
UNMASKING THE MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD

**BROTHERISM,
ISLAMOPHOBIA
& THE EU**

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- CCIB - COLLECTIF POUR L'INCLUSION ET CONTRE L'ISLAMOPHOBIE EN BELGIQUE
- CCIE - COLLECTIVE AGAINST ISLAMOPHOBIA IN EUROPE
- CCIV - CENTRO CULTURAL ISLÁMICO DE VALENCIA
- CDU - CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATIC UNION OF GERMANY
- CEM - COUNCIL OF EUROPEAN MUSLIMS
- CERV - CITIZENS, EQUALITY, RIGHTS AND VALUES PROGRAMME
- COE - COUNCIL OF EUROPE
- CORDIS - COMMUNITY RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT INFORMATION SERVICE
- DG ECHO - DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR CIVIL PROTECTION AND HUMANITARIAN AID OPERATIONS
- DG INTPA - DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR INTERNATIONAL PARTNERSHIPS
- DML - DEUTSCHEN MUSLIM-LIGA
- EC - EUROPEAN COMMISSION
- ECA - EUROPEAN COURT OF AUDITORS
- ECFR - EUROPEAN COUNCIL FOR FATWA AND RESEARCH
- ECTHR - EUROPEAN COURT OF HUMAN RIGHTS
- EDES - EARLY DETECTION AND EXCLUSION SYSTEM
- EFOMW - EUROPEAN FORUM OF MUSLIM WOMEN
- EMF - ETUDIANTS MUSULMANS DE FRANCE
- EMU - EUROPEAN MUSLIM UNION
- ENAR - EUROPEAN NETWORK AGAINST RACISM
- ENORB - EUROPEAN NETWORK ON RELIGION AND BELIEF
- EP - EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT
- EPRS - EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESEARCH SERVICE
- ERC - EUROPEAN RESEARCH COUNCIL
- ESC - EUROPEAN SOLIDARITY CORPS
- EU - EUROPEAN UNION
- FEMYSO - FORUM OF EUROPEAN MUSLIM YOUTH AND STUDENT ORGANISATIONS
- FIOE - FEDERATION OF ISLAMIC ORGANIZATIONS IN EUROPE
- FRA - FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS AGENCY
- IGS - ISLAMISCHE GEMEINSCHAFT DER SCHIITISCHEN GEMEINDEN DEUTSCHLANDS
- IESH - EUROPEAN INSTITUTE OF HUMAN SCIENCES
- IRGC - ISLAMIC REVOLUTIONARY GUARD CORPS
- IRW - ISLAMIC RELIEF WORLDWIDE
- IZH - ISLAMIC CENTRE OF HAMBURG
- JMF - JEUNES MUSULMANS DE FRANCE
- LFI - LA FRANCE INSOUmise
- LMB - LIGUE DES MUSULMANS DE BELGIQUE
- MB - MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD
- MCB - MUSLIM COUNCIL OF BRITAIN
- MENA - MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA
- MEP - MEMBER OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT
- MJÖ - MUSLIMISCHE JUGEND ÖSTERREICH
- NGO - NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATION
- OIC - ORGANISATION OF ISLAMIC COOPERATION
- ÖVP - AUSTRIAN PEOPLE'S PARTY
- PCF - FRENCH COMMUNIST PARTY
- PQ - PARLIAMENTARY QUESTION
- REC - RIGHTS, EQUALITY, CITIZENSHIP PROGRAMME
- SETA - FOUNDATION FOR POLITICAL, ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL RESEARCH
- SPD - SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC PARTY OF GERMANY
- SUM - SWEDISH YOUNG MUSLIMS
- UCOII - UNION OF ISLAMIC COMMUNITIES OF ITALY
- UOIF - UNION DES ORGANISATIONS ISLAMQUES DE FRANCE
- UNHCR - UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES
- WAMY - WORLD ASSEMBLY OF MUSLIM YOUTH
- WAFAW - WHEN AUTHORITARIANISM FAILS IN THE ARAB WORLD
- ZMD - CENTRAL COUNCIL OF MUSLIMS IN GERMANY

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FOREWORD

EUROPE STANDS AT A CROSSROADS



Charlie Weimers

Member of the European Parliament for Sweden
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If the European Union, its member states, regions, and municipalities continue to fund, legitimize, and embolden ideologies bent on undermining the continent's religious and cultural underpinnings, our shared future is at stake. The Muslim Brotherhood, a resourceful and calculating transnational Islamist organization, poses precisely such a threat. To safeguard the values that define us we must confront the challenge of this religious-ideological movement head-on with clarity and courage.

This report delivers a piercing, evidence-based dissection of the European branch of Muslim Brotherhood scrutinizing its ideological roots, operations, and financial networks, with a focus on its European network. I commissioned this report because those in power in the EU and many member states are alarmingly clueless about the Brotherhood's true nature. This movement is a different beast—ideologically and organizationally—diverging sharply from European norms for religious and political activist groups. The Muslim Brotherhood's rallying cry is "Islam is the solution." Their endgame is a global theocratic caliphate where every facet of life bends to the rigid dictates of Islam and Sharia, relegating non-Muslims to second-class status as dhimmis. The Brotherhood is a totalitarian force, and we must call it what it is.

In Europe, the Brotherhood is a wolf-in-sheep's-clothing disguise, shunning violence for a slick, pragmatic façade. They pose as reformists, eager to work within existing systems and engage with governments and society. But we must not be fooled—this tactical pivot is not a change of heart. Their ultimate aim remains to dismantle Europe's secular democratic institutions and erect a theocratic regime rooted in the Quran.

In liberal democracies, it is legal to leverage freedoms of religion, speech, and association to promote totalitarian ideologies that would abolish those very freedoms. Individuals and groups can advocate for Marxist dictatorship, a fascist autocracy, or Islamist theocracy, provided they avoid hate speech, are nonviolent and that they advocate for a peaceful transition to their favoured system.

European institutions, alongside many national governments and regional authorities, are woefully blind to this movement's true colours. This is no surprise—the Brotherhood's ideological aims, methods, and organizational structure clash starkly with European norms for political, religious, and activist groups. It's therefore no shock that most European Brotherhood organizations deny their ties to the movement, cloaking their true goals in ambiguity and adopting narratives that fit snugly within a secular, democratic, pluralistic framework. This might sound like a conspiracy theory, but the evidence backs it up.

Historically, Europe's ignorance of the Muslim Brotherhood was a minor issue, as the movement barely registered on the continent. But the tide has turned. Three seismic shifts have amplified its influence: (1) a surge in Muslim migration, creating a sizable Muslim minority; (2) the rise of a generation of young, Europe-born Muslims fluent in our culture and systems—while this often aids integration, it also equips the Brotherhood to exploit vulnerabilities; and (3) the Brotherhood's calculated push to entrench itself in the West, driven partly by bans and persecution in the Middle East.

This report is a wake-up call for decision-makers and citizens, offering a rigorous, evidence-based analysis of the Muslim Brotherhood's ideology and its sprawling European network. It lays bare how European institutions unwittingly bankroll and legitimize Brotherhood-affiliated groups, empowering them to chip away at Europe's core values.

The growing Muslim population has prompted European institutions, national governments, and regional authorities to seek bridges to Muslim communities, primarily to foster integration. Too often, they turn to Brotherhood-affiliated organizations, which appear accessible and credible to the untrained eye.

The Muslim Brotherhood's strength lies in its sophisticated global web of organizations, funding streams, and political clout, enabling seamless operations. Their playbook is clear: first, they establish mosques and Islamic cultural centres; then, they leverage these to pose as the voice of the Muslim community—despite only a minority sharing their ideology—when dealing with public institutions and society. Their activities—diversity projects, community organizing, interfaith dialogue, educational initiatives, and advocacy for religious freedom, social justice, multiculturalism, and combating “Islamophobia”—are, on their face, legitimate in a free society.

The Brotherhood's organizational structure in Europe is a labyrinth. It operates as a network of semi-independent groups, bound by shared ideology, familial ties, and personal relationships in varying degrees. Power and decision-making often sidestep formal hierarchies and titles.

The funding of Brotherhood-affiliated organizations is equally tangled. While some cash flows from small donations, wealthy patrons, and Gulf states like Qatar, significant contributions also come from grants and subsidies doled out by European institutions, national governments, and regional authorities.

Here's the rub: funnelling public funds to Brotherhood-affiliated groups—beyond their totalitarian ideology—often backfires. These organizations frequently push goals that clash with the values of the public bodies footing the bill and the very purpose of the grants. For example, grants meant to boost integration and social cohesion can empower groups that, true to their ideology, urge Muslims in Europe to cling to a separatist Islamic identity. This isn't progress—it's like inviting the fox into the henhouse, undermining social cohesion and stalling integration. European institutions, national governments, and regional authorities must stop funding and legitimizing these groups, as it often defeats their own objectives.

The administrative state—whether European institutions, national governments, or regional authorities—runs on impersonal principles like the rule of law and impartial decision-making. These shape what counts as relevant in grant decisions and what qualifies as evidence of a project's success. But the system rests on shaky assumptions. It presupposes officials understand the Brotherhood's true nature, which they often don't. It also assumes financial fraud is the main threat, so it's geared toward scrutinizing applications, receipts, accounts and ensuring that activities have happened. The actual content—what's said in a funded meeting or lecture; what is actually being propagated—slips through the cracks.

The bottom line and the key political takeaways from this report is that it exposes critical flaws in public funding of Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated groups and other totalitarian Islamists that demand urgent fixes. First off, the current setup lets Brotherhood-affiliated groups game the system. Officials rely on instructions, proper paperwork, and an organization's ability to parrot project goals. But these groups exploit officials' blind spots and administrative loopholes, mastering the art of using language that mirrors grant priorities to secure funding.

Second, political directives often push grant-giving bodies to prioritize or earmark funds for minority-run or minority-serving organizations. This, combined with officials' unfamiliarity with this totalitarian religious-ideology, gives Brotherhood-affiliated groups an edge. They can get funding and legitimacy that other totalitarian groups would never dream of getting.

Third, these organizations play a clever game of dominoes, leveraging legitimacy in one member state to gain credibility in another or at the European level, then using that to charm more grant-making bodies. This creates a vicious cycle of ever-growing legitimacy and funding from multiple sources.

Fourth, our monitoring systems are toothless when it comes to catching deviations from a grant's purpose. If an organization claims to uphold European values, authorities take it at face value. Denying funding for failing to align with those values requires ironclad evidence, but monitoring isn't built to scrutinize content. A few missteps are brushed off as one-offs, and any official who dares push back risks accusations of racism or "Islamophobia"—a chilling effect that will prevent most officials from acting unless they are extraordinarily principled and courageous.

Fifth, when an organization or its board is flagged as unsuitable for funding, there's little stopping associates or relatives from setting up a "new" entity, formally unconnected but effectively the same. Our systems don't track such ties, and administrative rules don't allow withholding funds based on such connections.

Finally, while the Brotherhood in Europe is largely peaceful—otherwise, it'd be banned for terrorism—some of its network and individuals flirt dangerously with violent extremism. Notably with Hamas, the self-proclaimed Palestinian arm of the Brotherhood, which has engaged in violence and terrorism. European institutions must tighten their zero-tolerance stance on groups or individuals tied to hatred, violence, or terrorism. Current grant systems only exclude those convicted of such acts—a very high bar—especially when new organizations can sprout overnight. We need a lower threshold, barring groups that even hint at failing to condemn hatred, violence, or terrorism.

This report lays bare a troubling pattern: Brotherhood-affiliated organizations routinely pursue goals and activities that run counter to European values—democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, gender equality, and respect for diverse faiths. These aren't outliers; they reflect the Brotherhood's core ideology. The conclusion is inescapable: European institutions, member states, and regional authorities must cut all ties, funding, and legitimacy to these groups. Anything less is a betrayal of the future of Europe and our shared values.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report examines the penetration of the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) and its ideology, “Brotherism”, within the EU, focusing on how MB-linked organisations exploit EU funding and institutions to advance their agenda.

Following the playbook of key ideologues such as Abu al-A’la al-Mawdudi and Yusuf al-Qaradawi, who have shaped strategies like gradual societal change and entryism, MB-affiliated networks have managed to discreetly influence European policymaking and public discourse. MB-linked organisations have directly received significant EU funding and institutional access despite their Islamist ideology and their ties to extremism.

On top of that, they have succeeded in mainstreaming their narrative on key issues, thus expanding Brotherism beyond its original remit. The “Islamophobia” discourse is a case in point. The MB uses “Islamophobia” as a rhetorical tool to frame criticism of its interpretations of Islam as racism, leveraging this strategy to align with left-wing political and civil society actors who, knowingly or unknowingly, advance a Brotherist agenda under the guise of inclusion.

The report identifies insufficient financial oversight, allowing EU funds to support extremist groups or to amplify their illiberal ideologies. It also warns against a legitimization effect produced by the engagement of EU institutions with Brotherist narratives and structures. The findings highlight the urgency of policy reforms to counter the Muslim Brotherhood’s influence in Europe, through an enhanced EU oversight to protect secular, liberal and democratic values.

1. INTRODUCTION: THE MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD SYSTEM AND “BROTHERISM”

“The European Commission does not finance extremists. On the contrary, we have very strong oversight and audit of our financing intervention. If you have evidence to the contrary, I would be very interested to have it”.¹

With these words, EU Commissioner for the European Way of Life, Margaritis Schinas, replied to ECR MEP Charlie Weimers, who, in a 2019 public exchange at the European Parliament, raised the alarm about funding for Islamist organizations. When, three years later, Weimers presented indeed the evidence, the tone drastically changed.²

Schinas’s initial reaction, while definitively inaccurate, can be partially explained by the persistent confusion surrounding concepts such as “extremism” and “Islamism”, despite decades of discussions about them. In fact, this is not accidental but rather the fruit of a deliberate strategy of obfuscation. Non-violent Islamist groups in the West, of which the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) is undoubtedly the main representative, have made the deliberate mystification of their identity and goals one of the secrets of their success.

As an organization in the strictest meaning of the term, “Muslim Brotherhood”, also known as Muslim Brethren or *Ikhwan* (Arabic term for “Brothers”), describes the movement founded by Hasan al-Banna in Egypt in 1928. As such, the “Brotherhood” remains an established reality across Middle Eastern and Western countries, with an official website in English³ and Arabic;⁴ its branches bear the official name of “Muslim Brotherhood”, respond to an established hierarchal chain and count acknowledged members among their ranks.

This European iteration of the MB, however, represents only a small tip of the iceberg, and it is not the most influential or dangerous one. In a continent characterized by secularized liberal democracies with no historical Muslim traditions, the Brotherhood networks mostly operate discreetly, if not secretly. For this reason, under the public surface we find a diffuse network of individuals and organizations linked by adherence to the principles of al-Banna, in an updated version 2.0 – a veritable “network of networks”⁵ that operates strategically and flexibly, adapting to the specific political and social environments of different European countries.

“Collectively, these organisations form a trans-ethnic network or movement. They are connected by the numerous overlapping leadership roles of senior personnel, informal personal relationships, and organisational collaborations. They are connected by a shared way of perceiving and evaluating the world”.⁶

¹ Charlie Weimers MEP [@weimers], ‘2019 exchange in the EU Parliament on EU-financing of islamists.’, Tweet, X [Former Twitter], 14 July 2022, <https://x.com/weimers/status/1547627063095414785>.

² Ibid.

³ www.ikhwanweb.com

⁴ <https://www.ikhwanonline.com/>

⁵ Paul Stott and Tommaso Virgili, *Network of Networks: The Muslim Brotherhood in Europe* (European Conservatives and Reformists Group at the European Parliament, 2021), <https://ecrgroup.eu/files/MuslimBrotherhood.pdf>.

⁶ Damon Lee Perry, *Mainstream Islamism in Britain: Educating for the “Islamic Revival”* (Commission for Countering Extremism, 2019), 2, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/mainstream-islamism-in-britain-educating-for-the-islamic-revival>.

This means that, beyond the official layer of public MB members expatriated in Europe, one may find secretly sworn-in members who publicly deny their affiliation, and also individuals who operate in organisations established by Muslim Brothers despite not being themselves part of the brethren.⁷ This triple layer, in its turn, does not exhaust the complexities of the system that Bergeaud-Blackler, co-author of this report, defines *frérisme* (loosely translatable as “Brotherism”) – a blend of ideological coherence and collective identity formulated around a specific vision of global Islamic hegemony, to be pursued with a strategy of slow infiltration that leverages every possible allies.⁸

The latter may include individuals and entities that are not part of the MB in any structural sense but are influenced by its ideology and operate accordingly, as well as individuals completely unaware of their role in the plan and even coming from very distant ideological backgrounds, such as the materialist left.

Identifying active and committed *ikhwan* members is challenging, as they typically deny any affiliation. At any rate, the number of activists in organizations influenced by the Brotherhood significantly exceeds the number of officially sworn members. These affiliates may not even be aware of their involvement with the Brotherhood but remain active within organizations founded or influenced by its ideology, such as Islamic Relief Worldwide (IRW) and its branches, the network of the Council of European Muslims (CEM, former Federation of Islamic Organizations in Europe – FIOE), the Federation of European Muslim Youth and Student Organizations (FEMYSO), the European Forum of Muslim Women (EFOMW), and a plethora of other national and international entities.

Indeed, in each European country, the Brotherhood has established religious and cultural institutions that claim to represent the Muslim faith and community before the state and public authorities, but also numerous NGOs, think tanks and trusts that have ostensibly nothing to do with religion. Furthermore, it has raised and trained a network of professionals in different fields to penetrate all sectors of public life, including education, health, development, business, law and justice. It is not exaggeration or conspiracy to say that the MB and its conscious or unconscious allies have gained a deep foothold in European societies, strengthened with money, influence and the skilful use of ideology.

Those who consciously work for the Brotherhood pursue a common plan: change society, adapt it, educate and instil the “correct” understanding of Islam while fighting “incorrect” versions, promote an Islamic way of life and combat illicit behaviours – as per the Quranic maxim “enjoin good and forbid evil” (*al-amr bil-ma’ruf wa al-nahy ‘an al-munkar*). Adhering to the doctrine of the “middle way” (*wasatiyya*),⁹ they emphasize moderation and even offer their support to security services in preventing jihadist attacks. At the same time, they promote a separatist and identitarian ideology based on a rigorist interpretation of Islam that represents, in their eyes, a “complete system of life”.¹⁰ They also maintain a flexible approach to violence, including direct connections with armed groups, particularly in Palestine. In fact, Hamas itself is officially the Palestinian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood.

⁷ Stott and Virgili, *Network of Networks: The Muslim Brotherhood in Europe*, 13.

⁸ Florence Bergeaud-Blackler, *Le frérisme et ses réseaux: L'enquête* (Odile Jacob, 2023).

⁹ More on this below.

¹⁰ Perry, *Mainstream Islamism in Britain*, 4.

To fulfil their goal, the Brothers leverage religious channels, such as mosques, imams, religious literature and their version 2.0 of *fatwa* forums and apps,¹¹ but they also infiltrate social, political, legal and economic institutions by speaking the most appropriate language in any given situation. That is where the allies come into play. When the principles advocated by the Brotherhood clash with the secular and liberal values of their host countries, and these countries enact policies to protect those values, the *Ikhwan* often frame such responses as retaliatory actions fuelled by “Islamophobia” and state racism. This framing allows them to leverage left-wing parties and civil society movements aligned with “intersectional”, “critical” and “woke” ideologies¹².

As shown in a previous ECR report by Stott and Virgili,¹³ the European Union is far from immune to this complex network of influence and infiltration. This updated report delves more deeply into the system of Brotherism and one of its most effective carriers – the “Islamophobia” narrative.

We begin by exploring the foundational ideologies underpinning *frérisme*, examining influential figures like Yusuf al-Qaradawi and Abul Ala Mawdudi and showing the impact they have had not only on the thought, but also on the strategy of the European MB. We then scrutinize the EU’s entanglement with Brotherism, focusing on both the legitimization and funding enjoyed by MB-linked organizations. The subsequent section takes an in-depth look at the “Islamophobia” discourse, unmasking a fraudulent enterprise that perfectly fits in the Brotherist system and serves to advance its agenda by attracting leftist allies. We focus on several EU-funded projects and initiatives that legitimize and promote this discourse, whether through direct MB management or the parroting of its ideology and goals. The following section looks at good practices – initiatives some European nations and EU institutions have taken to counter, or at least mitigate, the Islamist influence. At the end, we call for decisive policy action and enhanced transparency in fund allocation to prevent EU resources from favouring Islamist organizations and agendas, and we offer some policy recommendations in the pursuit of these objectives.

¹¹ Stott and Virgili, *Network of Networks: The Muslim Brotherhood in Europe*, 36.

¹² Bergeaud-Blackler, *Le frérisme et ses réseaux; Global Influence Operations Report, Europe and the Global Muslim Brotherhood Part 2: Lobbying & Political Impacts* (2022), <https://www.global-influence-ops.com/gior-report-europe-and-the-global-muslim-brotherhood-part-2-lobbying-political-impacts/>.

¹³ Stott and Virgili, *Network of Networks: The Muslim Brotherhood in Europe*.

2. THE IDEOLOGUES BEHIND MODERN BROTHERISM

YUSUF AL-QARADAWI: THE MASTER OF FALSE MODERATION

Yusuf al-Qaradawi, a prominent Islamic scholar who was born in Egypt but later relocated to Qatar, played a pivotal role in shaping the ideology and development of the Muslim Brotherhood from his early involvement with the organization in the mid-20th century up to his death in 2022. His intellectual contributions were rooted in the concept of *wasatiyya*, or the “middle way”, which allegedly seeks to balance traditional Islamic values with contemporary societal needs through a “moderate” and politically engaged vision of Islam. This “moderatism” is presented as a reasonable middle ground between violent extremism and “extreme secularism”.¹⁴

In fact, *wasatiyya* encapsulates the main strategy of the Brotherist ideology: it is a façade for more radical agendas, allowing for the gradual implementation of Islamic law in societies that are not ready for abrupt changes, due to socio-cultural or political conditions. This gradualism is meant to achieve a form of stealth Islamization, where the ultimate goal of establishing an Islamic state is slowly pursued under the guise of moderation.¹⁵ It is through this same lens that one can view his doctrine of the *fiqh al-aqalliyat* – a jurisprudence for Muslim minorities living in non-Muslim countries. While often presented as a pathway toward Muslims’ integration, as it encourages them not to isolate and to engage peacefully with their host societies, *fiqh al-aqalliyat* is in fact the foundation of the Brotherist strategy of entryism: Muslims must maintain their distinct identity and Islamic values (often by demanding exemptions from secular laws and norms), while penetrating society through organizations, businesses and political engagement. This will allow them to gain influence and gradually bend Western societies in an Islamist direction.¹⁶ This project has nothing “moderate” in a liberal democratic sense. It rather represents a strategy based on the realisation that peaceful engagement and *dawa* (“invitation”, proselytism) are more effective than jihad for achieving the desired goals when the socio-political conditions do not favour violent struggle. In other contexts, conversely, Al-Qaradawi continued to regard violence and terrorism as the best means to attain the organisation’s objectives. In Israel, for instance, he identified even civilians and an “innocent child” as legitimate targets in what he termed a “jihad of necessity”.¹⁷

Even in places such as Europe where the Muslim Brotherhood has tactically rejected jihad in favour *dawa*, *wasatiyya* doesn’t bring about a rejection of extremism per se. Al-Qaradawi was very clear in praising extremists due “their love for truth and hatred of falsehood, their passion to disseminate the divine message, their determination to command the common good and forbid what is harmful, their zeal for jihad [struggling against oppression and corruption],¹⁸ their concern for Muslims everywhere in the world, and their aspiration to establish an Islamic society which lives in accordance with the teachings of God”.¹⁹ Their sole mistake, in simple terms, is impatience. What is first needed, is a change in societal conditions – a “comprehensive social transformation that does not just concern spirituality, education, finance, or politics, but every aspect of human existence”, to quote Anas Altikriti, president of the Muslim Association of Britain and founder of the Cordoba Foundation.²⁰

¹⁴ Tommaso Virgili, ‘Yusuf Al-Qaradawi: False Moderate and True Radical? The Star of Al-Jazeera Perhaps Is Not so Bright’, Al-Mesbar Studies & Research Center, 27 March 2018, <https://mesbar.org/yusuf-al-qaradawi-false-moderate-and-true-radical/>.

¹⁵ Bergeaud-Blackler, *Le frérisme et ses réseaux*, 121.

¹⁶ Stott and Virgili, *Network of Networks: The Muslim Brotherhood in Europe*, 30.

¹⁷ Virgili, ‘Yusuf Al-Qaradawi’.

¹⁸ Parentheses in the text.

¹⁹ Yusuf al-Qaradawi, *Islamic Awakening Between Rejection and Extremism* (International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2007), 91. Parentheses in the text.

²⁰ Perry, *Mainstream Islamism in Britain*, 10.

It is about a “cultural jihad”²¹ that will gradually lead to a fully-fledged sharia-based state, including the *hudud* punishments of amputation and stoning: “Some mainstream Islamists have made explicit their belief that prior to *hudud* punishments being applied, Islam has to be firmly embraced within society and *shari’a* lived out as a moral code”.²² Entryism and *dawa* are the perfect tools to reach that stage.

ABU AL-A’LA AL-MAWDUDI AND THE ISLAMIC WAY OF LIFE

Abu al-A’la al-Mawdudi, founder of Jamaat-e-Islami in colonial India, significantly influenced the Muslim Brotherhood’s ideology and development in Europe. While not an official member of the MB himself, his concept of “system-Islam”, emphasizing Islam’s self-sufficiency and ability to provide guidance for all aspects of human life world-wide, resonated deeply with the Brotherhood’s vision of a global Islamic rule.²³ Mawdudi’s emphasis on a bottom-up approach to achieving an Islamic society, through gradual societal transformation and the establishment of a network of Muslim institutions,²⁴ provided a blueprint for the Brotherhood’s strategy in Europe.

For Mawdudi, Islam is a universal and all-encompassing way of life, englobing political, social and economic aspects in a system dominated by sharia law.²⁵ The global *umma* has the mission to spread this system across borders – a transnationalism that resonates with the Muslim Brotherhood’s goal of establishing a global Islamic movement. In contrast with Sayyid Qutb’s strategy of jihad, Mawdudi was a champion of gradualism. According to Mawdudi’s system, the Islamic state shall be reached via a bottom-up approach that, first, brings about an intellectual change in the people; second, organizes them in the form of a movement; third, reforms society through social and humanitarian work; and finally, strives to change the leaders.²⁶ This strategy, which closely recalls Hassan Al-Banna’s multi-phase plan outlined in the *Letter to the Youth*,²⁷ is to be patiently pursued through a *dawa* that fits the specific context in which the Brothers find themselves. When operating in liberal democracies, for example, they are supposed to adopt the liberal democratic vocabulary – albeit with key terms emptied of their substance and filled with Islamic meanings – when doing so offers a better chance to deceive and penetrate a wary Western society.²⁸

In Europe, the British Islamic Foundation in Leicester, linked to Jama’at-i-Islami, has played a key role in translating and disseminating Mawdudi’s works in English, contributing to the spread of the abovementioned concept of *dawa*. The Islamic Foundation’s Director Khurram Murad, described by Lorenzo Vidino as a “Brotherhood *dawa* strategist”,²⁹ has promoted the idea of preserving Muslim identity in secular European societies while presenting Islam as a viable alternative way of life.³⁰

Muslim Brotherhood-linked movements have become masters of this technique, as they engage with European institutions and use a Western discourse to advance their agenda. Mawdudi’s emphasis on re-education of society is evident, *inter alia*, in the promotion of the anti-Islamophobia campaign presented below.

²¹ Cit. in Ibid., 11.

²² Ibid.

²³ Bergeaud-Blackler, *Le frérisme et ses réseaux*, 82.

²⁴ Damon Lee Perry, ‘The Global Muslim Brotherhood in Britain A Social Movement?’ (King’s College London, 2016), 75, <https://kclpure.kcl.ac.uk/portal/en/studentTheses/the-global-muslim-brotherhood-in-britain>.

²⁵ Bergeaud-Blackler, *Le frérisme et ses réseaux*, 82.

²⁶ Seyyed Vali Reza Nasr, *The Vanguard of the Islamic Revolution: The Jama’at-i Islami of Pakistan* (University of California Press, 1994).

²⁷ Stott and Virgili, *Network of Networks: The Muslim Brotherhood in Europe*, 25.

²⁸ Bergeaud-Blackler, *Le frérisme et ses réseaux*, 83.

²⁹ Lorenzo Vidino, *The New Muslim Brotherhood in the West*, e-book (Columbia University Press, 2010), chap. 2.

³⁰ Perry, ‘The Global Muslim Brotherhood in Britain A Social Movement?’, 178.

3. THE EU AND ISLAMISM: FUNDING AND LEGITIMIZATION

Several reports, parliamentary questions (PQs) and an analysis of the Transparency Register show that the EU still gives legitimacy and various forms of support to organisations linked to the Muslim Brotherhood galaxy. They thus obtain funding, preferential treatment and access to powerful networks within the EU institutions and the broader EU ecosystem.

EUROPEAN UNION FUNDING MODES

All programmes financed by the EU budget fall under one of three implementation modes depending on the nature of the funding concerned:

Direct management: under direct management, the European Commission (EC) is directly responsible for all stages of the implementation of a programme: launching the call for proposals, evaluating the proposals submitted, signing the grant agreements, monitoring the implementation of the project and evaluating the results and payments.

Shared management: the European Commission and national authorities jointly administer the funding. Under shared management, both the European Commission and the national authorities of the Member States, such as ministries and public bodies, are responsible for overseeing a particular programme. Around 70% of EU programmes are managed in this way.

Indirect management: funding is managed by partner organisations or other authorities inside or outside the EU. Examples include national bodies (such as Erasmus+ national agencies, development agencies of Member States and national promotional banks) as well as international organizations (the European Investment Bank, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, among others).³¹

It is crucial to stress that, even in case of indirect management, the Commission retains a duty of supervision and remains ultimately responsible for ensuring that EU funds are managed appropriately and in accordance with EU financial regulations.³²

MB-LINKED ORGANIZATIONS AND EU SUPPORT

Vidino and Altuna have identified the six organizations below as the main pan-European structures with links to the Muslim Brotherhood movement:³³

Council of European Muslims (CEM) (until 2020 called the **Federation of Islamic Organizations in Europe – FIOE**): This Brussels-based umbrella organization brings together the main national entities associated with the Muslim Brotherhood in European countries. It coordinates and harmonizes their activities.

³¹ European Commission, 'EU Funding by Management Mode', accessed 13 November 2024, https://commission.europa.eu/funding-tenders/find-funding/funding-management-mode_en.

³² 'Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2024/2509 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 September 2024 on the Financial Rules Applicable to the General Budget of the Union (Recast)', European Commission, 29 September 2024, https://commission.europa.eu/publications/eu-financial-regulation_en.

³³ Lorenzo Vidino and Sergio Altuna, *The Muslim Brotherhood's Pan-European Structure* (Austrian Fund for the Documentation of Religiously Motivated Extremism (Documentation Centre Political Islam), 2021), https://www.dokumentationsstelle.at/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Report_EU_Strukturen_final.pdf.

Federation of European Muslim Youth and Student Organizations (FEMYSO)

Also based in Brussels, FEMYSO serves as a network for youth and student organizations linked to the Muslim Brotherhood across Europe. Leadership positions are often held by children of senior members of Brotherhood-affiliated groups.

European Institute of Human Sciences (Institut Européen des Sciences Humaines – IESH)

A network of schools located in France, Germany, the UK and Finland. These institutions train imams and religious scholars while promoting an interpretation of Islam aligned with the Brotherhood's ideology. The French government dissolved the main France-based branch in September 2025, on the basis that its leaders and teaching materials promoted and legitimized violent jihad; incited discrimination, hatred, and violence against various groups—including women, non-Muslims, and homosexuals; propagated extremist ideologies; and were connected to the radicalization of individuals and the support of terrorist organizations like Hamas.³⁴

European Council for Fatwa and Research (ECFR)

Based in Dublin, this jurisprudential body provides religious rulings to help European Muslims reconcile Islamic law with life in non-Muslim-majority societies. Established by Al-Qaradawi, many of its members have ties to Brotherhood-affiliated entities.

Europe Trust

Headquartered in the UK, Europe Trust engages in financial activities, primarily real estate investments, to fund the network's initiatives. It has affiliates in various European countries.

Islamic Relief Worldwide (IRW) and its local branches

While IRW denies any affiliation, extensive organizational and personal connections exist between this charity and the Muslim Brotherhood's European network. Local IR branches are often run by individuals linked to other Brotherhood-affiliated entities.

As explained in the introduction, this foundational core does not exhaust the Brotherist network in Europe. There are numerous other organizations – at the European, national, regional and local levels – that are influenced by or linked to the Muslim Brotherhood in less direct ways, as emerges from organic and personal ties and/or a shared ideology.³⁵

Below, we outline some egregious cases of support from EU institutions to Brotherist structures.

EUROPEAN NETWORK AGAINST RACISM

The European Network Against Racism (ENAR) describes itself as “pan-European anti-racism network” that “works to put an end to structural racism and discrimination across Europe and make a real difference in ethnic and religious minorities’ lives”.³⁶ From 2010 to 2021, it was headed by Michaël Privot, a former sworn member of the Muslim Brotherhood who later denounced his affiliation.³⁷ Several of ENAR's member organizations, listed elsewhere in this study, have clear links with the global Muslim Brotherhood movement.

³⁴ Décret du 3 septembre 2025 portant dissolution de l'association « Institut Européen des Sciences Humaines (IESH) » (2025), <https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/jorf/id/JORFTEXT000052182608>.

³⁵ See for instance Bergeaud-Blackler, *Le frérisme et ses réseaux*, 203. See also other organizations mentioned in this report.

³⁶ 'About ENAR', European Network Against Racism, accessed 5 December 2024, <https://www.enar-eu.org/about/>.

³⁷ Michaël Privot, *Quand j'étais frère musulman : Parcours vers un islam des lumières* (La Boîte à Pandore, 2017).

These include FEMYSO, the *Collectif pour l'Inclusion et contre l'Islamophobie en Belgique* (CCIB, now CIIB), *Etudiants Musulmans de France* (EMF) and the European Forum of Muslim Women (EFOMW).³⁸

Unsurprisingly, ENAR has been in the forefront of the battle against Islamophobia. It has even coordinated a “European Coalition Against Islamophobia” that was, in fact a “network of Brotherist influencers”³⁹ comprising some of the most influential organizations and individuals of the Brotherhood nebula such as FEMYSO, EFOMW, European Network on Religion and Belief (ENORB),⁴⁰ CAGE, the Collective against Islamophobia in Europe (CCIE) – offspring of the Collective against Islamophobia in France dissolved by French authorities – , *Etudiants Musulmans de France*, Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) and the editor of the Islamophobia report Farid Hafez (see below).⁴¹

ENAR enjoys a great deal of material and immaterial benefits from the European Commission. According to a Parliamentary Question, in the period 2007–2020, it got EU funding to the tune of €23 million.⁴² Moreover, ENAR is frequently involved as a partner and consultant in different initiatives sponsored by the Commission or EU agencies. In 2021, for instance, it took part in a roundtable on “racial and climate justice” along with EC Vice-President Frans Timmermans and in another meeting concerning the European Climate Pact.⁴³ It also delivered the opening speech at the European Commission’s 6th Migration Forum.⁴⁴ In 2023, the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights shared on its social media, and later deleted, a call for a “march against Islamophobia” promoted by ENAR and other Brotherist organizations such as FEMYSO and EFOMW.⁴⁵ Additionally, ENAR prides itself on engaging with multiple political groups at the European Parliament and on influencing documents and reports from the European Commission, European Parliament and the Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA).⁴⁶

EUROPEAN FORUM OF MUSLIM WOMEN (EFOMW)

The European Forum of Muslim Women (EFOMW) was created in 2005 under the auspices of the *Union des Organisations Islamiques de France* (UOIF) – the French entity linked to the Muslim Brotherhood now called *Musulmans de France*.⁴⁷ Its first president was Noura Jaballah, who was not only leader of UOIF but also member of FIOE.⁴⁸ Her husband, Tunisian-born Ahmed Jaballah, is a star in the MB landscape, having held leading positions at UOIF, FIOE, IESH, ECFR and the International Union of Muslim Scholars (IUMS), among others.⁴⁹ A criminal investigation against him was opened in 2020 concerning the financing and activities of the IESH. In 2024, France ordered him to leave the territory and banned him from readmission on the grounds that he posed a threat to public order.⁵⁰

³⁸ ‘Members’, European Network Against Racism, accessed 27 September 2025, <https://www.enar-eu.org/members/>; Bergeaud-Blackler, *Le frérisme et ses réseaux*, 200; Stott and Virgili, *Network of Networks: The Muslim Brotherhood in Europe*.

³⁹ Bergeaud-Blackler, *Le frérisme et ses réseaux*, 203. Own translation from French.

⁴⁰ The Global Muslim Brotherhood Daily Watch, *European Parliament Helps Muslim Brotherhood Establish New Interfaith Group*, 13 January 2013, <https://www.globalmbwatch.com/2013/01/13/european-parliament-helps-muslim-brotherhood-establish-new-interfaith-group/>.

⁴¹ European Network Against Racism, *Open Letter: A Meaningful Coordinator on Anti-Muslim Hatred to Transform EU Approach on Islamophobia*, 5 July 2018, <https://www.enar-eu.org/open-letter-a-meaningful-coordinator-on-anti-muslim-hatred-to-transform-eu-1523/>.

⁴² Jean-Paul Garraud (ID), ‘Parliamentary Question E-005513/2021: Commission Finance and Support for an NGO Close to the Muslim Brotherhood’, European Parliament, 9 December 2021, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/E-9-2021-005513_EN.html.

⁴³ Global Influence Operations Report, *Europe and the Global Muslim Brotherhood Part 2*, 5.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 11.

⁴⁵ Jean-Paul Garraud (ID), Catherine Griset (ID), France Jamet (ID), André Rougé (ID), Jean-François Jalkh (ID), Eric Minardi (ID), ‘Parliamentary Question E-001114/2023: Fundamental Rights Agency and the Muslim Brotherhood’, European Parliament, 31 March 2023, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/E-9-2023-001114_EN.html.

⁴⁶ ENAR, *Annual Report 2022* (2023), https://www.enar-eu.org/wp-content/uploads/AnnualReport_2022_Final.pdf; ENAR, *Annual Report 2023* (2024), <https://www.enar-eu.org/wp-content/uploads/3.-ANNUAL-Report-2023.pdf>; Global Influence Operations Report, *Europe and the Global Muslim Brotherhood Part 2*, 13.

⁴⁷ Mohamed Louizi, *Pourquoi j’ai quitté les Frères musulmans* (Michalon, 2016), 185.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ ‘Ahmed Jaballah’, Global Influence Operations Report, accessed 27 November 2024, <https://www.global-influence-ops.com/wiki/ahmed-jaballah/>.

⁵⁰ Y. N., ‘Visé Par Une OQTF, Ahmed Jaballah Un Théologien Islamiste a Quitté La France Pour La Tunisie’, Kapitalis, 2 March 2024, <https://kapitalis.com/tunisie/2024/03/02/vise-par-une-oqtf-ahmed-jaballah-un-theologien-islamiste-a-quitte-la-france-pour-la-tunisie/>.

Besides being part of EU-funded projects,⁵¹ EFOMW has enjoyed non-material legitimacy from EU institutions. For instance, in 2018 the European Parliament Research Service (EPRS) quoted EFO-MW and SETA as sources to detect Islamophobia in Europe,⁵² and in 2023 EFOMW was part of the abovementioned march against Islamophobia sponsored by the Fundamental Rights Agency. Furthermore, EFOMW has a history of engagement with the European Parliament, where it has lobbied and proposed amendments on issues such as Islamic feminism, intersectional discrimination and anti-racism.⁵³

According to a 2025 Report on the Muslim Brotherhood by the French Ministry of Interior, EFMOW has been dissolved in 2023.⁵⁴ However, as of September 2025, the organization is still featured in the members section of ENAR's website.⁵⁵

EUROPEAN MUSLIM UNION (EMU)

The European Muslim Union is a French-based organization founded by German convert Andreas Abu Bakr Rieger. Rieger is better known for having explicitly praised the Holocaust in 1993 (an act for which he would only apologize 13 years later).⁵⁶

"Like the Turks, we Germans have often fought a good cause, though I admit that my grandfathers did not face up to our common enemy thoroughly enough".⁵⁷

The statement was issued in the occasion of the commemoration of Metin Kaplan,⁵⁸ the so-called "Caliph of Cologne", an advocate of overthrowing democracies in favour of an Islamic state, who planned a terrorist attack in Turkey and served a four-year prison sentence in Germany for orchestrating the execution of a rival Islamic leader.⁵⁹ Indeed, Rieger is considered close to a Cologne-based Islamist organization that advocates the Islamist takeover of Germany,⁶⁰ and he has been on the radar of German intelligence (Offices for the Protection of the Constitution) along with the Weimar Institute for Intellectual and Contemporary History that he established.⁶¹

The European Muslim Union itself is considered part of the MB network by the Canadian Institute for Jewish Research,⁶² and it is listed in the *Qatar Papers* as a recipient of Qatar Charity funding.⁶³

None of this has raised a red flag for the EU evaluators who have granted EMU more than €1 million over 16 Erasmus+ projects, among which "Let's say stop to Islamophobic!", described below.⁶⁴

⁵¹ For instance, "Dialogue, Education and Respect in the Classroom" under Erasmus+. See below.

⁵² Wouter van Ballegooij and Jeffrey Moxom, *Equality and the Fight against Racism and Xenophobia* (European Parliamentary Research Service, 2018), 80, [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2018/615660/EPRS_STU\(2018\)615660_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2018/615660/EPRS_STU(2018)615660_EN.pdf).

⁵³ Bergeaud-Blackler, *Le frérisme et ses réseaux*, 223; Global Influence Operations Report, Europe and the Global Muslim Brotherhood Part 2, 15.

⁵⁴ République Française, *Frères musulmans et islamisme politique en France* (Paris, 2025), 32, <https://www.interieur.gouv.fr/sites/minint/files/medias/documents/2025-05/2025-05-02-rapport-freres-musulmans.pdf>.

⁵⁵ European Network Against Racism, 'Members'.

⁵⁶ Frederik Schindler, 'Erasmus-Mittel: Geldsegen Aus EU-Töpfen Für Umstrittene Islamische Organisation', *Die Welt*, 7 January 2023, <https://www.welt.de/politik/deutschland/article243083993/Erasmus-Mittel-Geldsegen-aus-EU-Toepfen-fuer-umstrittene-islamische-Organisation.html>.

⁵⁷ Jorge González-Gallarza, 'When the EU Funds Hate', *The American Conservative*, 30 June 2021, <https://www.theamericanconservative.com/when-the-european-union-funds-hate/>.

⁵⁸ Victor Eyraud, 'L'islamisme d'Erdogan infiltre l'Europe via Erasmus+', *Valeurs actuelles*, 16 December 2022, <https://www.valeursactuelles.com/clubvaleurs/societe/islamisme-derdogan-infiltre-leurope-via-erasmus>.

⁵⁹ BBC, *Profile: The Caliph of Cologne*, 27 May 2004, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/1705886.stm>.

⁶⁰ González-Gallarza, 'When the EU Funds Hate'.

⁶¹ Schindler, 'Erasmus-Mittel'.

⁶² Charles Chitayat, 'The Spread of Islamism in the West, Courtesy of Qatar: The Unique Case of France', Canadian Institute for Jewish Research, 14 May 2020, <https://isranet.org/analysis/the-spread-of-islamism-in-the-west-courtesy-of-qatar-the-unique-case-of-france/>.

⁶³ Christian Chesnot and Georges Malbrunot, *Qatar Papers*, Kindle edition (Michel Lafont, 2019).

⁶⁴ Eyraud, 'L'islamisme d'Erdogan infiltre l'Europe via Erasmus+'.

FORUM OF EUROPEAN MUSLIM YOUTH AND STUDENT ORGANISATIONS (FEMYSO)

The Forum of European Muslim Youth and Student Organisations was created in 1996 at the behest of the FIOE and other MB-linked organizations, such as the Islamic Foundation of Leicester, the Swedish Young Muslims (SUM), *Jeunes Musulmans de France* (JMF) and Young Muslims UK.⁶⁵ Based in Brussels, FEMYSO used to have the same address as the CIIB, the World Assembly of Muslim Youth (WAMY) and European Forum of Muslim Women (EFOMW).⁶⁶

Within FEMYSO, we find the Gotha of the MB aristocracy worldwide. Its co-founder and first president was Ibrahim El-Zayat,⁶⁷ a German of Egyptian heritage whom German security services dubbed “the spider in the web of Islamist organizations”⁶⁸ and “the representative of the Muslim Brotherhood in Germany”.⁶⁹ It would be hard to overestimate his *Ikhwani* pedigree, considering that he has been involved in virtually all the most important MB organizations in Europe, including Islamic Relief, FIOE, Europe Trust, IESH, the viciously antisemitic⁷⁰ World Assembly of Muslim Youth (WAMY), Millî Görüş and several other German MB entities.⁷¹ In El-Zayat’s case, anyhow, there is no need to resort to association by proximity: he was explicitly declared an MB member by the official Brotherhood outlet Ikhwanweb,⁷² and he lost a lawsuit against a German MP who called him “an MB official”.⁷³

Along with El-Zayat, FEMYSO’s initial vice-president was Huda Himmat, daughter of the Syrian-born naturalized Italian Ghaleb Himmat; her brother Youssef would later become FEMYSO’s president.⁷⁴ Ghaleb Himmat, another key figure in the European MB panorama and self-admitted financier of the global MB network,⁷⁵ was also identified by Ikhwanweb as part of the Muslim Brotherhood.⁷⁶ Another former president of FEMYSO was Intissar Kherigi, daughter of Rached Ghannouchi, President of Tunisian MB-linked Ennahdha party. For the period 2021-2023 the organization was headed by Hend Taner, Dutch member of Millî Görüş (the Turkish branch of the Muslim Brotherhood).⁷⁷

This brief excursus makes it clear that FEMYSO is a nexus of multiple MB branches and families across Europe and the Middle East. With representatives from 32 member organizations in 22 European countries, FEMYSO embodies the *Ikhwan*’s globalist vision aimed at fostering transnational connections and serving as a platform for developing a unified European Muslim identity.

Between 2007 and 2019, FEMYSO received €288,856 of EU funding⁷⁸ across various projects, some of which are described in the Islamophobia section of this report. In July 2023, the Commission stated that no EU funded project featuring FEMYSO was still running.⁷⁹

⁶⁵ FEMYSO, ‘Our History’, accessed 25 November 2024, <https://web.archive.org/web/20210127105320/https://femyso.org/history/>.

⁶⁶ Bergeaud-Blackler, *Le frérisme et ses réseaux*, 141.

⁶⁷ Stott and Virgili, *Network of Networks: The Muslim Brotherhood in Europe*, 40.

⁶⁸ Vidino and Altuna, *The Muslim Brotherhood’s Pan-European Structure*, 147.

⁶⁹ Birgit Gärtner, ‘Eine Erfolgsgeschichte Der Muslimbruderschaft’, Heise, 10 January 2021, <https://www.heise.de/tp/features/Eine-Erfolgsgeschichte-der-Muslimbruderschaft-5019447.html?seite=all>; Stefan Meining, ‘The Islamic Community in Germany: An Organisation Under Observation’, in *The Muslim Brotherhood in Europe*, ed. Edwin Bakker et al. (Oxford University Press, 2013), 230.

⁷⁰ Susanne Schröter, *Politischer Islam: Stresstest für Deutschland* (Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2019), 100.

⁷¹ Bergeaud-Blackler, *Le frérisme et ses réseaux*, 142; Privot, *Quand j’étais frère musulman*, 126; Lorenzo Vidino, *The Muslim Brotherhood in Austria* (George Washington University Program on Extremism with University of Vienna, 2017), 25; Schröter, *Politischer Islam*, 100.

⁷² Vidino, *The Muslim Brotherhood in Austria*, 25.

⁷³ Vidino and Altuna, *The Muslim Brotherhood’s Pan-European Structure*, 151.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 154.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Gärtner, ‘Eine Erfolgsgeschichte Der Muslimbruderschaft’.

⁷⁷ Bergeaud-Blackler, *Le frérisme et ses réseaux*, 145.

⁷⁸ Stott and Virgili, *Network of Networks: The Muslim Brotherhood in Europe*, 54; Global Influence Operations Report, *Europe and the Global Muslim Brotherhood Part 1: European Governmental Funding* (2022), 4, <https://www.global-influence-ops.com/reports/european-funding-of-the-global-muslim-brotherhood/>.

⁷⁹ Commissioner Johannes Hahn on behalf of the European Commission, ‘Answer for Parliamentary Question P-001534/23’, European Parliament, 19 July 2023, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/P-9-2023-001534-ASW_EN.html.

Yet, beyond the matter of financial support, FEMYSO represents another towering example of the different forms of legitimization EU institutions bestow on Brotherist entities. FRA explicitly admits its cooperation with FEMYSO,⁸⁰ and, in 2023, it advertised on social media the FEMYSO-led “march against Islamophobia” mentioned above. The Commission and the Parliament, too, engage with FEMYSO. In November 2021, Commissioner Helena Dalli tweeted about her meetings with FEMYSO members. This happened the same month as Dalli promoted the controversial FEMYSO campaign to mainstream the hijab, described below.⁸¹ In 2022, the Commission released a video “to pay tribute to young people across the EU” that also included FEMYSO. The video was taken from an event organized at the European Parliament,⁸² namely the “European Youth Event”, held in Strasbourg, in which FEMYSO regularly takes part.⁸³

ISLAMIC RELIEF

Few organizations have enjoyed such lavish support from the EU as Islamic Relief Worldwide and its national branches. The Global Influence Operation Report calculated that the EU gave Islamic Relief Worldwide the astronomical sum of €33,770,597 in the period 2007-2020.⁸⁴ As shown by Stott and Virgili, this amount further increases up to €40,026,424 if one includes the national branches, which are formally separate entities.⁸⁵

In July 2023, the Commission claimed that there was “no EU funded ongoing project” involving Islamic Relief.⁸⁶ This, however, has proved to be inaccurate, since PQs have unveiled ongoing grants for Islamic Relief Germany under Erasmus+. ⁸⁷ The Commission’s somewhat embarrassed reply to those PQs is indicative of the problems surrounding the monitoring of EU funds. While clarifying that “The Erasmus+ programme is to a great part implemented by national agencies, which are in charge of selecting projects, managing grants and following up on project implementation”, the EC did not deny its own duty of co-supervision, and it guaranteed that it had “immediately asked the national agency to investigate the case”.⁸⁸

As this is not the first time the Commission has been caught by surprise concerning its own disbursements to Islamist organizations,⁸⁹ the issue of how the allocation and monitoring of funding works inevitably arises. A Parliamentary Question of October 2024 on the matter asked a seemingly simple but in fact crucial question, namely whether “we [can] count on automatic verification methods to prevent funding from European citizens from supporting Islamism”.⁹⁰

⁸⁰ European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, *Challenges Facing Civil Society Organisations Working on Human Rights in the EU* (Publications Office, 2017), 57, https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2018-challenges-facing-civil-society_en.pdf.

⁸¹ Dominique Bilde (ID), ‘Parliamentary Question P-002830/2022 Possible Links between FEMYSO and the Commission’, European Parliament, 19 August 2022, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/P-9-2022-002830_EN.html.

⁸² Commissioner Mariya Gabriel on behalf of the European Commission, ‘Answer for Parliamentary Question P-002830/22’, European Parliament, 25 January 2023, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/P-9-2022-002830-ASW_EN.html.

⁸³ FEMYSO, ‘European Youth Event’, accessed 25 November 2024, <https://femyso.org/networking/events/eye/>.

⁸⁴ Global Influence Operations Report, *Europe and the Global Muslim Brotherhood Part 1*, 5.

⁸⁵ Stott and Virgili, *Network of Networks: The Muslim Brotherhood in Europe*, 64.

⁸⁶ Commissioner Johannes Hahn on behalf of the European Commission, ‘Answer for Parliamentary Question P-001534/23’.

⁸⁷ Monika Hohlmeier (PPE), Sabine Verheyen (PPE), ‘Parliamentary Question E-003708/2023: EU Funding for the Organisation Islamic Relief Germany’, European Parliament, 18 December 2023, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/E-9-2023-003708_EN.html; Marie Dauchy (ID) et al., ‘Parliamentary Question P-000262/2024: Request for the Commission to Explain Why a Subsidy Was Granted to an Islamist Association That It Said It Does Not Support Financially’, European Parliament, 29 January 2024, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/P-9-2024-000262_EN.html#def1.

⁸⁸ Commissioner Iliana Ivanova on behalf of the European Commission, ‘Answer for Parliamentary Question P-000262/24’, European Parliament, 14 May 2024, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/P-9-2024-000262-ASW_EN.html.

⁸⁹ See for instance about the “Saffron Project” and “Islamophobia report” scandals, Stott and Virgili, *Network of Networks: The Muslim Brotherhood in Europe*, 56–57. See also elsewhere in this report.

⁹⁰ Emmanouil Fragkos (ECR), ‘Parliamentary Question E-002288/2024: Funding of Islamist Organisations by the European Commission’, 28 October 2024, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/E-10-2024-002288_EN.html.

Indeed, once the Commission has decided to exclude a certain organization from funding, it does not seem too complicated to automatically flag that organization every time it applies for EU projects, whether under direct or indirect management. But perhaps the problem lies upstream, and it is not a new one: on Islamism, “positions diverge from ministry to ministry, and even from office to office of the same body”.⁹¹ The European Commission is no exception and Islamic Relief is a good example: while a Commissioner has vowed to investigate the matter of financing for Islamic Relief Germany, DG Echo has classified the same Islamic Relief Germany, along with Islamic Relief Sweden, as “certified EU Humanitarian Partners for the period 2021-2027”.⁹² This is despite the fact that both German and Swedish authorities have recognized the charities’ connection with the Muslim Brotherhood.⁹³

Furthermore, Capacity4Dev, namely the “knowledge sharing platform created by the European Commission’s Directorate General for International Partnerships (INTPA) to connect development professionals around the world”⁹⁴ has dedicated an entire page (significantly titled “The reality of intersectional factors in gender inequality”) to promoting Islamic Relief, with a specific textbox highlighting the merits of Islamic Relief in Gaza and its coordinator Suha Abu Ghazala.⁹⁵ As of September 2025, the page was still up, despite the open proximity of Islamic Relief Palestine with Hamas and with the Gaza Zakat Committee (IZS) – “a leading charitable institution of Hamas whose own website describes its officials as ‘soldiers for Jerusalem,’ and frequently runs events with senior Hamas officials”.⁹⁶

Equally worrying is the Commission’s dismissal of IR’s antisemitism and its ties with the Muslim Brotherhood and Hamas. In reply to a 2021 Parliamentary Question, the Commission qualified these accusations as mere “media reports”, before adding that it “does not tolerate support for terrorism or antisemitism, in line with established legislation and policies, and will immediately take action *should it become aware of any proven evidence in this respect*”.⁹⁷

It is not quite clear which better “proven evidence” the Commission would need, given the long track record of scandals – most notably involving antisemitism – that have plagued Islamic Relief and its leadership and that were already well known in 2021. Statements such as “Lay the bodies of the Jews on the top of the mountains, so that no dog in Palestine must suffer hunger”, references to Jews as “apes and pigs”,⁹⁸ eulogies of Hamas, close proximity with its key figures and suspicious transfers of money⁹⁹ have led IRW’s entire board to resign,¹⁰⁰ banks to close its accounts¹⁰¹ and governments to halt all forms of cooperation.¹⁰² But apparently, none of this “proven evidence” has deterred the Commission.

⁹¹ Lorenzo Vidino, ‘What Is the Muslim Brotherhood in the West?’, Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, 16 March 2020, 5, <https://www.kas.de/en/analysen-und-argumente/detail/-/content/what-is-the-muslim-brotherhood-in-the-west>.

⁹² DG Echo, ‘List of Non-Governmental Organisations Certified as EU Humanitarian Partners for the Period 2021- 2027’, accessed 22 October 2024, <https://www.dgecho-partners-helpdesk.eu/download/referencedocumentfile/234>.

⁹³ Middle East Forum, ‘Islamic Relief: Charity, Extremism & Terror’, 2018, 2, <https://www.meforum.org/islamic-relief-charity-extremism-terror-7403>.

⁹⁴ ‘Capacity4dev’, accessed 28 April 2025, https://capacity4dev.europa.eu/_en.

⁹⁵ Capacity4dev, ‘The Reality of Intersectional Factors in Gender Inequality’, 1 October 2018, https://capacity4dev.europa.eu/articles/reality-intersectional-factors-gender-inequality_en.

⁹⁶ Sam Westrop, ‘Islamic Relief Partnered with Senior Hamas Officials, Including Son of Terror Leader Ismail Haniyeh’, Middle East Forum, 4 April 2024, <https://www.meforum.org/islamic-relief-partnered-with-senior-hamas>.

⁹⁷ Commissioner Janez Lenarčič on behalf of the European Commission, ‘Answer for Parliamentary Question E-002253/2021(ASW)’, European Parliament, 28 July 2021, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/E-9-2021-002253-ASW_EN.html. Emphasis added.

⁹⁸ Stott and Virgili, *Network of Networks: The Muslim Brotherhood in Europe*, 65.

⁹⁹ Middle East Forum, ‘Islamic Relief’, 20 ff.

¹⁰⁰ Andrew Norfolk, ‘Entire Board Resigns at Islamic Relief Worldwide’, 22 August 2020, <https://www.thetimes.com/article/entire-board-resigns-at-muslim-charity-tknktgb2g>.

¹⁰¹ Middle East Forum, ‘Islamic Relief’, 3.

¹⁰² Stott and Virgili, *Network of Networks: The Muslim Brotherhood in Europe*, 66.

Islamic Relief's ties with the Muslim Brotherhood, widely shown by independent research, governmental reports and intelligence analysis,¹⁰³ are even less consequential: despite the explicit question from MEPs, the EC does not even bother to address this aspect, and rather limits itself to citing "support for terrorism" and "antisemitism" as possible grounds for exclusion. This implicitly shows that the European Commission does not regard allegiance or affiliation to the Muslim Brotherhood, in itself, to be a disqualifying factor for disbursing EU contributions.

ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY OF GAZIANTEP

The Islam Science and Technology University of Gaziantep, in Turkey, was established in 2018 to replace the University of Zirve, shut down due to its proximity with the Gülenist movement. Its first rector, directly chosen by President Erdoğan, was Nihat Hatipoğlu – a theologian better known for declaring that atheists "worship the devil" and homosexuality is a "psychological illness".¹⁰⁴ His successor, Şehmus Demir, was appointed by the Turkish president in 2023, just in time for being at the epicentre of a vicious pro-Hamas campaign after the 7-October terrorist attack in Israel. Just one week after the massacre, when the IDF had not even began the ground operation, the University directorate condemned the "crimes against humanity" perpetrated by the Israeli army, without any mention whatsoever of the of Hamas's attack and its victims. With the prosecution of the war, the University website published slogans inviting to continue the struggle "from the river to the sea", "saluting Hamas" and inviting humanity "to take action for the global intifada".¹⁰⁵ The rector personally shared on X a reference to the Quran calling for the struggle "to frighten the enemy of Allah",¹⁰⁶ and he even paid homage to the "martyr" Ismail Haniyeh – Hamas leader killed in an Israeli strike.¹⁰⁷

All along, the EU has not hesitated to finance and collaborate with the Islamic University of Gaziantep. In 2022, the academic institution was associated to the Erasmus+ programme, until 2026.¹⁰⁸ In September 2024 (meaning: at a time when the pro-Hamas sentiments of the University and its leadership were already in full display), the Commission granted it €250,000 to lead a research project. A few days later, the University was added to the European Solidarity Corps (ESC) with a "Quality Label" certification (more on this below).¹⁰⁹ Questioned on the matter, the Commission declared to have precautionarily "asked the national agency to suspend the contracting process for the grant agreement on the recently selected cooperation project", pursuant to the new Financial Regulation (see below). It did not, however, address the issue of the University's participation in the Erasmus+ programme or to the Solidarity Corps, nor the broader matter of why these incidents continue to happen.¹¹⁰

The issue of EU funding for the Islamic University of Gaziantep has escalated politically. In May 2025, the French government formally urged the European Commission to increase its vigilance and defend European values "by avoiding any funding to entities and individuals hostile to European values", specifically highlighting the Turkish university as a concerning case.¹¹¹

¹⁰³ Middle East Forum, 'Islamic Relief'; Lorenzo Vidino, *The Closed Circle: Joining and Leaving the Muslim Brotherhood in the West* (Columbia University Press, 2020); Stott and Virgili, *Network of Networks: The Muslim Brotherhood in Europe*.

¹⁰⁴ Pierre Chaminat, 'Erasmus : l'Union européenne sous le feu des critiques pour avoir intégré une université pro-Hamas', *Le Journal du Dimanche*, 30 September 2024, <https://www.lejdd.fr/societe/erasmus-lunion-europeenne-sous-le-feu-des-critiques-pour-avoir-integre-une-universite-pro-hamas-150023>.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Marie Darout, 'Université islamiste financée par l'UE : les eurodéputés LR demandent des comptes à Ursula von der Leyen', *Le Journal du Dimanche*, 2 October 2024, <https://www.lejdd.fr/international/universite-islamiste-financee-par-lue-les-eurodeputes-lr-demandent-des-comptes-ursula-von-der-leyen-150139>.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Fabrice Leggeri (Pfe), 'Parliamentary Question P-001922/2024: Another pro-Hamas University Being Funded by the Commission', European Parliament, accessed 12 January 2025, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/P-10-2024-001922_EN.html.

¹¹⁰ Executive Vice-President Minzatu on behalf of the European Commission, 'Answer for Parliamentary Question P-001922/2024', European Parliament, 13 December 2024, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/P-10-2024-001922-ASW_EN.pdf.

¹¹¹ Baudouin Moucadel, 'Financement d'entités « hostiles aux valeurs européennes » : la France interpelle l'UE sur la menace islamiste', *Le Journal du Dimanche*, 19 May 2025, <https://www.lejdd.fr/International/financement-dentites-hostiles-aux-valeurs-europeennes-la-france-interpelle-lue-sur-la-menace-islamiste-158201>.

AL SHARQ FORUM

Al Sharq Forum describes itself as “an independent, international non-profit organization that aims to consolidate the values of pluralism and justice, while developing long-term strategies and programs that contribute to the political development, economic prosperity, and social cohesion of the people of the Al Sharq region and the world”.¹¹² It has headquarters in Istanbul, Geneva, London and Kuala Lumpur.

Its founder and director, Wadah Khanfar, is a former Al-Jazeera director-general who was “described on the Muslim Brotherhood’s own website in 2007 as having been ‘one of the most prominent leaders in the Hamas Office in Sudan’”.¹¹³ It seems that the passage of time (and, incidentally, the cooperation with the EU) have not taken a toll on his moral compass, for he has celebrated the 7-October massacre.¹¹⁴

Al Sharq also constitutes a platform for the worldwide Brotherhood. Its 8th International Conference, held in Gaziantep in October 2024, hosted speakers such as FEMYSO President Hania Chahal, CAGE Research director Asim Qureshi and French scholar François Burgat.¹¹⁵

Qureshi is someone who once described ISIS terrorist Jihadi John as a “beautiful young man”.¹¹⁶ In fact, Jihadi John’s beauty was often concealed to the wider public by the black mask that he wore while he beheaded ISIS’ hostages live on camera.¹¹⁷ Yet, according to Qureshi, he followed a common trajectory of feeling “alienation” and “injustice” due to the “impunity and lack of accountability for the way our security agencies operate”; he was, in a sense, a victim of Western racism: “when we treat people as outsiders, they will inevitably feel as outsiders, and they will look for belonging elsewhere”.¹¹⁸ Sometimes to a place with a knife on one hand and a severed head on the other.

François Burgat, a French political scientist and scholar specializing in the dynamics of political Islam and Islamist movements in the Arab world, is a fervent admirer of the Brotherhood¹¹⁹ and Hamas’s leadership.¹²⁰ In July 2024, he was placed under police custody in Aix-en-Provence as part of an investigation for “apology of terrorism”. This legal action followed a complaint filed by the European Jewish Organization (OJE) regarding messages he posted on X (formerly Twitter) in which he expressed respect for leaders of Hamas.¹²¹ Incidentally, Burgat led a research program titled “When Authoritarianism Fails in the Arab World” (WAFAW), funded by an Advanced Grant from the European Research Council (ERC) for the period 2013–2017. This project, conducted in the Institute for Research and Study on the Arab and Muslim World (IREMAM), received a contribution of €1.9 million from the EU.¹²²

¹¹² ‘Al Sharq Forum - Home’, Al Sharq Forum, accessed 28 October 2024, <https://www.sharqforum.org/>.

¹¹³ Mohamed Fahmy, ‘The Price of Aljazeera’s Politics’, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 26 June 2015, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/price-aljazeeras-politics>.

¹¹⁴ Natalie Ecanow and David Adesnik, ‘Georgetown’s Qatari Branch to Host Former Al Jazeera Executive Who Praised October 7 Massacre’, Foundation for Defense of Democracies, 17 September 2024, <https://www.fdd.org/analysis/2024/09/17/georgetown-qatari-branch-to-host-former-al-jazeera-executive-who-praised-october-7-massacre/>.

¹¹⁵ *Speakers | Al Sharq Youth 8th Conference 2024 | Beyond Borders*, n.d., accessed 28 April 2025, <https://conference.sharqforum.org/all-speakers/>.

¹¹⁶ ‘IS “Jihadi John” Suspect “a Beautiful Young Man” - Cage’, BBC News, 26 February 2015, <https://www.bbc.com/news/av-uk-31650427>.

¹¹⁷ Michael Holden and Mark Hosenball, ‘“Jihadi John” Killer from Islamic State Beheading Videos Unmasked as Londoner’, Reuters, 27 February 2015, <https://www.reuters.com/article/world/jihadi-john-killer-from-islamic-state-beheading-videos-unmasked-as-londoner-idUSKBN0LU13Y/>.

¹¹⁸ BBC News, ‘IS “Jihadi John” Suspect “a Beautiful Young Man” - Cage’.

¹¹⁹ Bergeaud-Blackler, *Le frérisme et ses réseaux*, 262.

¹²⁰ M. A., ‘L’Islamologue François Burgat affirme avoir du «respect et de la considération» pour les dirigeants du Hamas’, Le Figaro, 4 January 2024, <https://www.lefigaro.fr/international/le-chercheur-du-cnrs-francois-burgat-affirme-avoir-du-respect-et-de-la-consideration-pour-les-dirigeants-du-hamas-20240104>; François Burgat [@frburgat], Tweet, X, 24 October 2024, <https://x.com/frburgat/status/1849529105689034955>.

¹²¹ Anadolu Agency, ‘Renowned French Political Scientist, Supporter of Gaza in Custody for “Advocacy of Terrorism”’, 9 July 2024, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/europe/renowned-french-political-scientist-supporter-of-gaza-in-custody-for-advocacy-of-terrorism/3270317>.

¹²² *Migration and Asylum: The Contribution of Frontier Research to the Understanding of Human Mobility across Frontiers*, with European Research Council (ERC) (European Commission, 2017), 52, https://erc.europa.eu/sites/default/files/document/file/Migration_and_asylum_the_contribution_of_frontier_research.pdf.

Back to Al Sharq: in 2022, the Forum got more than €100,000 as coordinator of four projects under Erasmus+;¹²³ furthermore, it is a “Quality Label” accredited organization with the European Solidarity Corps (ESC).¹²⁴ ESC is a “funding programme of the European Union that creates opportunities for young people to volunteer and run their own solidarity projects that benefit communities around Europe” and associated countries. Its members must “agree with and [...] uphold the Mission and Principles of the European Solidarity Corps” and, upon receiving the Quality Label, can apply for funding for their projects.¹²⁵ The funding is made available through a dedicated EU budget of €1.009 billion for 2021-2027. Most of the activities are “implemented and managed by the National Agencies in individual participating countries”, but the European Education and Culture Executive Agency implements some actions (“mainly support measures but also some calls for proposals, e.g. volunteering teams in high-priority areas”) and DG Education manages the overall programme (and fund).¹²⁶ “All organisations will undergo checks before they are authorised to run projects for the European Solidarity Corps, and before they are allowed to search for and recruit participants for their projects”.¹²⁷ The Quality Label “certifies that an organisation taking part in the Corps is able to provide the necessary conditions for young people to take part in solidarity activities. The participating organisation must comply with the principles and quality standards set out in the Programme Guide”.¹²⁸ These principles include “the values of solidarity, respect for human dignity and human rights, the promotion of a fair and equal society based on pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality”.¹²⁹

It is not quite clear how Al-Sharq or the Islamic University of Gaziantep are supposed to embody these virtues.

THE IRANIAN CONNECTION

The Islamic Republic of Iran and the Muslim Brotherhood, despite belonging to the Shia and Sunni branches of Islam respectively, have always entertained warm relations under the common banner of Islamism.¹³⁰ This, occasionally, is also reflected in organised cooperation between Khomeinist and MB entities in Europe.¹³¹

An interesting case of EU support for an Islamist organization functioning as *trait d'union* between the Muslim Brotherhood and Iran is that of the *Islamische Gemeinschaft der schiitischen Gemeinden Deutschlands* (Islamic Society of Shia Communities in Germany-IGS). IGS was established in 2009 as a federation of Shia organizations under the direction of Ayatollah Reza Ramezani Gilani, a member of the Assembly of Experts of the Islamic Republic of Iran – the apical body that selects, and can even remove, the Supreme Leader.¹³²

¹²³ Commissioner Johannes Hahn on behalf of the European Commission, ‘Answer for Parliamentary Question E-003176/22’, European Parliament, accessed 24 October 2024, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/E-9-2022-003176-ASW_EN.html.

¹²⁴ PIC: 901017287. Available at https://youth.europa.eu/volunteering/organisations_en?country=TR&city=istanbul&page=0. Accessed 24 October 2024.

¹²⁵ ‘European Solidarity Corps - Frequently Asked Questions’, European Youth Portal, accessed 24 October 2024, https://youth.europa.eu/solidarity/faq_en.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ ‘European Solidarity Corps - Quality Label’, European Youth Portal, accessed 24 October 2024, https://youth.europa.eu/solidarity/organisations/quality-label_en.

¹²⁹ ‘European Solidarity Corps - Principles’, European Youth Portal, accessed 24 October 2024, https://youth.europa.eu/solidarity/young-people/principles_en.

¹³⁰ Stott and Virgili, *Network of Networks: The Muslim Brotherhood in Europe*, 34.

¹³¹ Tommaso Virgili and Giovanni Giacalone, ‘Muslim Brotherhood and Khomeinism in Italy: The Told and the Untold’, *European Eye on Radicalization*, 6 May 2022, <https://www.kyleorton.com/p/ikhwan-khomeini-by-virgili-and-giacalone>; Paul Stott, ‘Revolutionaries at Home, Revolutionaries Abroad: Iran and Its Networks in Europe’, in *Handbook of Political Islam in Europe: Activities, Means, and Strategies from Salafists to the Muslim Brotherhood and Beyond*, ed. Thomas Jäger and Ralph Thiele, Springer Handbooks of Political Science and International Relations (Springer, 2024).

¹³² Susanne Schröter, *Antisemitisch, Antidemokratisch, Islamistisch. Das “Islamische Zentrum Hamburg” Und Radikale Schiitische Netzwerke in Deutschland* (AJC Berlin Ramer Institute, 2019), 7, https://ajcgermany.org/system/files/document/AJC-Berlin_IZH-Broschuere_43S_A5%281%29.pdf.

Before returning to Tehran in 2018 to take the leadership of the Tehran-based Ahl Al-Bayt World Assembly (the main epicentre for the global spread of Khomenism¹³³), Ramezani was also the head of the Islamic Centre of Hamburg (IZH), which constituted the main stakeholder in the IGS federation.¹³⁴ Ramezani's successor at the head of IZH was Mohammad Hadi Mofateh, a self-declared former member of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC)¹³⁵ – a body that the European Parliament has urged be added to the EU's terror lists.¹³⁶

The IZH was for years on the radar of both the Federal and Hamburg State Offices for the Protection of the Constitution, which regarded it as an instrument of the Iranian government promoting a system of values incompatible with democracy.¹³⁷ IGS is likewise considered an extremist entity and is therefore under intelligence scrutiny.¹³⁸ IZH was eventually dismantled by the German authorities in 2024, along with its dependent organizations all across Germany, due to "its Islamist ideology directed against human dignity, against women's rights, against an independent judiciary and against our democratic state".¹³⁹

IZH and its satellite organizations embody a compelling intersection of Iranian and Muslim Brotherhood extremism. IZH was part of the Central Council of Muslims in Germany (ZMD), which Guido Steinberg has described as "the umbrella organization of the Muslim Brotherhood in Germany".¹⁴⁰ This link has been present since the organization's inception. One of the founders of IZH, Abdul-Karim Grimm, was also member of the *Deutschen Muslim-Liga* (DML), which was in turn one of the founding members of ZMD. His wife Fatima Grimm was also dually involved in IZH and DML; on top of that, she was responsible for the newspaper "Al-Islam" published by the Islamic Centre of Munich (IZM),¹⁴¹ defined by Vidino and Altuna as "a key hub for the Brotherhood not just in Germany but worldwide – tellingly, three of the eight General Guides of the Egyptian Brotherhood have spent extensive time in Munich".¹⁴²

Despite these problematic connections, from 2017 to 2020, IGS received €283,000 Euro from the EU Internal Security Fund for a project against extremism called "Extrem Engagiert!".¹⁴³ That IGS was involved in a "counter-extremism project" is ironic, considering that at the same time it was being monitored for extremism by German intelligence services. Furthermore, its proximity with Iranian leadership and its track record of antisemitic, homophobic and pro-Hezbollah statements do not quite support its credentials as an organisation that should receive funding to fight extremism.¹⁴⁴ For instance, on the occasion of the legalization of gay marriage, IGS' board issued a press release in which it defined the acceptance of equal rights for homosexuals as "an extremely unsettling and concerning trend that indicates a planned and organized societal deviance, as well as the dilution of any moral, ethical, and religious standards".¹⁴⁵

¹³³ Stott, 'Revolutionaries at Home, Revolutionaries Abroad', 237.

¹³⁴ Schröter, *Antisemitisch, Antidemokratisch, Islamistisch*, 13.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹³⁶ AJC Transatlantic Institute, 'AJC Transatlantic Institute Welcomes the European Parliament's Resolution Calling or the IRGC to Be Listed as a Terror Organization', 28 November 2024, <https://transatlanticinstitute.org/press-releases/ajc-transatlantic-institute-welcomes-european-parliaments-resolution-calling-irgc-be>.

¹³⁷ Schröter, *Antisemitisch, Antidemokratisch, Islamistisch*, 8.

¹³⁸ Antje Schippmann, 'Warum kriegt ein Islamisten-Verein 283 000 Euro?', *Bild*, 26 January 2018, <https://www.bild.de/politik/inland/iran/anfrage-gruene-zu-igs-54579528.bild.html>.

¹³⁹ Bundesministerium des Innern und für Heimat, "'Islamisches Zentrum Hamburg e.V.' (IZH) mit seinen bundesweiten Teilorganisationen verboten', 24 July 2024, <https://www.bmi.bund.de/SharedDocs/kurzmeldungen/DE/2024/07/izh.html;jsessionid=46BA10F676DC6671AB9AAA11F4DEA8AA.live082?nn=10001204>.

¹⁴⁰ Guido Steinberg, 'The Muslim Brotherhood in Germany', in *The Muslim Brotherhood: The Organization and Policies of a Global Islamist Movement*, 1st ed, ed. Barry M. Rubin, Middle East in Focus (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 152.

¹⁴¹ Gärtner, 'Eine Erfolgsgeschichte Der Muslimbruderschaft'.

¹⁴² Vidino and Altuna, *The Muslim Brotherhood's Pan-European Structure*, 146.

¹⁴³ Schippmann, 'Warum kriegt ein Islamisten-Verein 283 000 Euro?'; Schröter, *Antisemitisch, Antidemokratisch, Islamistisch*, 33.

¹⁴⁴ Schröter, *Antisemitisch, Antidemokratisch, Islamistisch*, 6; 15; Schippmann, 'Warum kriegt ein Islamisten-Verein 283 000 Euro?'

¹⁴⁵ Schröter, *Antisemitisch, Antidemokratisch, Islamistisch*, 15. Own translation from German.

In meetings of IGS member organizations one could hear statements such as “You cannot say: ‘I am a democrat and a Shiite at the same time.’ No, you can’t. One cannot be both Muslim and secular. One cannot be both a humanist and a friend of the Prophet’s family”; and “We are soldiers who are willing to sacrifice their lives for Nasrallah. We are accused of being terrorists - we are proud of terrorism”.¹⁴⁶

Despite this, IGS has enjoyed cross-party political connections. Susanne Schröter reports that the organization has exerted its influence on the SPD and the connected Friedrich Ebert Foundation through Dawood Nazirizadeh – a dual member of SPD and IGS.¹⁴⁷ In an unusual political twist, funding for “Extrem Engagiert!” was instead approved by the centre-right (CDU) then-Interior Minister as part of Germany’s EU Internal Security Fund allocation – whose programs are often administered by national authorities and implemented through partnerships with local actors. Conversely, this decision faced opposition from the Green Party.¹⁴⁸

Occasional ties between Khomeinist and *Ikhwani* organizations have emerged elsewhere. In Italy, for instance, a Khomeinist entity, the Imam Ali Centre, has entrusted imams belonging to the MB galaxy as its representatives in the Lombardy region.¹⁴⁹

In France, the Centre Zahra (suspected by French authorities to support terrorist activities) has connections with Iran and Hezbollah.¹⁵⁰ Despite the lack of documented links, the Centre shares similar positions with organizations affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood on issues such as Palestine and its “resistance”.¹⁵¹ What Khomeinism and the MB also have in common is the entryism within the political left. Emmanuel Razavi, a senior reporter and Middle East specialist, has recently conducted in-depth investigations into the influence of the Islamic Republic of Iran in France. His work highlights the strategies of infiltration and interference used by the Iranian regime within certain French political factions, particularly on the far left. In a series of articles published on Atlantico, Razavi explains how Iran has attempted to influence parties such as the French Communist Party (PCF) and *La France Insoumise* (LFI).¹⁵² Razavi collected the testimonies of figures like Matthieu Ghadiri, a former Franco-Iranian police officer recruited by Iranian intelligence in the 1980s to infiltrate the French Socialist Party. He reveals that the PCF has occasionally allowed its premises to be used for meetings by activists from the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), an organization financially supported by Iran and designated as a terrorist group by the European Union.¹⁵³ Razavi and Bergeaud-Blackler have also shed light on the role of certain French intellectuals and influencers who promote the Iranian regime and its proxy groups. These individuals contribute to disseminating a positive image of the Islamic Republic, often downplaying or justifying its interference and human rights violations.¹⁵⁴

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 6.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 31.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 33; Schippmann, ‘Warum kriegt ein Islamisten-Verein 283 000 Euro?’

¹⁴⁹ Virgili and Giacalone, ‘Muslim Brotherhood and Khomeinism in Italy’.

¹⁵⁰ American Jewish Committee, ‘The Number of Hezbollah Operatives in Europe Is Increasing - Factsheet 10’, 20 September 2019, <https://www.ajc.org/news/the-number-of-hezbollah-operatives-in-europe-is-increasing-factsheet-10>.

¹⁵¹ Mikaël Libert, ‘Qu’est-ce que Zahra France, l’asso visée par une opération antiterroriste ?’, 20 Minutes, 2 October 2018, <https://www.20minutes.fr/lille/2346947-20181002-nord-centre-zahra-france-association-visee-operation-antiterroriste>.

¹⁵² Atlantico, ‘Comment la République islamique d’Iran a infiltré l’extrême-gauche française’, 19 October 2024, <https://atlantico.fr/article/video/comment-la-republique-islamique-d-iran-a-infiltre-l-extreme-gauche-francaise-teheran-parti-communiste-la-france-insoumise>.

¹⁵³ Emmanuel Razavi, ‘Ingérences iraniennes en France : Les confidences d’un ex-agent infiltré’, Atlantico, 17 October 2024, <https://atlantico.fr/article/decryptage/ingerences-iraniennes-en-france-les-confidences-dun-ex-agent-infiltre-matthieu-ghadiri-agent-infiltre-espionnage-iran-emmanuel-razavi>.

¹⁵⁴ Emmanuel Razavi, ‘Révélations : un chercheur et un influenceur français, agents d’influence de la République islamique d’Iran’, Atlantico, 15 November 2024, <https://atlantico.fr/article/decryptage/revelations-un-chercheur-et-un-influenceur-francais-agents-dinfluence-de-la-republique-islamique-diran-emmanuel-razavi>.

Non-exhaustive summary of financial figures for organizations:

Beneficiary	EU funding
<i>Islamic Relief Worldwide + national branches</i>	€40,026,424
<i>ENAR</i>	€23,000,000
<i>European Muslim Union (EMU)</i>	> €1,000,000
<i>FEMYSO</i>	€288,856
<i>IGS (Islamische Gem. Schiitischen)</i>	€283,000
<i>Islamic University of Gaziantep</i>	€250,000
<i>Al Sharq Forum</i>	> €100,000

4. THE INFLUENCE OF BROTHERISM IN EU-FUNDED INITIATIVES: ISLAMOPHOBIA AS A CASE STUDY



“ISLAMOPHOBIA”: A BROTHERIST CONCEPT PAR EXCELLENCE

Nothing unmasks Brotherism more than the “fight against ‘Islamophobia’” – a concept deprived of scientific validation, or even clear definition, which is nonetheless the subject of increasing academic and activist engagement. Islamophobia is the perfect vehicle for the Brotherhood to re-educate society and make it compatible with its demands in a multitude of domains: from anti-blasphemy laws to “anti-Zionism”, from hijab promotion to halal butchering, every demand stemming from the Brotherhood’s rigorist interpretation of Islam is clothed under the mantle of “anti-racism” and “minority rights”. By contrast, any opposition to Islamist ideology, goals or policy proposals is, inescapably, labelled as “Islamophobic”.

Although Islamophobia has occasionally been used since 1925, the term owes its popularity to Edward Said – the famous American-Palestinian author of *Orientalism*, influenced by Marx and Foucault, who denounced an alleged Western conspiracy to subjugate and ostracize Muslims. The concept has gained even more traction following a 1997 report of the British think tank Runnymede Trust.¹⁵⁵ Against the backdrop of a paradigm shift begun with the Salman Rushdie affair, whereby the category of “Muslims” replaced that of “South-Asians” in the public discourse, the Runnymede Trust managed to impose the idea that a specific discrimination against Muslims was underway. In its report *Islamophobia: a Challenge for Us All*, the “UK’s leading independent race equality think tank”, as it describes itself,¹⁵⁶ used Islamophobia to refer to “unfounded hostility toward Islam” and “to the practical consequences of such hostility in unfair discrimination against Muslim individuals and communities, and to the exclusion of Muslims from mainstream political and social affairs”.¹⁵⁷ The vagueness of the term did not prevent the Commission on British Muslims and Islamophobia, established by Runnymede, to present the report to Interior Minister Jack Straw with no less than 60 recommendations for public and private institutions in order to “fight Islamophobia”.¹⁵⁸

The main consequence was the crystallization of the “Muslim identity” as a proxy for a racial identity, useful to characterize any “unfounded hostility toward Islam” (i.e., against an abstract system of tenets) as a form of racism. In the words of Tariq Modood, one of the main champions of multiculturalism in academia, Islamophobia is “the most important cultural racism today”.¹⁵⁹

This characterization of “Islamophobia” erases the ontological differences between “race” and “religion”. First, religious affiliation is not genetic and can be changed (although this is made de facto impossible in many Muslim countries that criminalize apostasy); second, and most crucially, race is a morally-neutral concept, while religion is a system of values, beliefs and practices that in a democratic society can, or even must, be scrutinized.¹⁶⁰

This false equivalence stifles the debate and serves the Muslim Brotherhood’s agenda, for it casts the Muslim identity as a separate and victimized one and allows the movement to cover its supremacist requests (blasphemy laws, cultural exceptions in criminal law, etc.) under the cloak of “anti-discrimination” policies.

¹⁵⁵ Bergeaud-Blackler, *Le frérisme et ses réseaux*, 180.

¹⁵⁶ Runnymede Trust, ‘Race & Inclusion in Secondary Schoolart Education’, accessed 12 November 2024, <https://www.runnymedetrust.org/visualise>.

¹⁵⁷ Runnymede Trust, *Islamophobia: A Challenge for Us All* (1997), 4, <https://mcislamofobia.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Islamophobia-a-challenge-for-us-all-without-cartoons-1.pdf>.

¹⁵⁸ Bergeaud-Blackler, *Le frérisme et ses réseaux*, 181.

¹⁵⁹ Tariq Modood, *Multiculturalism: A Civic Idea* (Polity, 2013), 41.

¹⁶⁰ Tommaso Virgili and Matteo Gemolo, ‘Religions and LGBTI Rights: A Liberal Perspective’, The European Liberal Forum, accessed 12 November 2024, <https://liberalforum.eu/publication/religions-and-lgbti-rights-a-liberal-perspective/>.

What those policies should actually target is made quite clear by the All-Party Parliamentary Group on British Muslims – a UK interparliamentary group comprising members of the House of Lords and House of Commons: in its proposal for a “legally binding definition of Islamophobia”, the Group maintains that the “supposed right to criticise Islam results in nothing more than another subtle form of anti-Muslim racism”.¹⁶¹ In other words, the issue comes down to silencing any criticism of Islam and its dogmas, especially as interpreted by Islamists.

In fact, Muslims themselves are not spared from the mark of infamy of Islamophobia. Initiatives such as SETA’s “Islamophobia Report” and Georgetown University’s “Bridge Initiative”¹⁶² largely target Muslim liberals, based on the premise that it is “irrelevant if the person that reproduces Islamophobic structures, is himself or herself Muslim or not”.¹⁶³ Similarly, a Khomeinist organization in the UK has accused Iranian protesters against the regime of being “Islamophobic”,¹⁶⁴ and the abovementioned ayatollah Ramezani from IZH has called the liberal Ibn Rushd-Goethe Mosque in Berlin, established by female imam Seyran Ateş, a “movement to insult Islam and Muslims”.¹⁶⁵ It seems that, in the rock-paper-scissors game of selective indignation played by Islamists, Muslims are regarded as a persecuted minority only when they are compliant with the Islamist agenda, but they become a free target of attacks the moment they stop being so.

The same game is played against Jews, in that criticism of Muslim antisemitism is smeared as yet another form of Islamophobia. Thus, sanctioning someone who chants “Khaybar Khaybar O Jews ... Muhammad’s army will return”, hinting at the massacre of Jews perpetrated by the Prophet, is considered an Islamophobic act.¹⁶⁶ So is asking a Muslim to disavow Hamas or to explain why public funds may have been diverted to Hamas under his supervision.¹⁶⁷

From this perspective, Islamophobia would better be called “Ikhwanophobia”,¹⁶⁸ for the accusation strikes all those – Muslims or otherwise – who dare criticize Islamists, their ideology, goals or methods. After all, to quote the Chair of the Labour Muslim Network, if you try to mask your “rampant Islamophobia by just substituting the word ‘Islamist’ instead of Muslim”, “everyone can still see your racism”.¹⁶⁹ ENAR’s Julie Pascoet and Karen Taylor have advanced similar arguments.¹⁷⁰

The following step in the process is the use of Islamophobia against general policies that do not even mention either Islam or Islamism but run counter to the Brotherist agenda. For instance, in 2021, FEMYSO issued a statement against a judgement of the Court of Justice of the EU that allowed employers to ban *all* religious symbols in the workplace; according to FEMYSO, the decision, “disguised under a layer of ‘neutrality’ [sic]” was “a blatant reduction of the rights of visibly Muslim women in the EU, and thus nothing less than the institutionalisation of Islamophobia”.¹⁷¹ Incidentally, FEMYSO also called the verdict an instance of “sexism”, thus bringing to the table the “critical theory” of “intersectionality”.¹⁷²

¹⁶¹ Khalid Mahmood et al., *A Definition of Islamophobia?* (Policy Exchange, 2024), 7, <https://policyexchange.org.uk/publication/a-definition-of-islamophobia/>.

¹⁶² More on those below.

¹⁶³ Enes Bayraklı and Farid Hafez, *European Islamophobia Report 2020* (Leopold Weiss Institute, 2021), 10, https://www.islamophobiareport.com/EIR_2020.pdf.

¹⁶⁴ Mahmood et al., *A Definition of Islamophobia?*, 17.

¹⁶⁵ Schröter, *Antisemitisch, Antidemokratisch, Islamistisch*, 12.

¹⁶⁶ Mahmood et al., *A Definition of Islamophobia?*, 16.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹⁶⁸ Stott and Virgili, *Network of Networks: The Muslim Brotherhood in Europe*, 57.

¹⁶⁹ Mahmood et al., *A Definition of Islamophobia?*, 15.

¹⁷⁰ Bergeaud-Blackler, *Le frérisme et ses réseaux*, 202.

¹⁷¹ FEMYSO, ‘The EU Court of Justice Institutionalises Sexism and Islamophobia Again’, accessed 28 November 2024, <https://femyso.org/the-eu-court-of-justice-institutionalises-sexism-and-islamophobia-again/>.

¹⁷² August Samie, ‘Intersectionality’, *Encyclopedia Britannica*, accessed 28 November 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/intersectionality>.

This framing of Islamophobia makes it easier to assemble a diverse front of allies. The first is the Islamic camp, which the Brotherhood aims to unify. As demonstrated by the pluriannual attempts by the Organization of the Islamic Cooperation to pass resolutions against “defamation of religion”, culminated in the 2022 UN Resolution proclaiming 15 March as “International Day to Combat Islamophobia”, the concept is shared by all Muslim countries of the world, be they secular or theocratic, mono-ethnic or pluri-ethnic, pro or against the Brotherhood.¹⁷³ Notably, the resolution has also been sponsored by China, a state that is actively committing genocide against the Muslim Uyghur minority¹⁷⁴ – an unequivocal sign that Islamophobia is but a stick to beat the West with.

The second front is wider, and it aims to garner sympathies and create synergies with the post-modernist, post-colonialist left and supporters of woke “critical theories”. Pierre Valentin defines wokeness as a postmodernist ideology that perceives Western societies as dominated by power structures, systems of oppression and hierarchies of domination that aim to belittle minorities. According to this vision, these mechanisms are often invisible. A “woke” person is one who has opened their eyes to this hidden, harmful reality – which escapes all empirical demonstrations – and commits to showing it to others.¹⁷⁵ Under this lens, Islamophobia – just like anti-black racism – is “a problem of the structural and systemic racism that characterizes a whole society”,¹⁷⁶ whereas colour-blindness, or “neutrality” in FEMYSO’S language, is a denial of the lived experience of marginalized minorities and yet another way of perpetuating racism.¹⁷⁷

A crucial characteristic of critical, woke theories is that they are unfalsifiable.¹⁷⁸ The very attempt to contest them, on philosophical or even empirical grounds, is deemed yet another confirmation of “white fragility” that does nothing but confirm the theory itself.¹⁷⁹ This is exactly the case with Islamophobia: just like challenging systemic racism and white privilege is in itself an instance of racism, contesting omnipresent Islamophobia is in itself “an example of Islamophobia”.¹⁸⁰

From a scientific point of view, this violates Popper’s falsification criterion: for a theory to be considered scientific, it must be falsifiable, that is, it must be possible, in principle, to test it and refute it by observation or experiment. According to Popper, this criterion separates empirical sciences, which are open to refutation and therefore to progression, from non-sciences.

However, this is exactly what makes Islamophobia the perfect weapon: it can be wielded against anyone but disarmed by no one.

¹⁷³ APP, “‘Landmark Resolution’: UNGA Declares March 15 as International Day to Combat Islamophobia”, Dawn, 15 March 2022, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1680128>.

¹⁷⁴ Lindsay Maizland, ‘China’s Repression of Uyghurs in Xinjiang’, Council on Foreign Relations, accessed 13 November 2024, <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/china-xinjiang-uyghurs-muslims-repression-genocide-human-rights>.

¹⁷⁵ See Pierre Valentin, *L’ideologia woke 1: Anatomia del wokismo* (Fondation pour l’Innovation Politique, 2022), <https://www.fondapol.org/app/uploads/2022/04/fondapol-lideologia-woke-1-anatomia-del-wokismo-pierre-valentin-04-2022-1.pdf>.

¹⁷⁶ Bayraklı and Hafez, *European Islamophobia Report 2020*, 10.

¹⁷⁷ Amelia V. Gallucci-Cirio Library, ‘Anti-Racism Resources: What Does Racism Look Like? Colorblindness’, accessed 28 November 2024, <https://fitchburgstate.libguides.com/c.php?g=1046516&p=7616506>.

¹⁷⁸ Valentin, *L’ideologia woke 1: Anatomia del wokismo*, 32.

¹⁷⁹ Robin DiAngelo, *White Fragility: Why It’s So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism* (Beacon Press, 2018).

¹⁸⁰ Mahmood et al., *A Definition of Islamophobia?*, 17.

THE EU AND ISLAMOPHOBIA

The success of the Islamophobia narrative (and of the business behind it) is a chief example of Brotherist influence in the EU. The use of the term Islamophobia in initiatives, reports and projects supported by EU institutions implicitly accept the Brotherist framing as described in the previous section. Often, an MB-linked organization is directly involved as a lobbyist or project implementer, but this is not a necessary precondition: Brotherhood entities and their *compagnons de route* have managed to shape the discourse on Islam-related topics to such an extent that the process is standing on its own feet, without need for them to steer it at every turn. Various projects and initiatives are thus promoting ideologies that align with the objectives of the Muslim Brotherhood, even when the latter is not involved. This happens especially in matters such as “Muslim visibility” and “Islamophobia”.

We certainly do not claim, in a conspiratorial fashion, that every initiative of this kind has a Muslim Brother secretly manoeuvring behind the curtains. In fact, quite the opposite: one of the main strengths of the MB ideology emerges from its capacity to spread regardless of the *Ikhwan’s* involvement. Projects and initiatives on Islamophobia, Muslim victimization or alleged minority rights often embrace Brotherist narratives on their own accord, thus acting as conduit for the further dissemination of these ideas. This scheme has been especially successful in that it has found its perfect carrier in the “critical”, “post-colonial” and “woke” theories. Notably, such narratives not only run counter to European secular values but also undermine the struggle of liberal Muslim individuals and groups – the same people who are themselves called “Islamophobic”, as explained above.

It is important to unmask this agenda and its effort at moulding public attitudes. Once again, it comes down to due diligence and careful scrutiny of partnerships and of the end goals and added value of projects. It is essential to ensure that the formal promotion of democratic values does not inadvertently turn into its opposite by becoming a vehicle for illiberal ideologies.

In the following sections, we provide some paradigmatic examples of initiatives that, for different reasons, are largely unjustified from the taxpayer’s perspective and clearly show the direct or indirect hand of Brotherism. This outcome is the result of a research systematically conducted on PQs and on four EU programmes, which we searched using the keyword “Islamophobia”. In particular, we investigated: the 2014-2020 “Rights, Equality, Citizenship” (REC) programme; its successor for the period 2021-2027, Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values (CERV) programme; Erasmus+; and the Community Research and Development Information Service (CORDIS), which contains the projects funded by the EU’s framework programmes for research and innovation such as Horizon Europe, Horizon 2020 and their predecessors.

The breakdown is as follows:

Programme	Period	Number of Projects w. “Islamophobia” keyword	Total EU contribution
CERV	2021-2027	7	€2,060,220.22
REC	2014-2020	21	€8,423,802.96
ERASMUS +	2014-2023	172	€7,197,202.50
CORDIS	2002-2027	7	€8,374,843.83

The sheer numbers are, already by themselves, relevant indicators of the penetration of the Islamophobia discourse at the EU level. In addition, we have addressed additional initiatives on Islamophobia financed through different channels that have met with particular criticism due to their clear ideological aim.

For space reasons, we will not go into every single Islamophobia project in depth and will only review the most relevant ones below.

Non-exhaustive summary of financial figures for projects:

Project	EU funding
WFAW Project	€1,900,000
MEET Project	€443,021
"Freedom in Hijab" Campaign	€340,000
RE-VISUALIZE Project	€250,000
MAGIC Project	€205,989
Let's Say Stop to Islamophobia!	€142,664
European Islamophobia Report	€127,000
Dialogue, Education and Respect in the Classroom	€101,070
IMAN Project	€70,187
Young Muslims for a Europe with a Future	€60,000

THE "HIJAB CAMPAIGN(S)" AND OTHER "INTERSECTIONAL" PROJECTS

An example of an EU-supported action that clearly fits the Brotherist "Islamophobia" pattern was the "Freedom in hijab" campaign. In November 2021, the Council of Europe (CoE) launched an EU-funded social media campaign promoting diversity and acceptance of the hijab. The initiative, which cost €340,000, was promoted by FEMYSO and featured slogans such as "Beauty is in diversity as freedom is in hijab" and "#JOYinHIJAB" – all in the name of the fight against "hatred" and discrimination.¹⁸¹

The promotion of the hijab has always been a key focus for MB organizations, which have done their best to present it, "intersectionally", as a symbol of an Islamic identity suffering "Islamophobic" discrimination but also of women's empowerment.¹⁸² Against this backdrop, the "Freedom in hijab" initiative fitted the MB strategy of seducing European publics with progressive buzzwords in order to gradually acclimatize them to the literalist, dogmatic and fundamentalist interpretation of the Islamic norm that actually underpins their obsession with female covering.

¹⁸¹ Jack Parrock, 'EU-Funded Hijab Campaign Sparks Outrage', Deutsche Welle, 4 November 2021, <https://www.dw.com/en/eu-funded-hijab-campaign-sparks-outrage/a-59725546>; Jérôme Rivière (ID), 'Parliamentary Question E-005129/2021: Commission Funding for Promotion of the Hijab', European Parliament, 16 November 2021, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/E-9-2021-005129_EN.html.

¹⁸² Bergeaud-Blackler, *Le frérisme et ses réseaux*, 16; Martyn Frampton, *The Muslim Brotherhood and the West: A History of Enmity and Engagement* (the Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2018), 404.

For instance, it is not quite “women’s empowerment” that the ECFR had in mind when it stated that “we must convince the sister that covering her head is a religious obligation which is decreed by Allah (swt) and His Messenger Muhammad (pbuh) and agreed in consensus by the entire Ummah”.¹⁸³ Nor is the description of the hijab as an “absolute duty” by European MB-linked religious associations¹⁸⁴ a particularly compelling feminist slogan. In fact, the *imposition* of the veil has always been a key point of the MB agenda, starting with Hassan al-Banna himself.¹⁸⁵

The COE-EU campaign faced intense criticism, especially from French politicians – traditionally engaged in the protection of secularism and the battle against identitarian separatism. Condemnations came from all sides of the political spectrum, with numerous officials stressing that the initiative was not innocently reasserting personal freedom but was actually using the legitimacy of the Council of Europe and EU funding to *advertise the hijab*. “It is one thing to point out that women are free to wear the hijab ... [but] to say that freedom is in the hijab is another”, tweeted France’s socialist women’s rights minister. Others went further and pointed out that the veil is *not* an instrument of freedom but rather one of devaluation and subjugation.¹⁸⁶

Eventually, the campaign was withdrawn and disavowed by its two co-sponsors. The Council of Europe asserted that the social media posts “reflected statements made by individual participants in one of the project workshops, and do not represent the views of the Council of Europe or its Secretary-General”.¹⁸⁷ The Commission, for its part, denied responsibility, stating that “the actions implementing the project are taken by the grant beneficiary” and that it “was not consulted and did not validate the specific material of the campaign”.¹⁸⁸

Once again, this calls into question the European Commission’s due-diligence mechanisms – or the lack thereof – for its expenditures.

The CoE-EU hijab campaign made waves due to its public diffusion, but other less publicized EU-funded initiatives have promoted strikingly similar messages. One of them is the EU-funded “More Equal Europe Together” (MEET) project, which also saw FEMYSO’s participation under the coordination of the Italian foundation *L’Albero della Vita* (“The tree of life”). Running from 2019 to 2021, it received €443,021 from DG Justice under the REC programme.¹⁸⁹

Using a definition of Islamophobia provided by ENAR (“a specific form of racism that must be tackled”), the project was specifically “addressed to women and girls because they are in fact a particular target of these discriminatory attacks and they suffer an **intersectional discrimination** [emphasis in original] based on multiple grounds: religion, gender, ethnicity”.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸³ Stott and Virgili, *Network of Networks: The Muslim Brotherhood in Europe*, 37.

¹⁸⁴ Hüseyin Çiçek, ‘Alevi and Turkish-Muslims in Austria: History and Current Developments’, in *Muslims in Europe: Historical Developments, Present Issues, and Future Challenges*, ed. Rauf Ceylan and Marvin Mücke, Islam in Der Gesellschaft (Springer, 2024), 128.

¹⁸⁵ Rita Faraj, ‘Hasan Al-Banna: The “Gem Woman” and Isolation’, Al-Mesbar Studies & Research Center, 5 June 2018, <https://mesbar.org/hasan-al-banna-the-gem-woman-and-isolation/>.

¹⁸⁶ The Cube, ‘Council of Europe Removes Hijab Campaign Images amid Backlash’, Euronews, 3 November 2021, 155000, <https://www.euronews.com/my-europe/2021/11/03/council-of-europe-removes-hijab-diversity-campaign-tweets-amid-backlash>.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ Commissioner Helena Dalli on behalf of the European Commission, ‘Answer for Parliamentary Question E-005129/21’, European Parliament, 24 June 2022, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/E-9-2021-005129-ASW_EN.html.

¹⁸⁹ ‘MEET More Equal Europe Together. Preventing Islamophobia against Women & Girls’, European Commission, accessed 29 April 2025, <https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/portal/screen/opportunities/projects-details/31076817/848472>.

¹⁹⁰ ‘Meet Project – More Equal Europe Together’, accessed 4 December 2024, <https://meet-project.alberodellavita.org/>.

The presentation video on the project's website shows the cartoon of a girl entering a metro amidst the hostile looks of every single bystander, some of whom whisper: "submissive woman. They forced her to wear the veil!"; and shout: "Taliban. Go back where you come from!". To which she proudly replies: "Where is the Taliban? Look how nice I am with my pink hijab!". The video ends with the message: "Discrimination lies in the eyes of the beholder, but so does beauty".¹⁹¹ The implication is clear: she is not submissive; she is empowered, and her freedom and beauty are expressed in the hijab. That might ring a bell.

Among similar "women and Islamophobia" projects financed under REC we find "MAGIC Muslim women and communities Against Gender Islamophobia in society".¹⁹² Running from 2021 to 2023, it got €205,989 from the EU, and it was implemented by, among others, the CIIB.¹⁹³

Another project worth noting, under the auspices of Erasmus+, is "RE-VISUALIZE. Genre et Islam dans le monde digital francophone".¹⁹⁴ Financed with €250,000 by the EU, it pursues the following investigation:

"How do new female figures on social media navigate the construction of a '*pious and engaged feminine/feminist*' subjectivity at the intersection of their faith and the digital world, particularly in societies plagued by Islamophobia? How do they actively dismantle the stereotype of the submissive Muslim woman who 'endures' wearing a veil, reframing it instead as an '*act of empowerment*' and creative agency to promote a positive representation of women's bodies, which have long been rendered invisible, dehumanized, or subjected to violence?".¹⁹⁵

Among the lead researchers, we find Malika Hamidi.¹⁹⁶ A specialist of Muslim feminism, Hamidi is a disciple of the MB ideologue Tariq Ramadan,¹⁹⁷ grandson of Hassan al-Banna, who represented one of the most prominent Islamist voices¹⁹⁸ before his reputation was tarnished by a series of rape accusations - one of which cost him a definitive conviction in Switzerland in August 2025.¹⁹⁹ Hamidi was the second signatory after Farid Hafez of a "worldwide appeal for due process for Tariq Ramadan", which denounced a violation of the rights of the Islamic ideologue, suggesting anti-Muslim discrimination by French authorities.²⁰⁰

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁹² 'About MAGIC', accessed 13 January 2025, <https://magic.iemed.org/about/>.

¹⁹³ 'Muslim Women and Communities Against Gender Islamophobia in soCietY', European Commission, accessed 29 April 2025, <https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/portal/screen/opportunities/projects-details/31076817/963678>.

¹⁹⁴ 'RE-VISUALIZE. Genre et Islam Dans Le Monde Digital Francophone', European Commission, accessed 29 April 2025, <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/projects/search>.

¹⁹⁵ 'RE-VISUALIZE', accessed 13 January 2025, <https://www.revisualize.eu/projet>. Emphasis added.

¹⁹⁶ Centre de recherches et d'interventions sociologiques, 'Malika Hamidi', UCLouvain Saint-Louis Bruxelles, accessed 3 December 2024, <https://cesir.uclouvain.be/hamidi-malika>.

¹⁹⁷ Bergeaud-Blackler, *Le frérisme et ses réseaux*, 222.

¹⁹⁸ Stott and Virgili, *Network of Networks: The Muslim Brotherhood in Europe*, 26.

¹⁹⁹ Keystone-SDA, 'Tariq Ramadan's Swiss Rape Conviction Is Final', Swiss Info, 28 August 2025, <https://www.swissinfo.ch/eng/various/tariq-ramadans-conviction-for-rape-is-final/89908059>; John Rossomando, 'Swiss Islamist Tariq Ramadan Abandoned by His Friends after Rape Conviction', Middle East Forum, 10 October 2024, <https://www.meforum.org/fwi/fwi-news/swiss-islamist-tariq-ramadan-abandoned-by-his-friends-after-rape-conviction>.

²⁰⁰ "Is there one form of justice for Muslims in France and another for everyone else?". See 'A Worldwide Appeal for Tariq Ramadan', IslamiCity, 14 June 2018, <https://islamicity.org/16048/a-worldwide-appeal-for-tariq-ramadan/>.

For years, Hamidi also directed Ramadan's think tank "European Muslim Network",²⁰¹ which counted among its members²⁰² the abovementioned Ibrahim El-Zayat, his wife Sabiha Erbakan, niece of the Turkish Islamist politician Necmettin Erbakan, as well as other representatives of the European MB galaxy such as the Italian Hamza Roberto Piccardo and Davide Piccardo.²⁰³

Once again, it seems that the EU has funded a project, clearly connected to the Brotherhist sphere, whose main goal is to promote the hijab in a "progressive" wrapping.

EU-FUNDED PROJECTS AGAINST ISLAMOPHOBIA

We have identified several other EU-funded projects on Islamophobia. In some cases, they have been directly implemented by organizations or individuals that are connected to the global Muslim Brotherhood – some of whom at times had been flagged as such by the security services of Member States.

The "Islamophobia Report" is a towering example.²⁰⁴ In 2018, the European Union co-founded the annual report on Islamophobia in Europe, published by the Turkish Foundation for Political, Economic and Social Research (SETA) and written by Farid Hafez and Enes Bayrakli.

SETA is a foundation run by Serhat Albayrak, the elder brother of Berat Albayrak, son-in-law of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and chairman of the board of Turkey's largest state media conglomerate. The Commission has confirmed that the report was funded by Brussels to the tune of €127,000.²⁰⁵

As concerns Farid Hafez, no formal evidence has been presented to establish his direct affiliation with the Muslim Brotherhood, but his closeness to the network has been highlighted on multiple occasions.²⁰⁶ Hafez is a founding member of *Muslimische Jugend Österreich* (MJÖ), an Austrian Muslim youth organization that was a member of FEMYSO.²⁰⁷ He is also a senior researcher at the Bridge Initiative at Georgetown University, directed by John Esposito, which is known for engaging with MB-linked individuals and networks²⁰⁸ while systematically exposing opponents (Muslims and non-Muslims alike) as "Islamophobic".²⁰⁹ Hafez himself actively contributes to this narrative.²¹⁰

²⁰¹ Ian Hamel, 'Tariq Ramadan's European Muslim Network: The End of an Empty Shell', Middle East Forum, 9 February 2021, <https://www.meforum.org/campus-watch/tariq-ramadan-european-muslim-network-the-end>.

²⁰² European Muslim Network, 'Team', 21 July 2018, <https://web.archive.org/web/20180721104936/http://eumuslim.net/category/team/page/2>.

²⁰³ Tommaso Virgili, 'Islamism in Italy: The Muslim Brotherhood Network and Its Allies', in *Handbook of Political Islam in Europe: Activities, Means, and Strategies from Salafists to the Muslim Brotherhood and Beyond*, ed. Thomas Jäger and Ralph Thiele, Springer Handbooks of Political Science and International Relations (Springer, 2023).

²⁰⁴ See Stott and Virgili, *Network of Networks: The Muslim Brotherhood in Europe*, 57.

²⁰⁵ Commissioner Johannes Hahn on behalf of the European Commission, 'Answer to Parliamentary Question P-003384/19', European Parliament, accessed 22 March 2021, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/P-9-2019-003384-ASW_EN.html.

²⁰⁶ Virginie Joron (ID), 'Parliamentary Question E-002519/2021: European Report on Islamophobia Drafted by a Turkish Research Centre Closely Linked to the Muslim Brotherhood', accessed 13 January 2025, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/E-9-2021-002519_EN.html; Global Influence Operations Report, 'Co-Founders Of Austria's Main Muslim Youth Association Accused Of Being Part Of The Muslim Brotherhood', 25 August 2021, <https://www.global-influence-ops.com/co-founders-of-austrias-main-muslim-youth-association-accused-of-being-part-of-the-muslim-brotherhood/>.

²⁰⁷ Global Influence Operations Report, 'Co-Founders Of Austria's Main Muslim Youth Association Accused Of Being Part Of The Muslim Brotherhood'.

²⁰⁸ The Global Muslim Brotherhood Daily Watch, 'Georgetown Academic To Head New Islamophobia Program; John Esposito Has Long History Of Support For Global Muslim Brotherhood', 1 July 2015, <https://www.globalmbwatch.com/2015/07/01/georgetown-academic-to-head-new-islamophobia-program-john-esposito-has-long-history-of-support-for-global-muslim-brotherhood/>.

²⁰⁹ 'Factsheets', *Bridge Initiative*, n.d., accessed 29 April 2025, <https://bridge.georgetown.edu/research-publications/factsheets/>.

²¹⁰ For instance: Farid Hafez, 'The Global Muslim Brotherhood Conspiracy Theory', Bridge Initiative, 19 September 2017, <https://bridge.georgetown.edu/research/the-global-muslim-brotherhood-conspiracy-theory/>.

As concerns Esposito, the Global Muslim Brotherhood Daily Watch documents that he has worked in an array of MB-linked organizations. Along with Yusuf Al-Qaradawi and François Burgat, he has served on the advisory board of the Institute of Islamic Political Thought in the U.K., led by Azzam Tamimi, “a leader of the U.K. Muslim Brotherhood and often described as a Hamas spokesman”.²¹¹ He was again alongside Al-Qaradawi in the Steering Committee of the Circle of Tradition and Progress. Additionally, it emerged from his testimony in the *US v. Holy Land Foundation* trial that he had a close relationship with the United Association for Studies and Research (UASR), “part of the U.S. Muslim Brotherhood’s Palestine Committee and part of the Hamas support infrastructure”.²¹²

The EU support for the Islamophobia report has been met with vivid criticism from intellectuals and politicians across the spectrum.²¹³ The European Commission has distanced itself from the report and its content, and it has played the usual card of deflecting the blame on the implementing authorities (the Turkish government in this case). It has also guaranteed that the Instrument of Pre-accession Assistance (IPA), through which the funding had been channelled, was subsequently put under direct EC control.²¹⁴

Other projects on Islamophobia directly implemented by MB-linked organizations were the “Islamophobia Monitoring and Action Network” (IMAN), “Let’s Say Stop to Islamophobia!” and “Dialogue, Education and Respect in the Classroom”.

IMAN, now concluded, was funded by the Commission with €70,187 and implemented by FEMY-SO with the *Collectif contre l’islamophobie en France* (CCIF)²¹⁵ – an organization that the French government would later dissolve in connection with the murder of Samuel Paty.

“Let’s Say Stop to Islamophobia!” was an Erasmus+ project that ran from 2022 to February 2025 and was financed by the Commission with €142,664.²¹⁶ The coordinator was *Yeni Dünya Vakfı* (New World Foundation), whose president Mahmut Göksu is a founding member of Erdogan’s Islamist party AKP.²¹⁷ Another member of the consortium, Metamo Education Center, albeit based in Belgium, is also linked to the Turkish government and to its religious establishment as part of the Maarif Foundation. The latter is connected to the Turkish government’s authority for religious affairs Diyanet and is considered by the French security services a spreader of AKP’s Islamo-nationalism and an institution used to collect intelligence for the Turkish government.²¹⁸ As concerns the French member of the consortium, the European Muslim Union, its problematic links with Islamism have been described above.

²¹¹The Global Muslim Brotherhood Daily Watch, ‘Georgetown Academic To Head New Islamophobia Program’.

²¹²Ibid. Esposito’s complete testimony in the Holy Land trial is available here: ‘US v. Holy Land Foundation for Relief and Development, et al. : John Esposito’s Testimony’, The Investigative Project on Terrorism, accessed 14 January 2025, https://www.investigativeproject.org/case_docs/us-v-holy-land-foundation/770/john-esposito-testimony.pdf.

²¹³Stott and Virgili, *Network of Networks: The Muslim Brotherhood in Europe*, 57.

²¹⁴Commissioner Olivier Várhelyi on behalf of the European Commission, ‘Answer for Parliamentary Question E-003735/19’, European Parliament, 10 January 2020, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/E-9-2019-003735-ASW_EN.html.

²¹⁵Global Influence Operations Report, *Europe and the Global Muslim Brotherhood Part 1*, 4.

²¹⁶Erasmus+, ‘Let’s Say Stop to Islamophobia!’, European Commission, accessed 22 November 2024, <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/projects/search/details/2021-1-TR01-KA220-YOU-000028820>.

²¹⁷EU Radio, ‘Entre la Turquie et l’UE, tout n’est pas clair - La chronique des Jeunes Européens’, 10 June 2024, <https://euradio.fr/emission/9pyr-chronique-je/0mLQ-entre-la-turquie-et-lue-tout-nest-pas-clair-la-chronique-des-jeunes-europeens>.

²¹⁸Eyraud, ‘L’islamisme d’Erdogan infiltre l’Europe via Erasmus+’.

The project “Dialogue, Education and Respect in the Classroom”, presented as an initiative to counter hatred and polarization in schools, was more precisely devoted to “stop[ping] the uncontrolled growth of ideologies of hatred, especially Islamophobia, which has been detected in recent years in the classrooms of schools across Europe”.²¹⁹ It ran between 2020 and 2023 with Erasmus+ financing (€101,070) under the coordination of the Spanish *Centro Cultural Islámico de Valencia* (Islamic Cultural Center of Valencia - CCIV) and in partnership, among others, with the European Forum of Muslim Women.

CCIV is an organization created by the Muslim Brotherhood and affiliated with the *Liga Islámica para el Diálogo y la Convivencia en España* (LIDCOE),²²⁰ which is part of the Council of European Muslims.²²¹ In 2022, CCIV was awarded the coordination of an additional Erasmus+ project that, although not explicitly mentioning “Islamophobia” in the title, is interesting for being entirely managed by MB-linked organizations. Entitled “Young Muslims for a Europe with a future: inclusive, digital and sustainable”, the project ran from 2022 until August 2024.²²² As stated on the CCIV website,²²³ it aimed to “transform young participants” by developing their key competencies and fostering their inclusion through learning outcomes, while making youth entities (especially Muslim ones) more inclusive, digital and sustainable. Among the tangible outcomes are an interactive guide to help young people transform associations into digital, inclusive and sustainable entities and the development of a network of European Muslim youth associations. Financed by Erasmus+ with €60,000, the project was managed by four organizations with various degrees of connection to the MB – starting with their common affiliation to FEMYSO.²²⁴

We have already addressed CCIV as coordinator. Another partner was *Asociación de Jóvenes Musulmanes en Valencia*, youth branch of CCIV.²²⁵ The Belgian partner was the youth branch of the *Ligue des musulmans de Belgique* (LMB, previously known as *Ligue islamique interculturelle de Belgique*), a member of the CEM which historically has represented the Muslim Brotherhood movement in Belgium, as the organization itself has admitted.²²⁶ The Italian partner, *Giovani Musulmani d'Italia*, is linked to the Union of Islamic Communities of Italy (UCOII)²²⁷ – the local CEM member and Brotherhood-linked organization.²²⁸ The French partner *Etudiants Musulmans de France* is similarly connected to CEM-member *Musulmans de France* (former UOIF), and it was part of ENAR’s “European Coalition against Islamophobia”.²²⁹

For both CCIV projects, the objectives and expected outcomes provide no specific details regarding the content of the teachings, which is worrying in consideration of the *ideology* of the associations involved and the vulnerable target audience.

²¹⁹ ‘Dialogue, Education and Respect in the Classroom: The Way to a Plural and Democratic Europe’, European Commission, accessed 14 January 2025, <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/projects/search/details/2020-1-ES01-KA201-082926>.

²²⁰ Sergio Altuna and Lorenzo Vidino, *La Hermandad Musulmana en España: activismo comunitario, política y terrorismo* (Real Instituto Elcano, 2022), 63, <https://media.realinstitutoelcano.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/dt6-2022-altuna-vidino-la-hermandad-musulmana-en-espana.pdf>.

²²¹ Council of European Muslims, ‘Members and Partners’, accessed 16 February 2022, <https://www.eumuslims.org/en/members/members-and-partners?page=0>.

²²² ‘Jóvenes Musulmanes Por Una Europa Con Futuro: Inclusiva, Digital y Sostenible’, European Commission, accessed 3 December 2024, <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/projects/search/details/2022-1-ES02-KA210-YOU-000081149>.

²²³ Centro Cultural Islámico de Valencia, ‘Jóvenes musulmanes por una Europa con futuro: inclusiva, digital, y sostenible’, n.d., accessed 14 January 2025, <https://www.webcciv.org/new/jovenes-musulmanes-por-una-europa-con-futuro-inclusiva-digital-y-sostenible/>.

²²⁴ FEMYSO, ‘Member Organisations’, accessed 4 December 2024, <https://femyso.org/we-are-femyso/member-organisations/>.

²²⁵ Altuna and Vidino, *La Hermandad Musulmana en España: activismo comunitario, política y terrorismo*, 80.

²²⁶ Privot, *Quand j’étais frère musulman*, 158.

²²⁷ Vidino, *The Closed Circle*, X.

²²⁸ Virgili, ‘Islamism in Italy: The Muslim Brotherhood Network and Its Allies’.

²²⁹ Privot, *Quand j’étais frère musulman*, 126; Bergeaud-Blackler, *Le frérisme et ses réseaux*, 203.

In fact, this constellation of Islamist organizations has not gone unnoticed, prompting a PQ that has led the Commission to engage in the usual blame game described several more times in this report: “The project that the Honourable Member refers to was selected by one of the Erasmus+ National Agencies in Spain according to the procedures of the Erasmus+ programme guide”.²³⁰ In this occasion, however, the Commission has also added veiled criticism toward the choice of the involved entities:

“A number of recent cases have highlighted the risk of both national and/or EU funding falling into the wrong hands. The Commission has thus proposed to reinforce the financial regulation by adding a new rule for exclusion of potential beneficiaries of EU funds in case of ‘incitement to hatred, discrimination or violence’, and strengthening the EU values section of the annotated grant agreement. This proposal on the additional exclusion would offer a stronger legal base to fight against such abuses in the future and the Commission calls on the co-legislators to quickly find an agreement on the text”.²³¹

While the implicit admission of a problem with MB entities is already a step forward, it is going to lead nowhere in the lack of an explicit acknowledgement of the Brotherhood ideology as extremist in itself, regardless of the seducing words employed to mask real intents. We will return to this point in the following chapter.

The projects on Islamophobia directly implemented by MB entities are not the only ones adopting the Brotherist outlook. Even those handled by actors that cannot be immediately connected to the movement often exhibit a similar perspective. This is a mark of the success of the Islamist-woke alliance. One of such examples is “ISLAM-OPHOB-ISM”, an ERC project financed by DG Research and implemented by Istanbul Bilgi University.²³² The principal investigator considers Islamophobia “or anti-Muslim racism” as a fundamental component of contemporary European identity.

He describes it as “a form of *ideology*” that “operates as a form of cultural racism in Europe which has become apparent along with the process of *securitizing* and *stigmatizing* migration and migrants in the age of neoliberalism”.²³³ To better understand which type of “securitization” constitutes a form of “Islamophobia”, we can again refer to the researchers’ explanation: “the project problematised the neoliberal political tendency to *criminalise* and *pathologise radicalisation* by reducing the concept to extremism and terrorism”.²³⁴ “Contrary to this understanding, many youngsters are prone to non-violent radicalisation resulting from a *deeper search for reflexive awareness*”.²³⁵ The cause? Muslim discrimination. “According to the findings of ISLAM-OPHOB-ISM, those who feel *neglected, excluded, marginalised, alienated* and *forgotten* are likely to manifest a reactionary form of radicalisation that is often *exploited by anti-systemic political and societal formations such as right-wing populist parties and movements*”.²³⁶

²³⁰ Vice-President Margaritis Schinas on behalf of the European Commission, ‘Answer for Parliamentary Question E-002033/23’, European Parliament, 28 September 2023, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/E-9-2023-002033-ASW_EN.html.

²³¹ Ibid.

²³² ‘An Empathetic Approach to Youth Radicalisation in Europe’, European Commission, accessed 21 November 2024, <https://cordis.europa.eu/article/id/443338-an-empathetic-approach-to-youth-radicalisation-in-europe>.

²³³ Ayhan Kaya, “‘Islamophobia’ as an Ideology in the West: Scapegoating Migrants of Muslim Origin”, in *An Anthology of Migration and Social Transformation*, ed. Anna Amelina et al., IMISCOE Research Series (Springer International Publishing, 2016), 281, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-23666-7_18. Emphasis in the text.

²³⁴ European Commission, ‘An Empathetic Approach to Youth Radicalisation in Europe’. Emphasis added.

²³⁵ Ibid. Emphasis added.

²³⁶ Ibid. Emphasis added.

If we connect the dots, we obtain the following picture: first, radicalisation (namely, in the Commission own words, a “process in which an individual or a group embraces a radical ideology or belief that accepts, uses or condones violence, including acts of terrorism, to reach a specific political or ideological purpose”²³⁷) is a sort of introspective self-exploration provoked by the intrinsic anti-Muslim racism that pervades the “neo-liberal states”; second, the fight against radicalisation (again, a core objective of the Commission itself) is yet again a racist endeavour, for the problem is not radicalization per se (a mere “deeper search for reflexive awareness”), but its “exploitation” by populist, right wing parties that “pathologize” and “securitize” Muslims’ righteous search for identity. In other words: systemic Islamophobia is the cause of radicalization, and the fight against it is, in turn, another epiphenomenon of systemic Islamophobia. Incidentally, the European Commission ends up in the schizophrenic position of supporting a host of initiatives against extremism, as well as a project that considers this very endeavour “Islamophobic”.

It is interesting to compare these arguments with those advanced by ENAR on several occasions. ENAR has claimed that “the narrative around counterterrorism and extremism effectively scapegoats Muslim communities”, “radicalization indicators should not include ‘religious expression’”, and the EU should refrain from using labels such as “Jihadism, Islamism and Political Islam” due to their “stigmatizing impact”.²³⁸

In summary, regardless of whether the Brotherist ideology on Islamophobia is disseminated directly or indirectly, it clearly has a large impact on the public discourse.

THE EU COORDINATOR ON ANTI-MUSLIM HATRED

On 1st February 2023, the European Commission appointed Marion Lalis as the new Coordinator for combating anti-Muslim hatred. In this role, she is tasked with collaborating with Member States, European institutions, civil society and academia to strengthen policy responses to anti-Muslim hatred. Her responsibilities include working on anti-discrimination measures and serving as the main point of contact for these issues within the European Union.

The first person to hold this position, created in 2015, was David Friggieri. He was replaced by Tommaso Chiamparino in 2018, following pressure from NGOs united in a European Coalition Against Islamophobia²³⁹ that was largely composed of associations connected to the Brotherist network under ENAR’s coordination.²⁴⁰ In an open letter to First Vice President Frans Timmermans, the coalition members accused Friggieri of engaging “with very questionable figures fuelling Islamophobia” and of conflating the fight against Islamophobia with other issues, such as blasphemy laws, Islamism and counter-terrorism. They also argued that the coordinator’s efforts had been insufficient in “politically addressing the structural forms of discrimination and racism affecting Muslims or those perceived as such.” They thus requested that the Commission appoint a coordinator from the affected communities to build trust with NGOs, negotiate the coordinator’s mandate, establish transparent communication and consultation with civil society, and define concrete objectives accompanied by an action plan and regular evaluations.²⁴¹

²³⁷ European Commission, ‘Prevention of Radicalisation’, accessed 21 November 2024, https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies/internal-security/counter-terrorism-and-radicalisation/prevention-radicalisation_en.

²³⁸ Global Influence Operations Report, *Europe and the Global Muslim Brotherhood Part 2*, 5.

²³⁹ Florence Bergeaud-Blackler, ‘L’Europe de la recherche et le financement des Frères musulmans’, *Le Point*, 18 November 2020, https://www.lepoint.fr/debats/l-europe-de-la-recherche-et-le-financement-des-freres-musulmans-18-11-2020-2401643_2.php.

²⁴⁰ Bergeaud-Blackler, *Le frérisme et ses réseaux*, 203.

²⁴¹ ‘Open Letter: A Meaningful Coordinator on Anti-Muslim Hatred to Transform EU Approach on Islamophobia’, European Network Against Racism, 5 July 2018, <https://www.enar-eu.org/open-letter-a-meaningful-coordinator-on-anti-muslim-hatred-to-transform-eu-1523/>.

Subsequently, the coordinator and the network's organizations have developed a collaborative relationship through which those entities have gained easy access to "anti-Islamophobia" events and EU calls for projects aimed at fighting racism and anti-Muslim hatred. As a result, the coalition's NGOs have benefitted from legitimacy and European funding in a system where they have acted as both the arbiters of the qualifying criteria and the recipients of the resulting benefits.²⁴²

The current coordinator, Marion Lalissee, has clarified during an interview with Radio France that her mission is to combat anti-Muslim hatred and not Islamophobia qua criticism of Islam – the latter being, in principle, acceptable under freedom of conscience and expression. She has also acknowledged that the term "Islamophobia" has often been exploited by third countries to smear Europe.²⁴³ While the theory is sound, the devil is in the details – specifically, in the coordinator's concrete action and in the actors who influence it. From this perspective, Lalissee's declarations are less reassuring. First of all, she has admitted that "the terminology may not satisfy everyone, but an organization responsible for combating anti-Semitism rightly told me that sometimes it's necessary to accept the *terms chosen by victims*. So, from our side, even if we talk about combating hatred against Muslims, *we will certainly work with actors who refer to Islamophobia*".²⁴⁴

This is a crucial point, for these civil society actors are those with whom Lalissee is working toward a "a non-binding document where we could establish a diagnosis of the situation and consider avenues beyond the Commission, for the future, in terms of strategy and action plan".²⁴⁵ Should these associations determine that the "victims" have chosen a broad definition of Islamophobia that includes blasphemy and secularist policies, what recommendations, potentially to be turned into law, will the coordinator and her network provide to EU institutions?

Indeed, this concern is already supported by Lalissee's own definition of her work: "We are working on data regarding anti-Muslim acts, on the *feelings*²⁴⁶ of Muslims or those perceived as Muslims, but also on the feelings of non-Muslims toward the Muslim community".²⁴⁷ The inclusion of the subjective "feelings" next to the objective "acts" shifts the conversation toward a very dangerous direction – much closer to the definition of Islamophobia provided by the European Coalition than to that of "anti-Muslim hatred" officially endorsed by the EU. What if a Muslim "feels victimized" by Muhammad's caricatures due to their alleged "anti-Muslim" character, asserted by the entire spectrum of organizations running the Islamophobia machine? The consequences on free speech can be dire, up to and including criminal convictions for blasphemy, as already happens in the jurisprudence of the European Court of Human Rights.²⁴⁸

Yet, for the EU coordinator, these concerns could arguably themselves be Islamophobic, if one has to judge from her criticism of "certain actors who claim that we are infiltrated by *frérisme* and the Muslim Brotherhood, at the level of institutions and civil society": "words such as *frérisme* or *Islamogauchisme* are used to discredit actors from civil society, researchers, the press and institutional actors amidst shortcuts, amalgams, and conspiracy theories".²⁴⁹

²⁴² Bergeau d-Blackler, 'L'Europe de la recherche et le financement des Frères musulmans'.

²⁴³ Marion Lalissee, 'La lutte contre la haine à l'encontre des musulmans', interview by Ghaleb Bencheikh, 18 June 2023, Radio France, <https://www.radiofrance.fr/franceculture/podcasts/questions-d-islam/la-lutte-contre-la-haine-a-l-encontre-des-musulmans-2110800>. Own translations from French.

²⁴⁴ Ibid.

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

²⁴⁶ French: *sentiments*

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

²⁴⁸ Tommaso Virgili, 'Rabczewska v. Poland and Blasphemy before the ECtHR: A Neverending Story of Inconsistency', *Strasbourg Observers*, 21 October 2022,

<https://strasbourgobservers.com/2022/10/21/rabczewska-v-poland-and-blasphemy-before-the-ecthr-a-neverending-story-of-inconsistency/>.

²⁴⁹ Lalissee, 'La lutte contre la haine à l'encontre des musulmans'.

THE EU AGENCY FOR FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS AND THE ONLINE DATABASE ON ANTI-MUSLIM HATRED

The European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) is another actor involved in the Islamophobia discourse. It has specifically created and maintains a database that provides detailed information on hate crimes, hate speech and discrimination against Muslims in the EU. The most concerning aspect of this initiative lies in the database's conflation of genuine hate crimes with legitimate policy decisions. For instance, under the "discrimination" filter one may find a reference to the French law against separatism (addressed in more details below) and to its requirement for (all) religious organizations to respect "the secular character and principles of the Republic (including equality between men and women, human dignity, fraternity)" in order to obtain public funding.²⁵⁰ The second issue is that FRA does not maintain any similar database for other minorities. The reasons for this choice are unclear; when one of the authors of the present report asked FRA more information on similar reporting on antisemitism and homophobic crimes, he received the following answer:

"The online Database on anti-Muslim hatred provides information on significant international, European and national case law and rulings, UN human rights body decisions, reports, findings by human rights and equality bodies and organisations relating to hate crime, hate speech and discrimination against Muslims, as well as relevant research, reports, studies, data and statistics on these issues. The Agency has not developed a similar database with case law and rulings on anti-Semitism and homophobic hatred, nor are we able to direct you to an external source with this information".²⁵¹

²⁵⁰ 'France / UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) / Concluding Observations on the Combined Twenty-Second and Twenty-Third Periodic Report of France / CERD/C/FRA/CO/22-23', Fundamental Rights Agency - Database 2012-2022 on Anti-Muslim Hatred, accessed 30 April 2025, <https://fra.europa.eu/en/databases/anti-muslim-hatred/node/8159>.

²⁵¹ Email from contact@fra.europa.eu, 1 October 2021.

5. INITIATIVES TO COMBAT THE ISLAMIST INFILTRATION

Over the last ten years, some governments and EU institutions have taken initiatives that, directly or indirectly, may contribute to counter the advance of Islamist infiltration. Below we outline notable examples.

FRANCE: THE LEGISLATIVE ROUTE

*In 2021, France adopted the “Law Reinforcing Respect for the Principles of the Republic” (Loi confortant le respect des principes de la République).*²⁵² Widely known as the “Anti-Separatism Law”, it aims to combat “separatism” and Islamic extremism in French society.

The French government defines separatism as an enterprise “weakening or even destroying the national community with the aim of replacing it with new forms of allegiance and identification that break away from the democratic and republican tradition. It relies on an ideological approach –political or politico-religious – aimed at severing the individual-citizen from their national framework. It stands in opposition to the nation as a source of collective identity, creating definitive divisions between individuals and groups”.²⁵³

The law, unique in its kind in Europe, includes several key provisions. First, as noted above, all associations must sign a “republican engagement contract” to receive public funding or approval, committing to respect the principles of *liberté, égalité, fraternité* and the secular character of the Republic. Crucially, private and public bodies that provide public services must observe neutrality and respect secularism. The statute also increases financial and administrative scrutiny of religious associations, such as external certification of accounts, additional checks on foreign funding and higher penalties for offences committed within places of worship. Furthermore, to avoid cultural separatism and encourage social mixing, the law significantly restricts home-schooling. Finally, it contains stringent provisions to tackle radicalization and the spread of extremist ideologies online and offline. Such measures include additional powers for authorities to dissolve associations promoting extremism or inciting violence.

The law has resulted in concrete actions – including, during its first year, the permanent or temporary closure of 836 organisations and establishments.²⁵⁴ Even before the adoption of this law, the French government was cracking down on extremist entities connected with the jihadi murder of the teacher Samuel Paty. Prominent examples of this action were the closures the NGO Baraka City and the CCIF.²⁵⁵

Although the Law against Separatism does not explicitly mention Islam or Islamism, it has elicited a barrage of criticism from predictable quarters labelling it as “Islamophobic”. Turkish state-run agency Anadolu has written that “the controversial anti-separatism bill in France limits the existence and rights of Muslims”; it quoted a former CCIF employee stating that “there is state racism and Islamophobia in France”.²⁵⁶ CAGE published a report entitled “ ‘We are Beginning to Spread

²⁵² République Française, ‘Loi N° 2021-1109 Du 24 Août 2021 Confortant Le Respect Des Principes de La République’, Légifrance, 24 August 2021,

²⁵³ Ministère de l’Intérieur et des Outre-Mer, *Loi Confortant Le Respect Des Principes de La République : Premier Bilan et Perspectives, Un an Après Sa Promulgation* (2022), 4, https://www.cipdr.gouv.fr/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/DP_Loi-confortant-le-respect-des-principes-de-la-Republique-2022-1.pdf. Own translation from French.

²⁵⁴ Sonia Backes, Secrétaire d’État auprès du ministre de l’Intérieur et des Outre-mer, ‘Loi confortant le respect des principes de la République 2022’, Ministère de l’Intérieur, accessed 16 December 2024, <https://www.interieur.gouv.fr/actualites/dossiers-de-presse/loi-confortant-respect-des-principes-de-republique-2022>.

²⁵⁵ France 24, ‘France : dissolution de l’ONG BarakaCity, accusée d’être liée à l’islam radical’, 28 October 2020, <https://www.france24.com/fr/france/20201028-france-dissolution-de-l-ong-barakacity-accus%C3%A9e-d-%C3%AAtre-li%C3%A9e-%C3%A0-l-islam-radical>.

²⁵⁶ Alattin Dogru and Esra Taskin, ‘Muslims in France Worried over Controversial Anti-Separatism Bill’, Anadolu Agency, 25 July 2021, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/europe/muslims-in-france-worried-over-controversial-anti-separatism-bill/2313758>.

Terror’: the State-Sponsored Persecution of Muslims in France”, with a foreword by François Burgat, which denounced France’s “structural” and “virulent Islamophobia”.²⁵⁷

An “International Coalition Against Islamophobia”, composed of 25 NGOs for the most part affiliated to ENAR or FEMYSO, wrote a letter to EC President Ursula Von der Leyen urging her to take action against France due to its “racist, discriminative and Islamophobic agenda”.²⁵⁸ Even more worryingly, the letter draws a parallel between blasphemy and Islamophobia:

“The French government has openly supported and advocated the publication of demeaning and insulting cartoons depicting Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). This while the judgement of the ECtHR is unquestionably clear about the positive obligations of governments in ensuring the peaceful coexistence of all religions and in insuring tolerance. This has been repeatedly violated by France in the context of insulting cartoons depicting the Prophet Muhammed (peace be upon him). A previous court judgement has been made in this regard and a precedent set: the UNHCR Court emphasised that insulting the Prophet Muhammed (peace be upon him) does not fall under the right to free speech, and moreover, it conflicts with the core principles and values of the UN Convention”.²⁵⁹

This passage is deeply troubling on two levels: from a theoretical perspective, it clearly proves our earlier assertion that “Islamophobia” is a weapon used by Islamists not to protect Muslims as individuals but rather Islam as a dogma; even more dangerously, from a consequential perspective, its logic echoes the justifications for atrocities like the Charlie Hebdo massacre and the assassination of Samuel Paty (among many similar atrocities worldwide), which perpetrators have framed as acts of defence against attacks on Islam.

AUSTRIA: THE RESEARCH ROUTE

In 2020, the Austrian government, under the coalition of the Austrian People’s Party (ÖVP) and the Greens, established the Dokumentationsstelle Politischer Islam (Documentation Centre on Political Islam). The Centre operates as a fund of the Republic of Austria, in accordance with the 2015 Austrian Foundation Act, and it was initially supported with a start-up grant of €500,000 by the Ministry of Integration.

The *Dokumentationsstelle’s* main mission is to document and scientifically analyse political Islam, its network and structures, with the intention of raising awareness on religiously motivated political extremism and its threat to democracy, the rule of law and fundamental rights. The Centre operates according to the definition of political Islam as “an ideology of supremacy that aims at influencing or changing society, culture, state, policy, politics and/or polity according to such values and norms that are declared as Islamic by the actors of Political Islam, but are not shared by the majority of Muslims and are in clear contradiction to the rule of law, democracy and human rights”.²⁶⁰

²⁵⁷ “We Are Beginning to Spread Terror”: The State-Sponsored Persecution of Muslims in France (2022), https://cdn.prod.website-files.com/6364ebb4927fbc4330221d8f/65ca29985a16d0c2e17bbafe_gpspXfzbMp7cRjEP0A90e_zHmj3zg77jtcS-WkDFI6Q.pdf.

²⁵⁸ International Coalition against Islamophobia, ‘French Islamophobic Laws’, 8 March 2021, https://cdn.prod.website-files.com/6364ebb4927fbc4330221d8f/65ca2969a445132dee2b1c1b_ziEQa_7cPu8UyHlIsRUBV2sOXWNDmvyuSrJ-CkMKLdE.pdf.

²⁵⁹ Ibid.

²⁶⁰ Dokumentationsstelle Politischer Islam, ‘Overview’, accessed 9 January 2025, <https://www.dokumentationsstelle.at/en/research/overview>.

The Centre's website offers news, publications, a media library and information on its activities. It also features an "Expert Talk" video format that is used to present findings from experts and researchers. Its research activities are prolific, and they produce in-depth study outputs on the multifaceted world of Islamism – in particular, Brotherism, Salafism and Khomeinism – with both a thematic and a geographic approach. *Inter alia*, the Documentation Centre has covered the MB in Europe and in specific countries, its similarities and differences with Salafism, the entire spectrum of Turkish Islamism, Khomeinism in its theory and practice and specific issues such as Islamic anti-Semitism, blasphemy and the connections between Islamism and the political left.²⁶¹ Furthermore, the Centre organizes an annual *Conference on Extremism and Radicalisation in Austria* (CERA) featuring prominent experts, researchers, practitioners and policy-makers in the field on Islamism.

Other European countries have occasionally established focus groups on political Islam outside the intelligence realm. One of such examples was the ephemeral *Expertenkreis Politischer Islamismus* (Expert Circle on Political Islamism) in Germany, which was dissolved after a mere one year of activity by the new centre-left coalition, without having the time to produce any concrete output.²⁶² The Austrian *Dokumentationsstelle* stands out for being a permanent and stable institution that produces analyses and policy recommendations and actively engages in public outreach on a regular basis.

EU SCRUTINY AND FUNDING CONTROLS: ADVANCEMENTS AND LOOPHOLES

About one year after the "hijab campaign" scandal, the "Woman Life Freedom" protest erupted in Iran. Sparked by the death of Mahsa Jina Amini while in the custody of Iran's morality police for allegedly wearing her hijab "improperly", demonstrations rapidly spread throughout Iran and soon emerged as the most significant challenge to the Ayatollah's regime since 1979. The protest brought together women and men, from the capital to the most remote and conservative provinces, united by their rage against the regime and its gender apartheid.²⁶³

In the midst of the protest, which received solidarity from the European Parliament,²⁶⁴ French EPP MEP François-Xavier Bellamy revisited the topic of hijab campaign, emphasizing that, in light of the murderous oppression faced by women who refuse to wear the veil, it is unacceptable for the EU to promote messages such as "freedom and joy in the hijab". He thus proposed an oral amendment aimed at preventing the EU from funding similar campaigns in the future; regrettably, the opposition of the Greens and S&D blocked its adoption.²⁶⁵ This, however, was only a temporary setback: a similar amendment was re-proposed in written form in the EU Budget Report two weeks later and this time approved by a majority of the parliament.²⁶⁶

The same document contains another relevant section, explicitly addressing the Muslim Brotherhood. Proposed by Renew Europe MEPs, the amendment states that the European Parliament.

²⁶¹ Dokumentationsstelle Politischer Islam, 'Publikationen', accessed 9 January 2025, <https://www.dokumentationsstelle.at/publikationen>.

²⁶² Forschung und Lehre, 'Expertenkreis Aufgelöst – Wissenschaftler Enttäuscht', 4 September 2022, <https://www.forschung-und-lehre.de/politik/expertenkreis-aufgeloesst-wissenschaftler-enttaeuscht-4986>.

²⁶³ UN News, 'Iran: Draft Hijab Law Tantamount to "Gender Apartheid" Say Rights Experts', 1 September 2023, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2023/09/1140307>.

²⁶⁴ European Parliament, 'Woman, Life, Freedom', LinkedIn, 6 October 2022, https://www.linkedin.com/posts/european-parliament_the-death-of-mahsa-amini-and-the-repression-activity-6983728252192227328-YoHo/?originalSubdomain=se.

²⁶⁵ Claire Conruyt, 'UE: la gauche s'oppose à un amendement de François-Xavier Bellamy contre la promotion du voile par les institutions européennes', Le Figaro, 7 October 2022, <https://www.lefigaro.fr/politique/francois-xavier-bellamy-lr-echoue-a-faire-interdire-la-promotion-du-voile-par-les-institutions-europeennes-20221007>.

²⁶⁶ The amendment was approved with 308 votes in favour, 280 against and 57 abstentions. Claire Conruyt, 'UE: un nouvel amendement de Bellamy contre la promotion du voile par les institutions européennes, finalement adopté', Le Figaro, 19 October 2022, <https://www.lefigaro.fr/politique/ue-un-nouvel-amendement-de-bellamy-contre-la-promotion-du-voile-par-les-institutions-europeennes-finalement-adopte-20221019>.

"Is deeply concerned about the multiple reports highlighting the financing of associations with links to radical religious and political organisations, such as the Muslim Brotherhood; calls on the Commission to guarantee that Union funds finance only organisations that strictly respect all European values, including the freedom of thought, the freedom of speech and equality between men and women, in particular through the programme Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values; asks the Commission, therefore, to impose to the beneficiary organisations the signature of a Charter committing them to respect those values before making funds available".²⁶⁷

Unsurprisingly, FEMYSO swiftly reacted through its president Hande Taner, condemning the move as a "direct targeting of Muslims and a very dangerous backslide of EU values".²⁶⁸

No equivalent prevision has found its way in the EP Resolution for the 2024 Budget Report.²⁶⁹

The Parliament also took action in the framework of the 2023 Discharge Report, which, in line with a 2018 report of the European Court of Auditors (ECA),²⁷⁰ demanded more transparency and caution from the Commission in the financing of NGOs. In particular, the Discharge Report expressed concern over "the funding of projects carried out by or involving NGOs with links to radical religious and political organisations" and called on the Commission "to set up ex ante mechanisms clearly identifying NGOs operating on Union territory and abroad *that have acknowledged ties to religious fundamentalist networks* and push forward an agenda that is undermining Union values; calls, in this context, for the creation of a *public black list of NGOs, that have engaged in activities such as hate speech, incitement to terrorism, religious extremism supporting or glorifying violence*, or have misused or misappropriated Union funds and are listed in the EDES database, in order to ensure they are blocked from access to Union institutions and Union funding programmes"; it also reiterated that "no funds can be allocated or linked to any cause or form of terrorism and/or religious or political radicalisation".²⁷¹

These are not mere declarations of principle: if the Commission does not take appropriate measures to address the Parliament's observations in the discharge report, the European Parliament's Committee on Budgetary Control (CONT) can follow suit and begin a demarche that can even culminate in a legal action before the Court of Justice of the EU.

Another tool that, theoretically, could be leveraged to prevent the funding of Islamist organizations is the EU Financial Regulation, and especially the Early Detection and Exclusion System (EDES). EDES is an instrument of early detection of unreliable entities that are excluded from EU funding, mainly because of financial misconduct (fraud, corruption, participation in criminal organizations, bankruptcy, tax evasion and others).²⁷²

²⁶⁷ European Parliament, 'General Budget of the European Union for the Financial Year 2023', 19 October 2022, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2022-0366_EN.html.

²⁶⁸ Twitter post on 19 October 2022. Screenshot in the authors' possession. Currently available in restricted view at <https://x.com/tnrhande/status/1582711705951354880>

²⁶⁹ European Parliament, 'General Budget of the European Union for the Financial Year 2024', 18 October 2023, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2023-0367_EN.html.

²⁷⁰ European Court of Auditors, *Transparency of EU Funds Implemented by NGOs: More Effort Needed*, Special Report N. 35 (2018), https://www.eca.europa.eu/Lists/ECADocuments/SR18_35/SR_NGO_FUNDING_EN.pdf.

²⁷¹ European Parliament, 'Discharge 2021: EU General Budget - Commission and Executive Agencies', 10 May 2023, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2023-0137_EN.html. Emphasis added

²⁷² European Commission, 'Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2024/2509 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 September 2024 on the Financial Rules Applicable to the General Budget of the Union (Recast)'.

The latest iteration of the financial regulation, adopted in 2024, has extended the purview of EDES's control to funds under shared management (starting from 2028), and it has also deployed "additional means to prevent disbursement of EU funds to individuals or entities that do not respect EU values".²⁷³ Among the new criteria, we find the exclusion of a person or entity that has been judged guilty of "incitement to discrimination, hatred or violence". In an October 2024 debate on "Protecting the EU budget and ensuring that EU funds do not benefit entities or individuals linked to terrorist or Islamist movements", Commissioner Johannes Hahn earmarked this provision as the latest addition to a strong framework that should theoretically prevent EU funding from reaching "entities and individuals associated with terrorist activities or activities incompatible with EU values".²⁷⁴

However, it is highly doubtful that the provision will achieve concrete change, as the bar for exclusion is set quite high: first, the individual/entity cannot be excluded for bearing an extremist, anti-democratic or hateful ideology, but has to engage in a conduct tantamount to "incitement"; second, there must be a conviction under criminal or administrative law for "incitement" – or, alternatively, a cumbersome procedure that requires a decision from the authorising officer "on the basis of a preliminary classification in law of a conduct", upon the recommendation of a panel composed of two independent experts appointed by the Commission, two Commission representatives and one representative of the requesting authorizing officer; and even that being insufficient, the provision additionally requires a causal link between the incitement and an improper execution of the contract.²⁷⁵

It is not immediately clear why the mechanisms of early detection and exclusion are so unwieldy, given that adherence to EU values has recently become part of the contractual framework between the Commission and beneficiaries of EU funding. This framework theoretically requires the Commission to conduct ex-ante controls on beneficiaries, as noted in a recent report of the European Court of Auditors.²⁷⁶ The report, focused on the transparency of EU funding for NGOs, paints an overall critical picture of the due diligence process in the selection of beneficiaries. Significantly, one identified weakness is the Commission's insufficient attention to the normative dimension: the ECA highlights the Commission's failure to proactively check recipients' compliance with EU values, despite this being a contractual obligation for EU funding beneficiaries under the 2021-2027 multiannual financial framework. In particular, the Court criticizes the Commission and other implementing bodies for assessing adherence to EU values based solely on applicants' self-declarations and formal statute checks, rather than conducting proactive verification using additional sources. Furthermore, the report observes that recent internal Commission guidance on suspending, reducing or terminating grants for violation of EU values fails to specify "how compliance with this obligation should be checked or how to assess the seriousness of non-compliance".

²⁷³ European Commission, 'Report from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council on the Follow-up to the Discharge for the 2022 Financial Year', 25 June 2024, 1, COM(2024) 267 final, <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-11637-2024-INIT/en/pdf>.

²⁷⁴ 'Verbatim Report of Proceedings - Protecting the EU Budget and Ensuring That EU Funds Do Not Benefit Entities or Individuals Linked to Terrorist or Islamist Movement', European Parliament, 9 October 2024, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-10-2024-10-09-ITM-017_EN.html.

²⁷⁵ "The authorising officer responsible shall exclude a person or entity referred to in Article 137(2) from participating in award procedures governed by this Regulation or from implementing Union funds where that person or entity is in one or more of the following exclusion situations: [...] (c) it has been established by a final judgment or a final administrative decision that the person or entity is guilty of grave professional misconduct by having violated applicable laws or regulations or ethical standards of the profession to which the person or entity belongs, or by having engaged in any wrongful conduct which has an impact on its professional credibility where such conduct denotes wrongful intent or gross negligence, including, in particular, any of the following: [...] (vi) incitement to discrimination, hatred or violence against a group of persons or a member of a group or similar activities that are contrary to the values on which the Union is founded enshrined in Article 2 TEU, where such misconduct has an impact on the person or entity's integrity which negatively affects or concretely risks affecting the performance of the legal commitment". European Commission, 'Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2024/2509 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 September 2024 on the Financial Rules Applicable to the General Budget of the Union (Recast)', Art. 138.

²⁷⁶ European Court of Auditors, *Transparency of EU Funding Granted to NGOs Despite Progress, the Overview Is Still Not Reliable*, Special Report 11/2025 (2025), https://www.eca.europa.eu/ECAPublications/SR-2025-11/SR-2025-11_EN.pdf.

Finally, the Court specifies that it expects “all EU grant contracts to include the obligation to respect EU values for all recipients’ activities, not just for those funded by the EU” – an obligation that has been recently added to grant agreements under the direct and indirect management modes but not those under shared management.

Given that these principles have now acquired legal standing, at least partially, two main points remain unclear: first, why EDES links significant breaches of EU values specifically to a conviction or potential conviction for incitement and to the “performance of the legal commitment”; and second, what criteria determine non-compliance with these values such as to justify an ex-ante exclusion of the beneficiary.

It is important at this juncture to reassert a fundamental distinction: the legal grounds for conviction are – and rightly should be – distinct from, and more stringent than, the administrative criteria governing financial support, which is ultimately dependent on policy choices. In a liberal democracy, the criminal bar should never be set so low that an individual could be imprisoned, or an entity dissolved, on purely ideological grounds; but neither should the public funding bar be so low that simply having a clean criminal record is enough to qualify. There are many neo-fascist, neo-Nazi, Maoist, Stalinist and other supremacist organizations operating legally in EU Member States, but they should certainly not receive taxpayers’ money. While this concept seems to enjoy widespread consensus when applied to political extremism, the same does not appear to hold true for religious extremism – Islamism above all.

6. CONCLUSIONS: CLEAR VISION, DECISIVE ACTION

The Muslim Brotherhood and its panoply of offshoots and affiliates do not champion liberal democracy. Deeper examination of their statements and problematic connections, below the sugar-coated slogans they produce for social media, grant applications and PR opportunities, makes it evident that their ideology and goals remain essentially unchanged since the times of Hassan al-Banna, and that their strategy follows the rulebook laid out by their founder and other influential ideologues such as Mawdudi and Al-Qaradawi.

The European Commission is still struggling to understand the essence of Brotherism, the threat it poses, and how to respond. As a result, the EU continues to give financial support, lend legitimacy and have relationships with organizations linked to the Muslim Brotherhood or influenced by its ideology. To change these patterns of institutional engagement and minimize the Brotherist strategic influence would require decisive changes in policy.

The EU lacks clear definitions of the terms that are used to determine what organisations are worthy of cooperation, funding and legitimization. How are “EU values” defined, and what actions violate them? What proof is needed to substantiate that an organisation does not adhere to EU values? What constitutes “extremism”, which the EU treats as a societal threat and has invested heavily in combating through countless networks and programmes?

What does the Commission intend to achieve by financing hundreds of projects targeting “Islamophobia”? Is there any awareness of the negative impact that the “Islamophobia” narrative can have on the rights of minorities *within* Muslim communities, such as secular or liberal Muslims, or on secular values in general?²⁷⁷ Without definitional clarity, procedural coherence becomes nearly impossible outside the legalistic boundaries of extreme cases, such as praising or engaging in terrorist acts. And this is part of the reason why the checks currently in place primarily focus on such edge cases.

However, a purely formalistic threshold based on commitment to non-violence obviously sets the bar too low, as does an equally formalistic requirement to use the right language in a well-crafted bids, regardless of the applicants’ true nature. For instance, it is quite plausible, not to say obvious, that Islamic Relief refrained from engaging in anti-Semitism or hate speech in grant proposals or on its front page; but is that sufficient reason to discard the extensive evidence of extremism that years of research, inquiries and scandals have brought to light? Ultimately, if the threshold is so low, which organization would ever be excluded – apart from Isis or the Ku Klux Klan?

The fact is that definitional clarity requires a clear moral compass and consequent policy decisions, which must not be delayed any longer. As called on by the European Parliament and the European Court of Auditors, the European Commission should enhance transparency in fund allocation and ensure that resources do not end up favouring Islamist organizations and their illiberal agenda.

²⁷⁷ See for instance Tommaso Virgili, *Lifting the Integration Veil: Outcasts from Islam in Western Europe* (Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies, 2020), https://www.martenscentre.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/paper_lifting_the_integration_veil-v2-web_1-1.pdf.

7. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Leveraging its multiple networks against extremism**, the Commission should establish a clear definition of “political”, “religious” and “political-religious extremism”. These definitions must be such that they avoid double standards and include Islamism.
- **Based on these definitions, the Commission should establish** clear benchmarks to exclude Islamist organizations, or organizations with ties to Islamism.
- **The Commission should introduce** “black-lists” of organizations ineligible for funding, to be checked for automatic verification.
- **The Commission should increase transparency** concerning the process of selection and evaluations of projects.
- **Projects dealing with sensitive topics** having normative implications, such as those addressing “Islamophobia”, should undergo an additional level of scrutiny compared to those of a purely technical nature.
- **EU institutions should refrain** from using the word “Islamophobia” and should make clear that “anti-Muslim hatred” only refers to the protection of individuals, not dogmas. Criticism, and even mockery, of Islam or any religion should always be covered under freedom of speech.
- **The European Commission should ask** the Fundamental Rights Agency to explain its special focus on Islamophobia.
- **The EP should follow up on its budget reports** and discharge reports and proceed to block funding for Islamist campaigns and Islamist organizations.

NOTES



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