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RELATIONS GERMANY – MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD

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***Abstract:** The article briefly examines the relationship between Germany and the Muslim Brotherhood (MB), including the period of the Third Reich. A brief overview is given of the spread of the Islamic religion in the European country and the role of the American administration in post-war Germany. It deals with various institutions, structures and, above all, the influence of the MB in the numerous German Islamic community. An analysis is made of the attitude of the main political parties towards the Islamists and an answer is sought to the question of why Germany does not want to declare the Islamist movement a terrorist organization – having in mind that it has branches in more than 70 countries.*

***Keywords:** Germany, Muslim Brothers, Terrorism, Islamism*

INTRODUCTION

Germany's ties with the Islamic world date back to the Third Reich. The Nazis created a special structural unit to work with Muslims in the occupied Soviet territories. Particular attention was paid to the Islamic population in Eastern Europe, mainly on the Balkans, the Caucasus, Crimea and other regions, in order to undermine the Soviet power and build local alliances. This included the strategic use of propaganda, recruiting soldiers for the Wehrmacht and the Waffen-SS, and even rebuilding religious institutions such as mosques and madrasahs that had been destroyed by the Soviet Union. Many of the Islamic communities were promised recognition as independent states after the USSR was defeated. A key role of the Nazi propaganda was played by Sturmbannführer Johann von Leers (1902-1965), who later converted to Islam and took the name Omar Amin. After World War II, the Nazi in question went to Egypt and became Gamal Abdel Nasser' advisor.

EXPOSITION

After the victory of the Allies in World War II, some of the pro-Nazi Islamic clerics followed the retreat of the fascists and settled in post-war Germany. These were mainly muftis from Crimea and Chechnya. The CIA, which took control of the affairs of the aforementioned Nazi ministry, operated within the framework of the Islamic community in the occupied territories, recruiting former Nazi officers who were involved in this activity. The intelligence agency also got its hands on the volumes of archives relating to Muslim activists with whom the fascists worked. Islamic clerics continued their activities on German territory, within the former Federal Republic.

The facilitation of the penetration of political Islam into Europe, and in particular into Germany, was linked to the ambitions of the United States to effectively oppose the USSR during the Cold War. According to secret documents revealed by the CIA, the planning of infiltrating Hassan al-Banna's organization in Europe dates back to the time of the administration of American President Dwight Eisenhower. In 1953, he met with the son-in-law of the founder of the MB, Said Ramadan, and the leader of the Syrian branch of the MB, Issam al-Attar. In the documents deposited in the Presidential Library in Washington, the man who married to al-Banna's younger daughter is described as "foreign minister of the Muslim Brotherhood." The relationship between the MB and the CIA facilitated the formation of that octopus of structures that would later be called the Brotherhood's "international organization." The documents

mentioned, some of which are cited in Robert Dreyfus's book "The Devil's Game," reveal how America helped the Islamists to expand into China, Europe, and other places around the world too, to recruit new members and to provide funding with the aim to oppose the Soviet Union at the time.

The documents also speak of the advice of the famous orientalist Bernard Lewis, who recommended that the USA "open up" to the MB in order to fragment the Middle East along ethno-confessional lines. Thus, Washington, represented by the Dulles brothers (one is Secretary of State John Foster, and the other is Alan Foster - Director of the CIA) is preparing for long-term cooperation with the Islamists. A forum at Princeton University, attended by Said Ramadan, along with members of the MB, proves such intentions.

The MB has been present in Germany since the early 1950s. In 1954, active members of the organization such as al-Mahjari and Gamal Nasser went there to study. They oriented their efforts to the city of Munich. Thus, at the end of 1958, a group of 86 men looked for a meeting hall in Munich, southern Germany. There, the pastor of St. Paul's Church allowed them to use one of the church halls to hold the first MB meeting in Germany and to discuss starting construction of a mosque. In fact, the records show that this act marked the beginning of the official presence of the Egyptian Islamist organization in Munich and throughout the country. Two years later, in 1960, the initiative group was renamed the "Mosque Building Committee." Its first leader was Said Ramadan during the period 1958-1968, although the religious temple itself in the capital of Bavaria opened the door only in 1973. This is the core, which was initially called the "Islamic Group in Bavaria", later transformed into the "Islamic Community of Germany" (ICG), and in 2018 changed its name to the "Organization of the Islamic Community in Germany" (OICG). The Islamists' desire is to distance themselves from their publicly known ties to the MB, due to the negative connotation that the name of the group carried. However, this entity, registered in Germany, is, de facto, the current branch of the MB's international network in the country.

After Munich and until the end of the 1960s, Islamists quickly created their own groups in Frankfurt, Bonn, Berlin, Württemberg and Stuttgart. All of these Islamic centres were connected to the IOG. Unique centres were formed that quickly sheltered radicals involved in outright terrorist attacks. For example, one of the activists of the Munich mosque and its cultural institute, Mahmoud Abu Halima, was involved in the 1993 attack on the World Trade Centre in New York. The former president of the IOG, Ghaleb Himat, an active supporter of Al-Qaeda and Osama bin Laden, was also associated with its activities. During the period 1983-1987, the 7th Supreme Leader of the MB, Mahdi Akif, was appointed as the general director of the Islamic Centre in Munich, which shows the importance of the position he held for the growth in the hierarchy of the organization of Egyptian Islamists. In his memoirs, he recounts in detail the Islamists' confrontation with the government, with the issue of whether the school curriculum should be secular or religious. Currently, the Munich Islamic Centre continues to be one of the important headquarters of the MB in Germany, although the official "command post" of the Islamists in the Federal Republic has been moved to the city of Cologne. Together with the Islamic Centre in Aachen, the Taiba Mosque in Berlin and the Abu Bakr Center in Cologne, they form the so-called second command level in the network of the German branch of the MB.

Over time, the BMN has expanded into numerous organizations, mosques, and cultural centres that have relative autonomy. Due to constant pressure from the government, some of them have tried to escape from the parent organization, with dubious ultimate success. However, a parallel entity has emerged – the Central Council of Muslims (CCM), which includes over 30 associations, charitable foundations, religious temples, etc. The Turkish organization ATIBP, which is associated with the far-right "Grey Wolves," has also joined the ranks of the CCM.

Over time, German authorities have become increasingly aware of the danger posed by the Islamist organization. In a 2018 press release, the former director of the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution (German counterintelligence) in the state of North Rhine-

Westphalia, Burkhard Freyer, stated that the OIOG and its network of interconnected organizations seek to establish a religious regime in Germany. The anti-terrorist explains: "The growing influence of the Muslim Brotherhood poses a far greater threat to German democracy than the radical Salafist circles that support terrorist groups like ISIS and Al Qaeda. According to a 2023 report by the German counterintelligence agency - the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution, the number of active members of the radical organization MB in Germany increased significantly in the period 2021-2023, reaching 1 450 members in 2021 compared to 1 040 in 2018. In January 2022, the CSM attempted to distinguish itself from the formation of Egyptian radical fundamentalists and deny its subordination to the MB. Its leadership expelled some of its members in order to "freshen up" its public image. However, the desired effect was not achieved, as the organization continues to include entities such as the Islamic Council of Aachen, which is undoubtedly part of the MB network.

One of the biggest problems not only for the German state, but also for other European governments is the skilfully created MB money laundering network. Very often, illegal deals and transactions, usually in real estate, were associated with the name of Ibrahim al-Ziyat. The latter is one of the leaders of the international network of Islamists and often called the "Minister of Finance of the MB". Until September 18, 2022, his name was constantly in local and European scandals related to the financing of the radical organization throughout Europe. Probably, the publicly compromised deal in 2021 with the purchase of a tempting property in Berlin by the Europe Trust holding company, associated with the MB, with the aim of turning it into a headquarters housing numerous Islamic associations, was the culmination of al-Ziyat's corrupt behaviour. All this forced the leadership of the CSM to remove him and terminate all relations with him.

German counterintelligence classifies the MB as an indirect threat to the democratic system. The Islamists in question are not seen as a terrorist organization, but rather as "a movement working quietly and systematically to spread an ideology that contradicts the free democratic order". There is currently a political debate about banning the activities of the "Muslim Brotherhood", especially in light of the prohibition law applied against extremist Salafist groups. Several reasons can be cited as an obstacle to including the MB on the list of terrorist entities, namely:

1. German legal standards. In the Federal Republic, a religious or social organization can only be banned if, according to the Associations Act, it can be proven that it poses a direct threat to freedom and democracy in the country. As already noted, in contrast of Salafist jihadist or terrorist groups that rely on violence, the MB in Germany uses an extremely "subtle" and "veiled" narrative that differs from directly raising slogans for the establishment of a caliphate or the implementation of Sharia.

2. There is no organization in the country whose name directly mentions the name "Muslim Brotherhood". Legal registration is designed very flexibly so that each of the dozens of legal entities is considered separately by the authorities and the court. Each individual entity of the local organization refrains from committing acts of violence.

3. The authorities are trying to suggest that the actions against these organizations are not aimed at Islam and Muslims, but in principle at representatives of public opinion. Everything is aimed at the growing rhetoric of the far right and in particular - the political party Alternative for Germany. The prevailing opinion is that placing the MB on the list of terrorist organizations could be political support for such populist formations. Moreover, it is considered that the ban on this organization, supported by numerous activists, could further radicalize them, push them into illegality, which is less desirable than being constantly monitored. The current status of the MB is perceived as the lesser evil for German security.

4. Some MB-related entities receive direct or indirect support from countries allied to Germany, such as the United States, Qatar and some other countries. There may be diplomatic

concerns that a complete ban on the MB could complicate Germany's relations with some of these countries, especially on issues such as energy, migration and mediation of crises in the Middle East. The logic of the spread and control of Islamic communities and faiths in Germany after World War II and the role of the US in the processes suggest that in this case Berlin would follow Washington's example.

5. The ban on MB in Germany will definitely worsen relations between Berlin and Ankara. The reason is the huge Turkish community in the country and the influence of the Turkish Directorate of Religious Affairs, Diyanet, on a significant part of the mosques and the active imams. As already noted, the ruling Justice and Development Party in Turkey is perceived as a political organization professing an ideology very close to that of MB. In 2017, the Turkish community in the country represents the largest minority in the country and is estimated at between 3 – 3.5 million. At the same time, German citizens of Turkish origin are about 1.5 million.

CONCLUSION

Until April 2025, state-level action against the MB consisted of five non-binding draft declarations submitted by the political parties Christian Democratic Union and Alternative for Germany, a draft law submitted by the government, and 12 parliamentary questions on political Islam. The federal government has responded five times, focusing on different aspects of Islamism. All of this portends a difficult period for the MB in Germany, with no imminent ban of the Islamist organization in this key European country.

There is no immediate prospect of a ban on the MB in Germany. It is unlikely that the pressure to take such action will come from Israel, as the Jewish state did with Hezbollah. In Germany and in Europe, the MB is perceived as unacceptable, especially in the context that the terrorist movement Hamas is the Palestinian branch of the MB. In Berlin and Tel Aviv, a clear distinction is made between Iran and Hezbollah on the one hand and Hamas and the MB on the other.

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