

The Muslim Brotherhood's Pan-European Structure

Reviewed by Bruce Bawer



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by Lorenzo Vidino and Sergio Altuna

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If the authors' outline of the Muslim Brotherhood in Europe looks like an organizational map of some massive international conglomerate, it is just that. Try to keep these acronyms straight: the Federation of Islamic Organizations in Europe (FIOE), which recently became the Council of European Muslims (CEM), is the secretive Brotherhood's public face in Europe. Its multinational subsidiaries include the Federation of European Muslim Youth and Student Organizations (FEMYSO), the European Institute for Human Sciences (IESH), the European Council for Fatwa and Research (ECFR), and the Europe Trust. Another possible entry on this list is Islamic Relief Worldwide (IRW) although it denies having Brotherhood ties.

Furthermore, the FIOE has member organizations in every major European country, from Austria's Liga Kultur Verein to the Deutsche Muslimische Gemeinschaft. These, in turn, have their own subordinate and related entities, some operationally close enough to be labeled "Brotherhood spawns" by the meticulous

authors and some sufficiently autonomous to be regarded merely as “organizations influenced by the Brotherhood.” France’s CEM member, the Union des Organisations Islamiques en France, which in 2017 became Musulmans de France (MF), boasts such assets, for example, as Lille’s Lycée-Collège Averroès and publishing house Bayane Éditions.

Examining in turn each of the Brotherhood’s more significant European units, Vidino, director of the Program on Extremism at George Washington University, and Altuna, of Madrid’s Elcano Royal Institute, discuss its history, activities, leaders, influence, and funding. Some country-to-country differences are interesting: For linguistic reasons, the Brotherhood never got much of a toehold in the Netherlands but flourishes in the U.K. Although certain governments—notably Germany’s—monitor Brotherhood groups closely and suspiciously, others—such as Switzerland’s—take a more laissez-faire approach while the multiculturalist Swedes stuff the Islamists’ pockets with cash. Indeed, it is remarkable how much European tax money some Brotherhood bodies have received for insidious but benign-sounding endeavors. And it is unsettling to read how cozy some Brotherhood leaders are with public officials high and low. Absurdly, it is not uncommon for one part of a national government to treat the Brotherhood as a severe security threat even as another part of the same government is funding Brotherhood projects.

Painting a disquieting picture of widespread, official wishy-washiness toward the Brotherhood, the authors quote a 2018 German report that explains succinctly why such a posture is unwise: in the long term, “the threat posed by [Brotherhood-style] legalistic Islamism to the liberal democratic system is greater than that of jihadism.” Perhaps the Brotherhood does not sponsor terrorism, but its activities reinforce Muslim isolation from, and hostility to, mainstream society, thereby setting the stage for a future Europe in which freedom, prosperity, and social harmony are mere memories.

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