. The use of ostensibly "humanitarian" concepts such as "charity," "refugee assistance," and "protection of the vulnerable" serves as a convenient cover for the promotion of anti-democratic and anti-Israeli narratives.

In addition, the organization's ties with bodies such as the PRC, which disseminate content challenging the very legitimacy of the State of Israel and employ political rhetoric invoking terms such as "apartheid" and "ethnic cleansing," reflect a broader strategy pursued by Hamas and other Islamist organizations. This strategy seeks to undermine the social and political resilience of Western democracies while isolating Israel on the international stage. Interpal's 2024 "Never Again" campaign, which directly accuses Israel, illustrates this dynamic clearly. The campaign calls on European citizens to pressure their elected representatives to take action against Israel. This constitutes a blatant exploitation of democratic freedoms to advance an extremist agenda, posing a threat not only to Israel's security but also to the foundational principles of the democratic system itself.

Interpal and its representatives have also participated in additional international initiatives that advanced Hamas's objectives under humanitarian cover. For example, senior Interpal figures led aid convoys known as "Miles of Smiles," which have departed since 2009 from Europe and Muslim-majority countries to the Gaza Strip via Egypt. These convoys were organized by Dr. Essam Yusuf and other Islamist activists and were coordinated with Hamas leadership in Gaza. The "Miles of Smiles" delegations included activists from the United Kingdom, Belgium, Sweden, Jordan, Malaysia, and other countries, who entered the Gaza Strip and publicly met with Hamas leaders as part of aid handover ceremonies and public relations events. Furthermore, Interpal representatives also participated in Hamas rallies in Gaza, during which chants praising the Izz ad-Din al-Qassam Brigades (Hamas's military wing) and glorifying "martyrs" were heard.¹¹⁹

Al-Aqsa Foundation

The Al-Aqsa Foundation was established in 1991 in Aachen, Germany, and defined itself as a charitable organization whose purpose was to provide assistance to Palestinian communities. It claimed to meet the "religious, cultural, and social needs of ... poor and needy Palestinians" living in the West Bank, Gaza, Lebanon, and Jordan. Despite its

humanitarian image, from an early stage Western intelligence and law-enforcement agencies suspected that Al-Aqsa's charitable facade concealed a critical component of Hamas's financing network.¹²⁰

Indeed, the foundation established in Germany rapidly evolved into a global fundraising network for Hamas. In addition to chapters in the Middle East and Africa, it established chapters across Europe (including the Netherlands, Denmark, Belgium, and Sweden), following a model consistent with the organizational approach of other groups linked to the Muslim Brotherhood. Under this model, local chapters maintained a degree of operational autonomy while adhering to a shared ideology and broader strategic objectives.¹²¹

The legal history of the Al-Aqsa Foundation constitutes a revealing case study of coordinated administrative and judicial action. As a result of concerted measures taken in the early 2000s, by the end of the decade Al-Aqsa's formal presence in Europe had largely been dismantled or driven underground through a combination of administrative bans, asset freezes, and sustained legal pressure across multiple jurisdictions. Today, the Al-Aqsa Foundation no longer operates openly under its original name in Europe; its offices have been closed or abandoned, its bank accounts seized, and its reputation irreversibly damaged by allegations of links to terrorism. Nevertheless, the foundation's trajectory - its legal proceedings and the outcomes of its dismantling - offers significant insight into how European authorities have confronted the sophisticated operational methods employed by the Muslim Brotherhood.^{122 123}

Leadership

Intelligence investigations have repeatedly found senior figures within the Foundation coordinating with Hamas leaders and participating in forums organized by the Muslim Brotherhood.¹²⁴ Mahmoud Amar, for example, who was the original founder of several Al-Aqsa branches, was identified by Israeli authorities as "a senior Hamas figure in Germany."¹²⁵ Another prominent figure was Sheikh Mohammed Ali Hassan al-Moayad, head of the Yemeni chapter of the Foundation. Al-Moayad was a cleric affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood and was recorded (prior to his arrest) admitting that he had acted as a "courier" transferring funds to Hamas. He was arrested by German authorities in 2003 on charges of providing financial support to both al-Qaeda and Hamas.¹²⁶

Another figure, Amin Abu Rashid, who was photographed alongside members of Hamas's Political Bureau leadership, served as a senior official in the Dutch chapter of the Foundation. He was arrested by Dutch authorities on suspicion of managing a network that transferred more than €10 million to Hamas in Gaza, but was released in 2024 due to insufficient evidence directly linking him to Hamas financing. Following his release, Abu Rashid continued the Foundation's activities through other organizations, such as the Israa Foundation in Rotterdam, under the same framework of the "Union of Good."¹²⁷

Bans on Activities¹²⁸

Germany and the Netherlands

The German government was the first to take decisive action. German investigators argued that the Foundation's funds ultimately supported Hamas operatives and propaganda. For example, Interior Minister Otto Schily cited evidence such as a Hamas-run kindergarten (supported through the Foundation) in which the children of suicide bombers reportedly underwent indoctrination processes and weapons training, as an indication of the true nature of the "humanitarian" projects being financed.

As a result, in July 2002, the German Federal Ministry of the Interior banned the Foundation's activities on the grounds that it supported Hamas under the guise of charity. Al-Aqsa appealed the German ban and initially won a court ruling in 2003 that allowed it to resume limited activities under government supervision. However, in December 2004, Germany's Federal Administrative Court definitively upheld the ban, ruling that even if direct terrorist financing could not be conclusively proven, the organization "identifies with the objectives of Hamas."¹²⁹

In the Netherlands, the authorities acted in a similar manner, freezing the assets of the "Stichting Al-Aqsa" in April 2003 based on an investigation by the General Intelligence and Security Service, which found that the organization was channeling funds to groups linked to Hamas. The Dutch chapter of the Foundation challenged this measure in court, but after reviewing classified evidence, a Dutch court ruled that the asset freeze was justified in light of the findings.

Denmark and Sweden

Denmark and Sweden also hosted chapters of the Foundation, which became targets of law-enforcement authorities in the mid-2000s. In Denmark, the authorities investigated the Copenhagen chapter (Foreningen Al-Aqsa) on suspicion of unlawful terrorist financing, leading to the indictment of two senior officials in 2006. However, in early 2008, a Danish court acquitted the defendants of all charges, reflecting a division of opinion on whether support for charitable organizations linked to Hamas constitutes support for terrorism. The judges noted that while some of the organizations receiving funds from the Foundation were likely connected to Hamas, the prosecution failed to prove that the funds were used for violent acts. The court also exercised caution in criminalizing support for the families of militants in the absence of clearer criminal intent.

A year later, a similar outcome occurred in Sweden. The head of the Foundation's Malmö chapter, Khaled al-Yousef, was prosecuted for allegedly violating European Union sanctions by transferring funds to Hamas-affiliated organizations. In February 2009, the Swedish court acquitted him, ruling that the evidence was insufficient to establish that the Palestinian charitable organizations receiving assistance were part of Hamas's terrorist wing. Swedish judges explicitly dismissed evidence provided by Israel and emphasized that providing assistance to the families of individuals regarded as "martyrs" or prisoners does not, in itself, constitute a clear violation of Swedish law. These acquittals in Scandinavia underscored the high evidentiary threshold required in Europe for criminal terrorist-financing cases and the judiciary's reluctance to rely on foreign intelligence.

Belgium

In Belgium, the Belgian security services reported to parliament in 2002 that Hamas was active in the country through the foundation's network. However, unlike in other states, the Belgian authorities did not move to outlaw the organization. In practice, the Belgian entity was never formally placed on the national terrorism list; officials stated that the available evidence did not meet the threshold required under Belgian law. As a result, the Belgian entity continued to operate openly for a period of time, even while its German and Dutch counterpart organizations were banned and placed on terrorism lists.

European Union

In parallel, the European Union designated the Al-Aqsa Foundation as a terrorist organization in 2003, in line with U.S. and UN sanctions, a decision that required all EU member states to freeze the foundation's assets. This designation led to an extended legal battle before the EU's highest courts, where the foundation challenged its inclusion on the EU terrorism list, arguing that it had not been given an adequate opportunity to respond to the allegations.

In July 2007, the General Court of the European Union annulled the listing and the associated sanctions on procedural grounds. The prolonged legal struggle continued for years, and in 2008 the foundation even filed a €10 million compensation claim, alleging unjust designation. Ultimately, the EU courts upheld the legality of the restrictive measures, and the foundation remained on the EU sanctions lists until it was eventually removed in 2014, against the background of its lack of organizational activity.

Responses and Strategic Adjustments¹³⁰

Legal Action

The Al-Aqsa Foundation responded to these European enforcement measures through a combination of public denial and legal countermeasures. Throughout what it portrayed as a campaign of persecution, Al-Aqsa officials consistently rejected any connection to Hamas, describing the foundation as a purely humanitarian initiative that had been unjustly swept into lists of terror-financing networks amid heightened post-9/11 security concerns. In courtrooms from Amsterdam to Malmö, lawyers representing Al-Aqsa and its officials argued that donations to Palestinian charities - even those administered by Hamas sympathizers - should not automatically be equated with terrorist financing. These arguments were, at times, received sympathetically by local courts (as seen in Scandinavia), underscoring the tension between security imperatives and strict evidentiary standards.

Following the annulment of the initial European Union listing in 2007 on procedural grounds, the foundation's legal representatives declared victory and pressed for its permanent removal from the list. When the Council of the European Union subsequently re-listed the organization, the foundation initiated further appeals - an approach that can be interpreted as a deliberate strategy to exploit Europe's legal system in order to delay sanctions and gain time.

This sustained "cat-and-mouse" dynamic compelled European institutions to continually refine their procedures to withstand judicial scrutiny, while simultaneously allowing the organization's support network time to adapt. The

prolonged legal struggle highlights a core challenge in the European response to extremist entities. The Al-Aqsa Foundation, like other organizations within the network, leveraged democratic law-enforcement and judicial systems to contest state authority. By using the courts to fight sanctions, it not only gained time but also sought to transform the measures taken against it into a source of legitimacy for its image and activities - a strategy commonly employed by Muslim Brotherhood-linked entities in Europe.

Use of Alternative Organizations

Another key tactic employed by the network to evade sanctions and maintain its presence was the use of multiple aliases and the establishment of successor entities. For example, in the Belgian chapter, Al-Aqsa Humanitar, Mahmoud Omar, the foundation's long-serving chair, stepped down from the board of trustees and rebranded the organization as Aksahum, while the Dutch chapter, Stichting Al-Aqsa, reportedly began operating under the name Stichting Jeruzalem. This practice of abandoning one organizational identity and adopting another in direct response to legal and financial pressure has enabled the network to continue operating despite formal restrictions imposed upon it.

Similarly, activists such as Amin Abu Rashid moved on to new entities (for example, the Esraa Foundation in Rotterdam) under the same Union of Good framework, maintaining the same pattern of ostensibly fundraising for humanitarian assistance in Gaza while covertly channeling funds to Hamas coffers.¹³¹ These organizations often maintain a low public profile, sometimes registering as local cultural or humanitarian associations, thereby avoiding the immediate scrutiny that the Al-Aqsa name would now trigger. They have also adapted by exploiting modern financial tools - for example, smaller bank transfers routed through third countries, the use of informal cash-courier networks, and potentially cryptocurrencies.

Investigations into terrorist financing have further revealed that the Al-Aqsa Foundation did not operate in isolation but as part of a broader network of Islamist charities. When one node was shut down, donations could be rerouted through parallel channels. Moreover, the recurring appearance of individuals previously associated with Al-Aqsa in such investigations is significant, suggesting that while the formal foundation was dismantled, its personnel and operational methods were dispersed throughout the wider humanitarian ecosystem of the Muslim Brotherhood.

A particularly illustrative case occurred in 2003, when Sheikh Mohammed al-Moayad, head of the Al-Aqsa chapter in Yemen, was recorded by the FBI boasting about his ability to divert USD 2 million to Hamas. During a meeting in Frankfurt, al-Moayad reportedly presented receipts from various organizations, including Interpal, to demonstrate funds that had already been transferred for what he termed the "jihad cause." This episode underscored that the Al-Aqsa Foundation functioned as part of a coordinated transnational network: when direct funding channels came under pressure, money could be funneled through other charities in different countries. Such coordination was often facilitated by the Union of Good, which enabled member charities to move donor funds among themselves and onward to Hamas beneficiaries.

Conclusions

The rise and fall of the Al-Aqsa Foundation constitute an important case study for policymakers in Europe. The affair underscores the need for early identification of illicit financial links, the use of effective legal tools to disrupt them, and the value of close international coordination - particularly in light of the ability of such networks to transform and adapt in response to enforcement efforts.

Although coordinated legal and economic pressure ultimately succeeded in neutralizing the foundation as a central financing channel, and although asset freezes and restrictions imposed across European states rendered its financial operations nearly impossible, European courts nonetheless required very high standards of proof - standards that were, at times, unattainable. This evidentiary threshold enabled acquittals even in cases where security services were convinced of links to Hamas.

It can therefore be argued that the Al-Aqsa saga exposes one of the structural vulnerabilities of European democracies: the capacity of organizations associated with the Muslim Brotherhood to operate in a grey zone. The resilience of the network does not lie primarily in formal structures that can be dismantled, but rather in ideological and personal ties. Even after the original foundation ceased to function as a significant financial actor, its offshoots continued to operate under different names and through new tactics.

In this sense, the Al-Aqsa Foundation became a paradigmatic example of the dynamic between European law-enforcement authorities and Islamist networks. It illustrates how a relatively small clique of interconnected leaders can control a range of ostensibly independent organizations in a manner that ensures continuity and coordination even when individual entities are banned or dismantled - and how democratic legal systems struggle to confront these methods effectively.

Islamic Relief Worldwide (IRW)

Islamic Relief Worldwide (hereinafter: IRW) is an international humanitarian aid organization founded in 1984 in the United Kingdom by Dr. Hany El-Banna and a group of medical students from the University of Birmingham. The organization has been registered as a charity in England since 1989, and since its establishment has grown into a globally operating organization, with an international headquarters in Birmingham and offices in more than 40 countries.

IRW maintains partnership agreements with international bodies such as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the World Food Programme (WFP), and the Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection Department of the European Commission. One of the organization's founders, Dr. Essam El-Haddad, simultaneously served as a senior activist in the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and as a national security adviser to President Mohamed Morsi. According to Egyptian law-enforcement authorities, El-Haddad exploited the IRW platform to finance Muslim Brotherhood activity in Egypt. These facts indicate that, already at an early stage of the organization's existence, personal links

existed between IRW's leadership and the Muslim Brotherhood network. At the same time, IRW presents itself as a non-partisan humanitarian aid organization committed to neutrality.¹³²

Pan-European Activity

IRW maintains official chapters and offices (as distinct from mere local partner organizations) in numerous European countries. Each chapter operates independently and is responsible for fundraising through donations for relief programs. For example, official chapters operate in London and Birmingham in the United Kingdom (where the global headquarters is located), in Cologne in Germany, and in Stockholm in Sweden. Additional chapters operate, inter alia, in Italy (Milan), the Netherlands (Amsterdam), Norway (Oslo), Ireland (Dublin), and elsewhere. These chapters are subject to the policies and strategic direction of IRW's global leadership and provide the organization with a pan-European presence accompanied by oversight at the local-chapter level. IRW's activity in Europe focuses primarily on fundraising through local donation initiatives (such as assistance to migrants and disadvantaged populations within Europe). Over the years, IRW has also benefited from institutional cooperation with European governmental bodies - for example, European Union institutions have supported IRW projects and its European chapters with cumulative funding exceeding €40 million under various aid frameworks.¹³³

Ties to the Muslim Brotherhood

Several senior figures and founders of Islamic Relief Worldwide (IRW) have been deeply involved in organizations identified with the Muslim Brotherhood. For example, Dr. Essam El-Haddad, one of IRW's founders, was a member of the Guidance Bureau of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and served in the Egyptian government on behalf of the Brotherhood until the fall of the Mohamed Morsi administration in 2013. According to investigations by Egyptian authorities, El-Haddad was suspected of using IRW's mechanisms to provide financial support to the Muslim Brotherhood.¹³⁴ In addition, Dr. Ahmed Al-Rawi, who previously served as Chief Executive Officer of IRW, simultaneously held the positions of President of FIOE and Chairman of the Muslim Association of Britain (MAB) - two central bodies within the European Muslim Brotherhood network. Another prominent figure is Dr. Issam El-Bashir, who served as a director of IRW and previously as Sudan's Minister of Religious Affairs. El-Bashir is regarded as a Muslim Brotherhood figure and was also a member of the European Council for Fatwa and Research (ECFR). Additional members of IRW's leadership have likewise maintained links to Islamist umbrella organizations associated with the Muslim Brotherhood. For example, Abd al-Wahhab Nourwali, who served concurrently on IRW's board, was also a board member of World Assembly of Muslim Youth (WAMY), an organization known for promoting Islamist ideology. Ibrahim El-Zayat also served for many years as Chairman of IRW's Board of Trustees.¹³⁵

At the level of institutional linkages, findings have emerged connecting IRW's activities with Muslim Brotherhood umbrella bodies in Europe. A 2019 official document of the German Bundestag stated that IRW's German chapter maintains close ties with the Islamische Gemeinschaft in Deutschland (IGD), regarded as the principal Muslim Brotherhood organization in Germany. The same document revealed that Ibrahim El-Zayat, a member of IRW's

leadership, simultaneously served as head of the Shura Council of IGD, and that IRW effectively acted as a key financier of IGD's activities in Germany. The report further noted that IRW's German branch maintained close links with foreign organizations and with Hamas.¹³⁶ Comparable assessments appear in intelligence and research reports from other countries. In a 2016 official report by Sweden's Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency (MSB), IRW was described as a "key organization" that provides the Muslim Brotherhood with legitimacy in Europe. The report also disclosed that a member of IRW's leadership in Sweden (Haytham Rahman) was himself a senior Muslim Brotherhood activist.^{137 138}

In light of these connections, various governmental bodies have come to view IRW as an integral component of the Muslim Brotherhood's infrastructure in Europe. Some analysts characterize the organization as a cross-border financial arm of the Muslim Brotherhood, exploiting charitable activities to advance political agendas.¹³⁹

For its part, IRW's leadership rejects these allegations and consistently denies any political affiliation. IRW's Chief Executive Officer, Naser Haghamed, has publicly emphasized that the organization is "a charity, not a terrorist organization or a chapter of the Muslim Brotherhood," arguing that the accusations stem from Islamophobia.^{140 141} Nevertheless, the accumulated findings indicate close links between IRW and the Muslim Brotherhood's European infrastructure, both through personal ties among senior figures and through institutional cooperation. Accordingly, in a 2020 report by the German government, IRW was defined as an organization with "significant connections" to Muslim Brotherhood structures.¹⁴²

Ties to Hamas and Terrorist Organizations

Over the years, Islamic Relief Worldwide (IRW) has been investigated and accused on multiple occasions of maintaining ties to terrorist organizations, in particular Hamas. Below is a review of documented information and official decisions on this matter, as reported in various countries:

- **Israel and the United Arab Emirates:** In June 2014, Israel's Ministry of Defense designated IRW as an illegal organization in Israel and in Judea and Samaria, following intelligence assessments linking the organization to the transfer of funds to Hamas. According to the Israel Security Agency (Shin Bet), IRW served as a "central player in the financing of Hamas," based on intelligence collected over several years. IRW responded by commissioning an external review and claimed that "no connection was found between the organization and terrorism." Israeli security authorities rejected these conclusions, stating that substantial evidence tied IRW to Hamas financing. In December 2014, the United Arab Emirates also designated IRW as a terrorist organization, citing its ties to the Muslim Brotherhood and Hamas.^{143 144 145}
- **United States:** In December 2020, the U.S. State Department's Special Envoy for Monitoring and Combating Antisemitism issued an official statement condemning "shocking antisemitic statements and the glorification of violence by senior figures within IRW." The statement emphasized that this represented a recurring pattern that "raises serious doubts regarding the organization's core values." Subsequently, media reports indicated that the U.S. administration decided to scale back cooperation with IRW, describing the organization as a

“significant concern” for donors and supporters and urging governments to reconsider engagement and funding.^{146 147} Despite this, IRW has not been formally designated as a terrorist organization in the United States.

- **Arrest of IRW Personnel in Gaza:** In July 2006, Israeli security forces arrested the head of IRW’s Gaza operations, Iyaz Ali (a British citizen of Pakistani origin), on suspicion that he had exploited his position to transfer funds and resources to local charitable bodies that functioned as Hamas fronts. During interrogation, Ali admitted to cooperation with Hamas operatives in Jordan and the West Bank, and acknowledged that portions of the funds reached Hamas-affiliated institutions. A search of his office reportedly uncovered incitement materials, including images of Israel Defense Forces insignia overlaid with swastikas, photographs of Osama bin Laden and Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, and documentation of armed Hamas operatives.¹⁴⁸
- **Other States and Financial Institutions:** Authorities in other countries have also cited IRW’s ties to extremist actors. In 2005, Russian security services accused IRW of indirect assistance to Chechen militants associated with Al-Qaeda. In 2017, the government of Bangladesh barred IRW from operating in refugee camps, citing concerns over the potential dissemination of extremist ideology. In addition, major European banks, including UBS and HSBC, terminated their relationships with IRW and closed its accounts due to concerns that donated funds could be diverted to terrorist financing.^{149 150 151 152}

Sources of Funding in the Gulf

- **Qatar:** The government of Qatar and Qatari charitable organizations are among the most prominent supporters of Islamic Relief Worldwide (IRW). Reports indicate that IRW has received substantial donations over the years from Qatar Charity, a powerful charity closely associated with the Qatari authorities and with Yusuf al-Qaradawi. For example, in 2020 alone, more than USD 600,000 was transferred to IRW from Qatar Charity.¹⁵³ In October 2024, IRW and Qatar Charity signed a formal strategic partnership agreement aimed at strengthening cooperation between the two organizations in humanitarian relief and development projects worldwide.¹⁵⁴ This cooperation underscores IRW’s reliance on Qatari resources, originating from a state widely known for its overt support of Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated organizational networks.
- **Kuwait:** Significant donations to IRW have also originated from Kuwait. One notable donor is the Kuwaiti organization International Islamic Charitable Organization (IICO), which, according to reports, transferred millions of dollars to IRW projects over the past decade. IICO has previously been identified by security researchers as an organization whose senior figures were involved in financing terrorist actors and supporting Hamas. In addition, reports indicate that the Abdullah Al-Nouri Charity Foundation in Kuwait - an Islamic charitable institution linked to circles associated with the Muslim Brotherhood - donated substantial sums to IRW during the same period.¹⁵⁵

More broadly, during the period 2004-2014, IRW’s own reports indicate that an average of approximately USD 5 million per year flowed into its accounts from dozens of Islamic institutions across the Gulf and other regions. Some of

these institutions were identified with the Muslim Brotherhood, while others had a documented record of supporting terrorist actors. It should be noted that this trend has moderated to some extent over the past decade, largely as a result of increased Western regulatory oversight and financial monitoring.¹⁵⁶

Public, Political, and Institutional Criticism of the Organization in Europe

IRW's activities and affiliations have been documented and subjected to extensive criticism in several European countries by media outlets, politicians, and state authorities. The main points of criticism and the measures taken include the following:

- **United Kingdom:** In 2020, the British newspaper *The Times* revealed that senior IRW figures had published antisemitic statements and expressions of support for terrorist organizations on social media. Among other examples, former chair of the board Hesham Khalifa described Hamas on Facebook as "the purest resistance movement in modern history" and claimed that designating its military wing as a terrorist organization was "a disgrace and a shame for all Muslims." It was further revealed that Khalifa had previously posted anti-Jewish statements, referring to Jews as "descendants of apes and pigs." These revelations led to Khalifa's immediate resignation in August 2020. It subsequently emerged that his intended successor, Dr. Al-Mu'taz Tayara, chair of IRW Germany, had also previously published praise for Hamas and antisemitic content.

The affair triggered a major public controversy. As a result, the entire global IRW board of directors resigned in August 2020, acknowledging the need for a "clean-up" within the organization's leadership. A UK governmental committee launched an immediate investigation and, in its final report, commended IRW's leadership for acting swiftly to condemn those involved and remove them from all positions. The investigation was closed in early 2021, after the committee was satisfied that the three officials whose conduct had violated the organization's values had indeed stepped down immediately and no longer maintained any formal affiliation with IRW. The *Times* exposé and its aftermath sparked a broader political debate in the United Kingdom regarding government engagement with Islamic organizations.¹⁵⁷

- **Germany:** In Germany, IRW has received particular attention from security authorities. In December 2019, in response to a parliamentary inquiry initiated by the FDP, the Federal Ministry of the Interior published a report stating that IRW's German chapter maintains "significant links" to Muslim Brotherhood actors and operates within an environment of extremist organizations. The German government formally noted that the authorities' assessment was that the organization has "extensive affiliations with the Muslim Brotherhood," despite attempts by the German chapter to present reforms and distance itself from problematic connections. Following these findings, the German Federal Foreign Office announced in late 2020 the termination of all government funding for IRW projects in Germany, citing concerns that public funds might indirectly support anti-democratic agendas. Then-Interior Minister Horst Seehofer stated in reference to the case that "anyone who supports Hamas under the guise of humanitarian aid shows contempt for the fundamental decisions

enshrined in our constitution.” It was further reported in Germany that the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution was considering formally classifying IRW as an organization posing a potential risk to democracy.¹⁵⁸

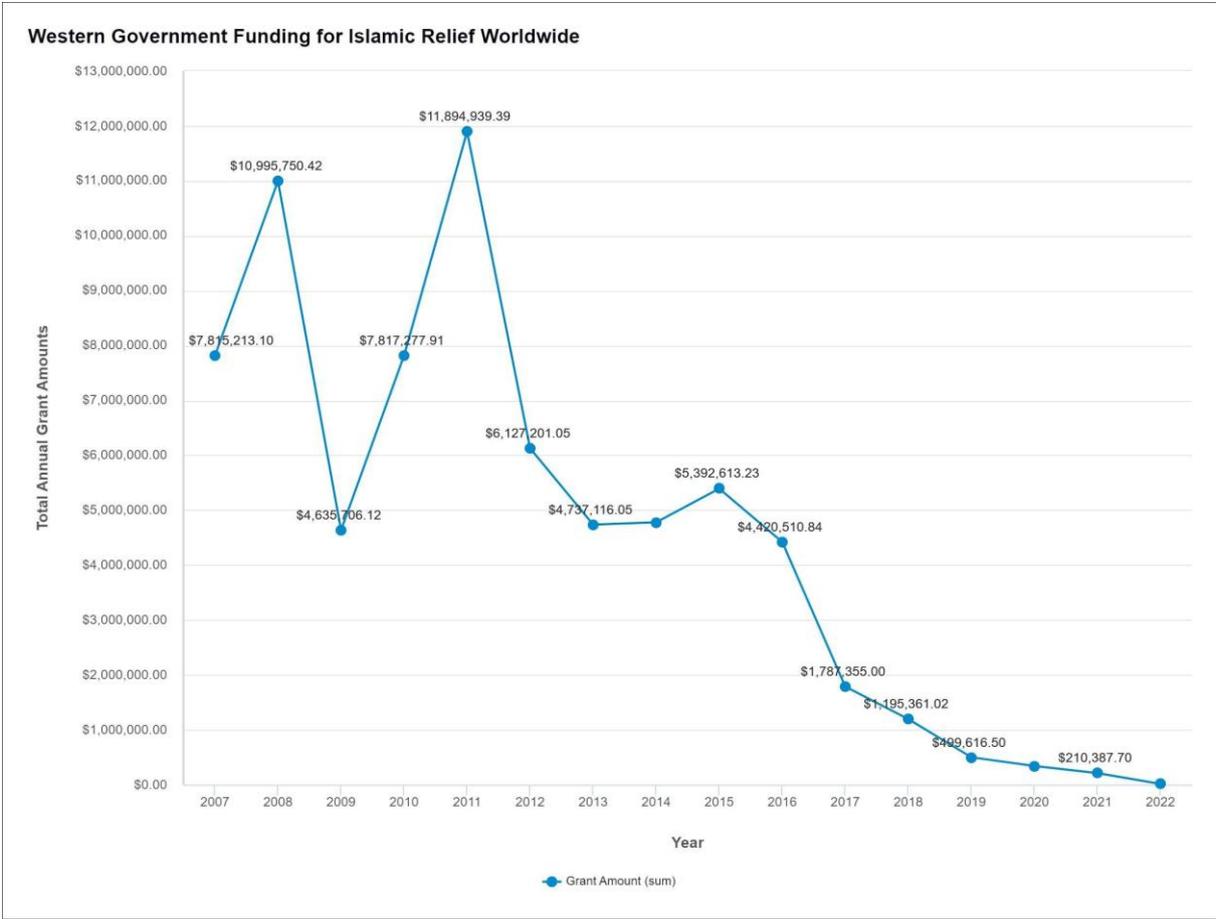
- **Other European states:** In several additional European countries, IRW has faced public criticism or official measures. In the Netherlands, for example, the Dutch government announced in 2020 that it would cease funding IRW and discontinue cooperation with the organization, following reports concerning its ties to Muslim Brotherhood organizations and antisemitic actors.¹⁵⁹ In Sweden, Member of Parliament Hans Wallmark submitted a parliamentary question to the government regarding IRW’s activities in the country, following an earlier official Swedish report (2016) that warned of IRW’s role as an organization connected to the Muslim Brotherhood.¹⁶⁰ In France, journalistic and academic investigations have argued that the international Muslim Brotherhood network has succeeded in penetrating humanitarian aid organizations through funding and the placement of activists in their leadership structures. A prominent example cited is Secours Islamique France (SIF), IRW’s local partner, which experts claim functions as the charitable arm of the UOIF umbrella organization in France. French authorities have closely monitored SIF’s activities, although to date no clear enforcement measures have been taken against it.¹⁶¹

Following the disclosures and public criticism, IRW has experienced a decline in support from Western governments. Whereas in the past the organization benefited from substantial funding from governments in Europe and North America (such as grants from the UK Department for International Development and contributions from the German Federal Foreign Office via intermediary organizations), in recent years this funding has been significantly reduced. An examination of IRW’s financial statements shows that total direct funding from Western governments fell from nearly USD 12 million in 2011 to approximately USD 15,000 in 2022 - a dramatic decline attributed directly to concerns over association with an organization perceived as tainted by extremism.^{162 163}

At the same time, IRW has managed to offset this loss by expanding public fundraising and income from UN bodies. In 2022, the organization reported global revenues of approximately USD 286 million, a figure indicating that, at this stage, the reputational damage has not led to financial collapse.¹⁶⁴ Nevertheless, political and legislative pressure continues to intensify. Across Europe, legislators and research institutions have called for stricter oversight of IRW. In the European Parliament, for example, voices have emerged demanding the freezing of all EU funds allocated to IRW and its affiliated organizations until the completion of a comprehensive investigation into the organization’s alleged links to extremist Islamism. Similar calls have also been voiced in national parliaments, drawing on precedents established in Germany and the United Kingdom.



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