

# Islamism and the Muslim Brotherhood in a new European social frame

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## **AVERA** – COMMENTARY

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### **1. INTRODUCTION**

One of the many Islamic movements that became prominently featured in the Arab media after the Arab spring in 2011 was the Muslim Brothers, better known as the Muslim Brotherhood or the Muslim Brothers and hereinafter referred to as “MB”.

The influence and extent of their Islamic and religious activism has received widespread research and commentaries, often in association to topics as violent radicalism, extremism and terrorism. Also in Europe various experts and security reports have been focusing on political Islam and its modus operandi.

Islamic political activism and idealism are known as Islamism. However for most people, including a significant part of the Muslim populations itself, it is not always easy to make a distinction between Islamism and Islam. Therefore teachings, doctrines, statements and actions instigated by Islamism are often considered to be represented and aligned with Islam itself. Of course, equating the two is for a large extend the focus of Islamism in order to gain support for their political objectives.

As a result it is extremely challenging for European governments to balance their fight against political Islam that rejects Western values and civilisation and too often inspires radicalism and violent extremism on the one hand, and preventing

alienating the general Muslim population – in and outside Europe - in the process for whom it seems their faith is being attacked and proof of Islamophobia and stigmatisation. Islamistic groups, politicians and regimes utilize this to further blur the distinction, steer up the emotional sentiment, causing further polarising. Since their whole ideology is based on the incompatibility between Islamism and Western secular society, any criticism or crackdown on Islamism is reframed where Muslims are the once more the victims and proof of their ideology.

The letter from Le Collectif des Mosquées et Associations Musulmanes de l'Île de France sent to French President Macron on October 7th should be seen from this perspective. In it they warned for excessive rhetoric, generalisations, stigmatisations and policies that would alienate the vast majority of Muslim in Europe who have no affiliation or inclination to political Islam as such a characterisation will make constructive dialogue impossible.

Instead of equating Islamism and Islam it is more beneficial to analyse Islamism groups such as the MB through the various models and theories that are applied in the study of social movements like Black Lives Matters, LGBT- Rights Advocates, Environmental Action Groups and others – with some of them resorting also to violence. Is the MB movement typological linear (Habermas) or is it rather cyclical (Touraine)? What are the strategies they apply and the meaning of their actions? What are the social change they are aiming to establish? And seen from this perspective, is the MB in order to achieve their goals willing to respect the democratic constitutional state and process in Europe? Do they engage in double speak, with one narrative in their official communication to the outside world, to gain acceptance and avoid scrutiny on the one hand in order, and a hidden goal and strategy internally to subvert on the other?

Authors defending Islamism tend to focus on Islamistic movements, including MB, as having emerged as result of external factors such as repression due to colonisation or the authoritarian regimes in parts of the Arab world. As such they are nothing more than justified causes against a colonial occupier, authoritarian repression<sup>1</sup> or other form of injustice. Other researches however conclude that the core of Islamism is an exclusive and totalitarian idealism, that fundamentally and radically rejects not only western modern society and its values but also everyone who does not fully subscribe to their ideology and principles<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> BEN NEFISSA, Sarah, ONG, gouvernance et développement dans le monde arabe. Onuitgegeven bijdrage voor de conferentie 'NGO and governance in Arab countries', Cairo, 29-31 maart 2000, pp.19-20.

<sup>2</sup> Platti Emilio, islamisme , Modern islamitisch radicalisme , Averbode: Altiora, 2016

The two are of course not necessary in contradiction with each other, as movements can start with a certain apolitical goal and gradually evolving into a fully idealistic, political and even radical movement. The challenge is that the dividing line between social and political activism on the one hand and extremism on the other is not a clear one, irrespective whether considered from a legal, moral or social change point-of-view. Many of the now widely accepted political and social customs and civil rights have once began as a rather radical form of opposition against the status quo.

A better way to obtain a grasp on the true motives and likely evolution of the MB is therefore to analyse its ideological foundation and the internal discourses of their spiritual leaders. It is here that intelligence apparatus reports raise concern about the MB, pointing to their regular 'double-speak' and their common use of 'facade-politics', hiding their true ideological affiliation and goals to both Muslims and Non-Muslims<sup>3</sup>, a tactic that is reminiscent of that in cults and secret societies.

How then are their Islamistic ideals different from Islam?

### **ISLAM VERSUS ISLAMISM :**

The first Muslim scholar to mention and distinguish the essential difference between Muslims and Islamists was – more than 1000 years ago - the theologian and Imam Abou Hassan al-Acharie (d. 935 AD). In his book entitled the 'Maqaalaat al- Islaamiyyien', translated as discourses of the Muslims he made a distinction between two possible definitions of Islam as a normative concept: one is the religion, based on its five pillars as praxis; the other de politicising of faith, turning it into an instrumental ideology, for political gain and power<sup>4</sup>.

It is in this context one has to understand French President Macron's statements, even calling radical Islamism a form of Islamic separatism. While it caused the necessary stir amongst Muslims (many of them also not able to make the distinction between Islam and Islamism), it was mainly targetted towards the MB and its sister organizations<sup>5</sup>. The same view was stressed in Gerald Darman's communique, Minister of Internal Affairs in France, aiming at reducing foreign Islamism influences and clearly pointing out that it is not stigmatising all Muslims as political and/or radical extremists. In addition, Macron has submitted a proposal to strengthen the

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<sup>3</sup> Annual Report Belgian 'staatsveiligheid, pagina 41, 2011

<sup>4</sup> Al-Suwaidi Jamal Sanad, The Mirage, eccsr, UAE, 2015.

<sup>5</sup> Halawa Hassan & Sohaib Hassan in Fatwa van the European Council for Fatwa and Research, 5/10/2020

law regarding separation of church and state that dates back to 1905, aimed at preventing Islamism influences in its democratic institutions and processes.

As stated, the current form of Islamic activism or Islamism is often traced back to the fall of the Caliphate at the end of the Ottoman Empire as an organized opposition movement against its new colonizers. Rather than attributing the defeat on the lack of adaptation, openness and innovation to new ideas and advancements in science and technology elsewhere in Europe, the founder of the first Islamic party, Hassan El Banna (born in 1906 and killed in 1949) started at this secondary school in his home town a religious movement that prohibited anything that was not explicitly allowed in Islam (a reversal of traditional Islamic understanding). His organization was named 'Man° Ul Muharramet', which translates as 'the prohibition of religious decadence' and became a sort of moral police to combat decadence caused by the British colonisers.

It is a pattern all too familiar: a system (in this case Islam that once enjoyed its golden century due to its openness to outside knowledge and influences as a way of deepening the understanding of their faith and advance welfare) that is traumatised by its own pity condition; blaming anything and everyone but itself; thereby alienating both from its own source of inspiration and renewal on the one hand and the outside world on the other; and subsequently falling into a self-reinforcing pattern of externalised internal repression, frustration and neuroticism; all while holding fast to an idealised and stagnant past notion of history or the future where based on a black & white polarised world-view. If only...

**It is therefore no surprise - as history teaches us with many forms of closed ideological systems – that Islamism finally accumulated in a totalitarian ideology and doctrine, summarized by researcher Tibi Bassam in six points<sup>6</sup>:**

\* The interpretation (or reduction) of Islam as Nizam Islami (state ideology and order)

\* The de-picturing of Jews as the eternal enemy based on the believe that the Jews are pursuing (and currently controlling) a world-order that is morally the anti-thesis of the Islamic ideal.

\* A dogmatic institutional Islamism with no room for democracy or outside influences.

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<sup>6</sup> Tibi Bassam, Islamisme en islam , uitgeverij de Blauwe Tijger, Groningen, 2019

\* The re-framing of the concept of Jihad from a personal struggle against its lower desires and injustice, towards terrorism, even targeting innocent civilians and Muslims not belonging to their ideology.

\* The revisionistic reinterpretation of Sharia (jurisprudence) through taking Quranic verses and concepts out of their context to fit their narrative.

\* An arduous rejection of any secularisation by declaring it immediately as heresy, haram (against the sharia-law) or innovation.

Today we see Islamism movements active in more than 70 countries worldwide. Those include both Shia-movements active in Iran, Lebanon and Yemen and Sunni-movements mainly operating from Turkey and the Middle –East.

The MB is in its current form an Islamic mass movement whose world-view is based on its motto and belief that "Islam is the solution" and with as stated goal of (re)establishing a world order (a caliphate) based on the Islamic religious law (sharia).

Different branches emerged that are currently run largely independent from the MB such as the Ennahda-movement in Tunisia , the AKP in Turkey and Hamas in Palestine. However despite their independent operations, they intersect with each other and base their ideology predominantly on the same historical and ideological foundations and follow a very similar discourse, totalitarian ideology and objectives.

A study of the MB ideology and structure in Europe shows many of above elements, though it must be noted that there are substantial differences between how the MB operates in the United Kingdom and Europe, especially after the Brexit, further complicating the work of the security services. Such differences can be noticed when studying the synchronicity in the financing, operations and ideologies which diverge considerable between the MB in Britain and Belgium and the Netherlands. Experts as Zemni have studied those mutual interdependencies stating: "The relationship between movements and ideology is both synchronous and diachronic interdependent. Ideology influences their action, structure and mobilisation patterns and vice-versa, the strategy, structure and actions influences the ideology.

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<sup>7</sup> ZEMNI, Sami, Expansie, evolutie en transitie van het islamisme. Een politieke, historische sociologischestudie. In: DOOM, Ruddy, (red.), De structuur van de waanzin. Conflicten in de periferie. Gent, Academia Press, 2001, pp.219-220.

## THE DIFFERENT STAGES IN THE DEVELOPMENT AND LEVEL OF MEMBERSHIP OF THE MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD

**The Muslim Brotherhood (the official name is “al-ikhwan al-muslimun”) has gone through three major phases of development:**

- Establishment and preaching phase (1928)
- Institutionalising and politicising phase (1945)
- Action and confrontation phase (1949 till present day)

The "Muslim Brotherhood was founded in Egypt by Hasan al-Banna as an Islamist action group and social movement that took the street to oppose the colonial powers and its local supporters in various ways. After Arab countries gained independence in 60's and 70's, its focus shifted towards combatting the corruption and injustices of the new authoritarian regime, lending them credibility, legitimacy and support by a significant share of the oppressed population.

Under the impulse of Mostafa Mashhour, the fourth spiritual leader, the MB expanded internationally, making use of the annual pilgrimage to Mecca to establish international relationships. The first branch outside Egypt was founded in Djibouti in 1935, though formally it took till 1945 to set-up an international forum.

In 1991, during a first international evaluation of their global activities in Istanbul, MB declared it had the right to use all possible means to overcome opposition from states and governments and achieve its goals.

More recently, in 2019, another conference took place in Istanbul with as title: "Authenticity of Thought and Continuity of the Mission", in which 500 affiliated bodies swore their allegiance (Bay ° a) to Ibrahim Mounir, MB's spiritual leader and secretary-general of the global arm of the MB. Mounir is replacing Mohammed Badie, who was arrested and imprisoned in Egypt. He is also the spokesperson of MB in both Great Britain and Europe. The MB further requested their members to commit themselves to prepare the celebration of the 100th anniversary since being founded.

In 1989 the UK was chosen to set-up the FIOE (the Federation of Islamic Organizations in Europe), the umbrella organisation for the Muslim Brothers in Europe and consisting out of different executive bodies: the Shura Council (consultative committee for planning and strategy), the General Assembly, the Constitutional Council and the European Bureau who has the overall leadership of the FIOE and is empowered to execute all projects. FIOE's current General Secretary is Samir Falah.

The FIOE represents today 30 main Muslim organizations present in every country in Europe, as well as over 1000 local groups and associations (mostly local non-profit organizations and mosques). It also counts over 300 imams active within the structure of European Assembly of Imams and as spiritual guides.

The MB counts four different types of membership <sup>8</sup>, with each level having a different focus, role, obligations and access to information, and thus were each level is given a different version of the motives, goals and ideology of the MB.

*Akh Musa<sup>o</sup>ied*: a co-brother of brother sympathiser who signs and pay its membership

*Akh Muntasib*: affiliated brother who adheres to and propagated the ideology

*Akh °amiel*: a working brother, who participates actively, together with his family, in ideological meetings, trip and provide donations to their 'humanitarian funds'

*Akh Al Mujahid*: a brother who is confidentially co-opted and has conducted a specific training, obeys closely the instruction of the central body and the supervisory committee

## THE MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD AS POLITICAL MOVEMENT

Instrumental organizations are those set-up to achieve goals that imply radical societal change and therefore aim to recruit and mobilise members that are sympathetic or willing to active participate in this aim <sup>9</sup>. In the case of the MB, much of its recruitment and membership acquisition in the countries where it is active is the result of active propaganda that goes back to the 50's.

Despite regularly being the target of crack-downs, the MB has been able to adapt itself well to policies and actions enacted against them by governments aiming to reduce their influence, operations and opposition. Being excluded from the political process, they became however increasingly militant, starting with the killing of the Egyptian prime minister, Al Nuqràchi in 1948. They became especially radicalised after their spiritual leader Hassan al Banna was killed in 1949, under impulse of the dogmatic Egyptian ideologist, Sayyid Qutb, - who was also subsequently convicted and executed by dead penalty.

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<sup>8</sup> Imad Abdul Ghani, *Islamist Movements in the Arab world*, Centre for Arab Unity Studies, Beirut , 2013

<sup>9</sup> BECKMAN, Björn, *Explaining democratization: notes on the concept of civil society*. In: ÖZDALGA, Elisabeth, PERSSON, Sune, (reds.), *Civil society and democracy in the Muslim world*. Istanbul, Swedish Research Institute, 1997, p.5.

The MB leaders since then officially adapted the principle of non-violence, but the organization had a patterns of members occasionally becoming radicalized and leaving the MB for more extreme groups.

To further complicate matters, much of the MB's operations are still hidden until this day. Despite this secrecy they have been able to obtain huge influence in the Arabic world and are at the forefront of actively lobbying Islamism in both the Arab world and Islamic communities worldwide. It is known for example they have been political active in the Gulf-states, including efforts to take over political power during the elections. With their motto "Islam is the solution" they have been able to attract the tacit support of a large part of the Muslim world, and position themselves as the revivers of Islam (Al- Sahwa al-Islamiyya), promoting political Islam as the way to solve global economic and social issues.

As part of their success one should not overlook their extensive grass-root and social efforts in areas such as education, healthcare, social and community development.

It is this factor that largely explains their popularity during elections, cumulating in a (democratic-organized) election victory in Egypt short after the Arab spring that brought the MB officially to power in 2012 with Muslim Brotherhood senior member Mohammed Morsi directly elected as president.

But also in Tunisia, Morocco (through the PJD), Turkey (AKP) and several Arab countries in the Middle East, the MB has been able to win or try to win political power through the election process. In Europe a similar process is shaping place through the establishment of Islamic parties and the influencing of the member Islamic movements and mosques.

The Morsi presidency maybe gives the best account of the MB real agenda. After first denying interest in running for the presidency, the MB then officially praised the values of democracy and freedom to the press, but in front of closer audiences used a very different set of statements. And shortly after coming to power, President Morsi issued a Presidential decree giving himself powers, beyond the reach of any court or judge, effective circumventing democracy, to prepare a new constitution through an Islamist-dominated committee. When peaceful protesters gathered around the President palace, a MB-mob attracted the crowd violently <sup>10</sup>(which subsequently lead to Morsi losing support of the population and later being removed in a coup).

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<sup>10</sup> The New Yorker, Mohamed Morsi, Who Brought the Muslim Brotherhood to the Egyptian Presidency, June 2029

With this experience in mind, the MB uses different tactics, strategies and programs depending on the country in which it operates. In Tunisia, the Ennahda (Renaissance) party was inspired by the Muslim Brotherhood and has participated in the democratic process.

Today it has become part of the ruling coalition after willing to compromise officially on some of its more dogmatic objectives and instead accept Tunisia's secular democratic values and protecting civil peace (and thus avoiding Egyptian style violence). However this strategy is not without criticism from its grass-root on the one hand, and accusations of double speak on the other.

In Morocco, the MB is political represented by the PJD (Justice and Development Party) who is also part of and even leads the democratic elected coalition. Through an Islamist conservative party it officially disavows violence and terrorism and seeks to defend Morocco's Islamic identify through legislative means. The party also supports the Moroccan monarchy where the King, currently Mohammed VI, is also constitutional the leader of all believers (Amir al- Mu'minin).

In Turkey, the MB ideology can be found back in the AKP (Justice and Development Party) of President Erdogan. Though officially a secular party, and initially positioning itself to be pro-Western, pro-liberal market-economy and pro-Europe, it is after more than 15 years in power now clear how an Islamistic ideology shapes much of its policies, even bringing allegations that Turkish secular constitutional principles are gradually undermined.

The pattern that emerges is that despite its official narrative of non-violence and support democracy, the MB-movement is still predominantly inspired by the ideas of Egyptian ideologist Sayyid Qutb, an ideology that is in conflict with European secular and democratic value and the universal declaration of human right. Ideas moreover that has been frequently the source of inspiration of legitimacy for extremism and violence.

## KEY IDEOLOGICAL CONCEPTS OF THE BROTHERHOOD

**The short explanation of three ideological concepts is able to provide some better insight into their totalitarian character, deeper motives and objectives:**

- The Pledge of Oath (Bay'a) to the Muslim Brotherhood
- The Pagan or Jahiliyya -concept
- The Tamkin principle

To start, each Brotherhood member must pledge an oath to the MB, using following words: "Before Allah the Omnipotent, I commit myself to rigorously observe the dispositions and the precepts of Islam and to conduct jihad to defend its cause. Before Him I commit myself to respect the conditions of my faithfulness to the Muslim Brotherhood and discharge my duties regarding our confraternity. Before Him I commit myself to obey his directors in times of prosperity and in times of difficulty, to the limits of my strength, to the extent that the orders given to me do not require me to commit a sin. I swear this oath of loyalty, to which Allah is a witness."

It is obvious that a culture of absolute obedience and loyalty of the members to the MB leadership, in particularly to the organization's 'Guidance Bureau' and the leader of their local representative body, diverges widely from Western democratic values. Through an internal code of conduct and law the Guidance Bureau exerts control over the whole structure of the MB, its affiliated and associated organizations and its members. Disobedience or disloyalty can be sanctioned through fines, demotion, suspension or even being expelled of the organization.

Its founder Hassan Al-Banna had set-up a system ensuring loyalty and obedience through a process of targeted recruitment and elaborate indoctrination based on a long-term strategy, so members would eventually execute orders without questions or hesitations. Regular 'training' or 'educational' gatherings, referred to as 'battalion meetings', were held in strict confidence to anchor this culture in all ranks of the Muslim Brotherhood.

During its frequent use is made of repetitive slogans such as "Allah is our final goal, the Messenger is our example and guide, the Quran is our constitution, jihad is our life, dying on Allah's path is our highest hope!" without any deeper context or understanding.

Furthermore, the MB's London-based weekly bulletin, "Risalat al- Ikhwan" has following motto printed on the top of its cover: "Jihad is our path; martyrdom is our pursuit."

And in the official Muslim Brotherhood website following ideology can be found: "We want a Muslim individual, a Muslim home, a Muslim people, an Islamic government and state that will lead the Islamic countries and bring into the fold the Islamic diaspora and the countries deprived of Islam and the standard of the Islam.

Jihad and the call [da'wah] to Allah. [Then the] world will gladly accept the precepts of Islam. The problems of conquering the world will only end when the banner of Islam flies and jihad is declared."

All of the above points to the MB's totalitarian ideology, an absolute conception of how life and society should be organized and what is right and wrong, without openness for change or outside influences and in fierce opposition of anyone or anything not subscribing to it, and with its leaders as the vanguards and protectors of it. It is therefore by nature revolutionary, oppressing and incompatible with open societies and progress.

The second ideological concept is based on Sayyid Qutb's interpretation of and opposition to "Jahiliyya". Jahiliyya, meaning the age of ignorance, refers in Islam to the lawlessness, barbarism and paganism that characterised Arabic culture and society prior to the arrival of Islamic teachings.

However in Qutb's book 'Milestones' (central to the thinking of the Egyptian Islamic movement between 1967 and 1981 and still very influential today on MB and other radical groups and individuals) Jahiliyya became the core concept of the Islamistic dualistic world-view: either the world would be Islamic or it would be Jahiliyya; and those that do not choose Islam were automatically considered "Kafirs", unbelievers who needed either to be 'enlightened' with the Islamic doctrine or conquered/submitted to an Islamic governance system.

As such the Muslims have to engage in 'Jihad', struggle and fight against the ignorance and darkness of Jahiliyya. And this not only against non-Muslims but equally to Muslims who have deviated from their politicised version of Islam, being those who did not fully embrace and submit to Islamic Shariah law and engage in Jihad themselves.

This fight will only end with the creation of a pan-Islamic caliphate with absolute obedience to the Shariah for both Muslims and non-Muslims because only with the sovereignty of God's rule of society will it be free of Jahiliyya. This is an imperialistic view on the world, ironically but not coincidental, exactly that which the MB objected to and rallied against when founded. How often does one not become exactly what one resist, and does a revolution brings more of the same?

Building on Qutb's concept of Jahiliyya and Jihad, the MB expanded these objectives beyond national borders as fight against certain oppressive, corrupt or ignorant regimes, towards a global cause without geographic boundaries based on a perversion of the concept of ummah. The ummah original means an organized community consisting of citizens (umma).

In al-sahifah, often referred to as the Constitution of Medina during the time of the Prophet, the ummah included both Muslims and non-Muslims (Christians, Jews, other religions and pagans). The declaration aimed to unite the different tribes in Medina which each tribe responsible for the general conduct of its members

according to their customs and traditions, while the ummah as a whole must act together to enforce social order, security and confront enemies in the times of war and peace. For the MB and Islamists, however, the ummah became a virtual community of Muslims consisting of ideological citizens (umma) that unites virtually (in cyberspace) in their struggle against Jahiliyya, giving them a self-identity, sense of belonging and purpose. With it also binary logic was instilled between them and others, with them being the believers, victims and the righteous; and they the ignorant, oppressors and corrupt ones. Their logic also prohibits to care or love, and instead to hate in the name of faith.

It is interesting to note though that other influential Islamic thinkers such as ‘Abal-Raḥmān al-Kawākibī’ (1854-1902) even believe in the moral superiority of Arabs over non-Arabs and with it that Islam can only flourish if it is ruled from Mecca by an Arab Caliph (actually not even an Arab but an Arab from the original tribe of Mohammed), showing clearly racist tendencies still present till today. So apart from totalitarianism this ideology is racist, exclusive and divisive.

The third ideological concept used is Tamkin. In the Quran the term is used to depict the mutual relationship and responsibility between ‘lordship’ and ‘servant-hood’, e.g. between God and mankind, but also between the governance on earth in the capacity of vicegerent/steward from God.

This relationship applies to that between a person and his/her body, between husband and wife, parents and children, teacher and student, all the way up to that between political (and other forms of) leadership and their constituencies, and involves the idea that for good governance and harmony both sides have their own set of interlocking responsibilities. Thus the leader must serve its constituencies based on righteousness and truth and the constituencies have a responsibility to accept authority.

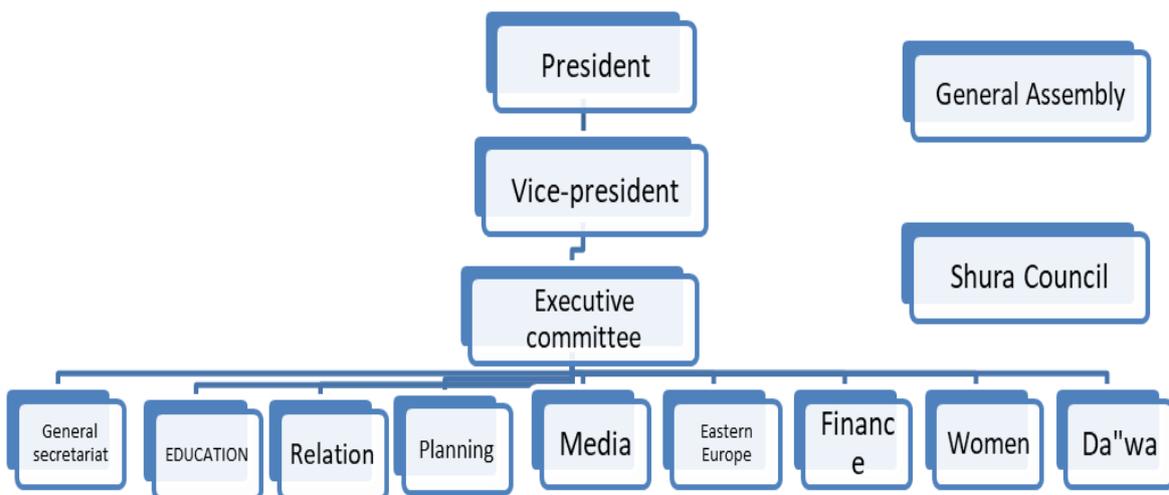
MB revised the Tamkin-concept as meaning the superiority of their form of leadership over that of anyone else based on the superiority of their religion, and therefore the obligation to establish a relationship of ‘lordship’ and ‘servant-hood’ between them and the rest of the world.

The corresponding strategy is to ‘infiltrate’ society to covertly take up positions of power and responsibility in society, i.e. without revealing their deeper motives, and then to use these positions to subvert the state once the power base is strong enough with as final goal to establish the caliphate.

As part of Tamkin, MB is involved in building mosques, buying properties, building private school and even businesses. Infiltration is further done through three means: Al Ihtiwa, which is using the resources of the state to spread their teaching, ideology and organization (for example as government-paid school teachers or subsidized non-profit organizations); At-Ta°Yoech, taking up positions of influence within the state; and At Tahyid, to avoid scrutiny or actions taking against the MB.

The same as with Bay'a and Jahaliyya, Tamkin's goal, as understood by the MB, is to dominate in the area of Europe in order to annex it into an Islamic State.

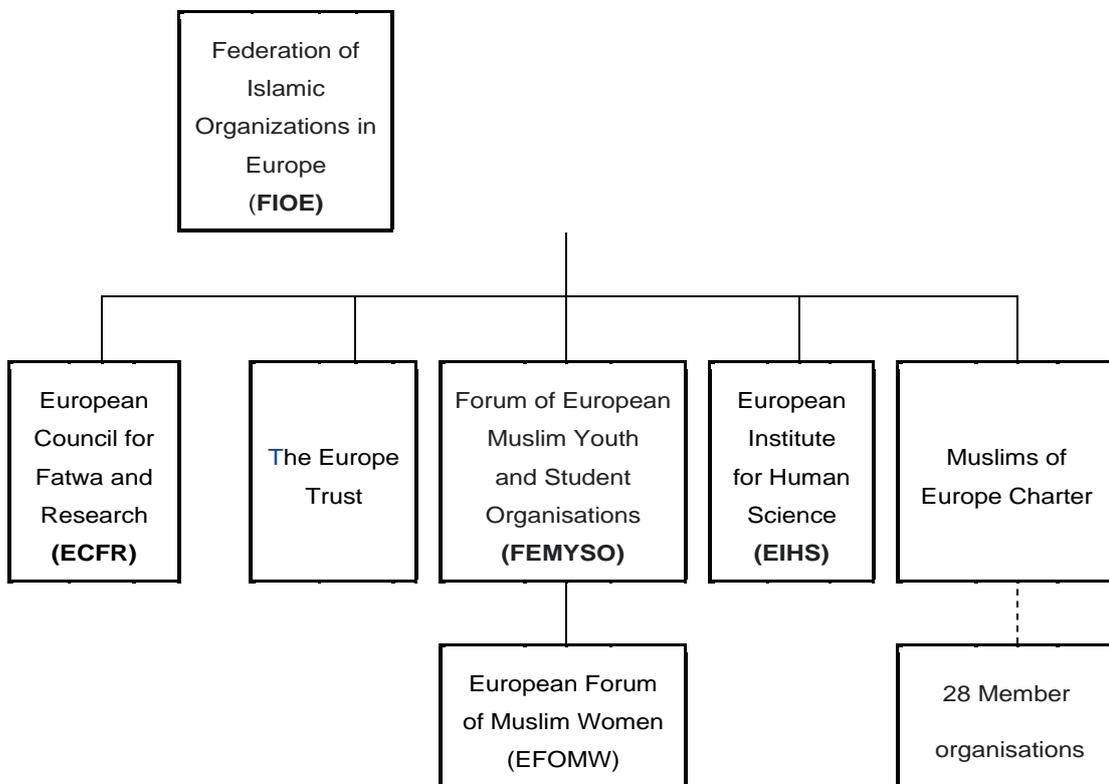
### FIOE AS THE UMBRELLA ORGANIZATION OF THE MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD IN EUROPE



The FIOE structure, as overviewed in picture above <sup>11</sup>, exists of hundreds of independent networks and associated structures and member organizations. Through this structure the MB are able to control huge influence through a relative small organization that is largely decentralized, agile and adaptable and therefore also difficult to dismantle.

<sup>11</sup> Merley Steven, The federation of Islamic organizations in Europe, Nefa foundation, 2008

Members are mostly non-profit organizations, mosques, schools and educational institutions, cultural and social organizations, Islamic centra and sport clubs. Others are specialised entities working around specific objectives such as the Federation of Islamic Organizations in Europe (FIOE); the European Institute for Human Sciences (EIHS), partly funded by the Qatar Foundation; the European Assembly of Imams and Spiritual Guides; the European Muslim Youth and Student Organisations (FEMYSO) and the European Council for Fatwa and Research (ECFR) and the Europe Trust – with purpose to develop a portfolio of assets intended to fund social and economic projects for communities in Europe <sup>12</sup>.



Studying the missions and activities of each of those organizations provides a better understanding of the MB’s extensive reach and influence from a multiple of angels.

Through those organizations the MB follows a strategy of gaining support from and influence over larger and larger Muslim communities. First by gradually creating a monopoly on Islamic education, books and other educational resources; mosques;

<sup>12</sup> Image Wikipedia

humanitarian institutions; and media targeted towards Muslims. And subsequently moving the discourse from participation in activities toward political awareness; from a religious towards an ideological discourse; and from there towards dominance.

## THE MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD IN BELGIUM

**In Belgium the MB consists of six major lines or circles :**

1. The Egyptian line, through the Ligue des Musulmans de Belgique (LMB)
2. The Syrian line, through the Tallaie Network (translated as Avant-Garde) that also a.o. operates from one of the biggest mosque in Belgium, Al Khalil Mosque
3. The Tunisian line, through the Ennahda party
4. The Turkish line, through both the AKP and Diyanet
5. The Moroccan line through the PJP and ADL Wel Ishaan
6. The Kuwaiti line through the Kuwaiti MB

The LMB for example mentions its membership of the FIOE in its articles-of-incorporation and includes a provision that in case of dissolving the organizations its assets will be transferred to the Europe Trust. Under the eleven signatures of the deed of incorporation in 2006, two also have mandates in other organizations linked to the MB structure in Belgium.

The Educational and Islamic Cultural Complex of Verviers (CECIV) was founded in 2004 out of the Intercultural Islamic League of Belgium (LIIB) one of the member organizations of the FIOE in 2001-2002. The LIIB has been actively involved in MB activities such as the sponsoring and organizing (in Belgium) conferences around lectures of senior MB members such as Tariq and Hani Ramadan and other FIOE affiliated organisations; joint-activities with FEMYSO; and the co-signing of a petition with 24 other FIOE member organisations..

## CONCLUSION

Starting from a local movement against colonial powers in Egypt, the MB has developed in one of the largest and most global Islamic movements with extensive reach and operations and increasingly active in Europe. It's financial centre has shifted increasingly to Istanbul, the Balkan, the UK and Ireland, but for mobilisation and logistic the hub is in Brussels.

Their ideology, as influenced by Sayyid Qutb, initially emerged as an Islamic alternative against the raise of new ideologies after the second world war such as socialism, communism, capitalism and liberalism each to be considered incompatible with Islam. Through this ideology Muslims would again establish a self-identity and self-worth, a shared ideal and purpose that would allow them to stand up against them being increasingly oppressed and corrupted by other ideologies. Gradually this goal expanded both geographically and in mission, to one of restoring the caliphate beyond its previous borders.

In Europe the current focus is on recruiting and training members that have the potential to be further 'developed' and co-opted as 4th level membership, and further developing a local operational structure. Worrying is that this process shows many similarities with the strategies and indoctrination used by Jihadist movements at the end for the nineties thereby using Europe as the epicentre for logistics and media operations and their preparation for the next phase of their plan.

According to estimations the MB has spent already over 260 million Euro in Europe on projects and operations.

## About the BIC

The BIC is an independent, non-profit, think-and-do tank based in the capital of Europe that is committed to developing solutions to address the cyclical drivers of insecurity, economic fragility, and conflict the Middle East and North Africa. Our goal is to bring added value to the highest levels of political discourse by bringing systemic issues to the forefront of the conversation.

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