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**CHRC Briefing:
The Muslim Brotherhood in Europe**

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When I returned to Europe five years ago, the biggest story was simple: economics.

In a world of fierce economic competition, Europe was losing ground. Jobs were disappearing but new corporate titans weren't springing up to create wealth. Asia's rise threatened to eclipse Europe, turning it into a cuddly and comfy declining power.

Since then, however, it's clear that Europe has a bigger, more intractable problem: its alienated immigrants. To some degree the economic problems are simple. Making labor markets more flexible, opening up venture capital markets and the like--these are technical issues that can be solved with a bit of political will. But getting immigration "right" is a lot trickier. Fixing it gets to the heart of what European societies are and how they are organized. It also means tackling one of the most potent ideologies of the past century, namely "political Islam," the dangerous brew of religion and politics, a blend of ideas as intoxicating and fatal as the grand ideas of the 20th century.

Why Islam? First, it's crucial to recognize that Europe needs immigration. Declining birth rates make an infusion of new talent necessary. And by force of geography--Europe's position to the Muslim world is roughly equivalent to the U.S.'s position to Latin American--many if not most of those immigrants will be Muslim.

These immigrants have been coming to Europe for decades and the problems integrating them goes back decades. We could fruitfully spend a couple of hours looking at European governments' responsibility for the problems. Clearly governments have failed to enact policies that would spur integration. Religious and racial discrimination is rife and some European politicians have their head stuck so far in the sand that they deny that their societies are immigrant societies. Today, however, I am going to look at the other side of the coin: what is going on in Europe's immigrant communities that is contributing to the problem.

Clearly there is a problem. Over the past four and a half years, from the 9/11 attacks to Madrid and London, terrorist attacks have sprung in part from these

communities. This isn't to tar the entire community. It's vitally important that we realize that terrorists are a tiny minority. But the communities do play a role. I spent several years in China and can't resist quoting Chairman Mao, who once said that revolutionaries swim in the sea of mass support. So, too, terrorists, who inevitably draw on broader groups in society, or are inspired by them. This doesn't mean condemning an entire community and certainly not an estimable religion like Islam. But it means that we must look beyond the terrorist cell to understand the problem.

Over the past four or so years, I've traveled around Europe, especially Germany, France and the U.K. I spent time in mosques affiliated with the biggest, most powerful Muslim organizations in these countries. I was especially interested in groups that aspired to interact with the government or were already doing so.

Let me first state an important caveat. It is very important: most Muslims are not members of these groups. Islam is a decentralized religion and most, the overwhelming majority of Muslims are not organized at all.

So why focus on these politically active mosques? Because organizations matter. They help set the agenda. They liaise with government leaders and set the tone in their countries. They bring issues to the forefront and, positively or negatively, help or hinder the integration of Europe's Muslims.

So who are these organized Islamic groups? There are two kinds. One is less interesting. This is the so-called "embassy Islam"--mosques and groups controlled by embassies of their home countries. Many big Turkish mosques in Germany, for example, are run by a German branch of Diyanet, the Turkish government's religious affairs office. In Paris, a key mosque is run by the Algerian government and its chief mosque an Algerian civil servant. So in a sense, these mosques are political, but they tend to represent the state-controlled Islam of their home countries. They are an interesting phenomenon but they didn't interest me too much because, by and large, these mosques aren't too dynamic. They don't attract activists and they haven't been home to radicals. They tend to follow the same emasculated Islam that only radicalizes people in a negative way--because these mosques are so closely aligned with governments, they are often rejected by Muslims and so are more of an anti-inspiration.

Instead, what interested me more were the other group of political mosques. These mosques are not run by a country in the Muslim world. They are independent of any government. Yet they are united by a vision, that of political Islam. I refer to these as the Muslim Brotherhood mosques.

You might be familiar with the Muslim Brotherhood. It means different things to different people. Let me specify what I mean. The Muslim Brotherhood was formed in 1920s Egypt by Hasan al-Banna, a teacher who reacted against the

political chaos and colonialization of his country by advocating a turn to fundamentalist Islam. He promoted literacy and social justice, but also the idea that one religion and one religion only--Islam--could be the foundation of society. The group's most famous motto neatly sums this up: "The Koran is our constitution."

This group still exists in Egypt and other Arab countries. But over the decades it has morphed into something more potent than a mere party: it has become a dynamic ideology, as potent as communism, spreading across the Muslim world, linking people in a common vision from Jakarta to Islamabad, Kabul to Cairo, Munich to Chicago. This is what I mean by the Brotherhood: not the Cairo-based party, but the matrix of ideas.

I think it is important here to say more clearly why the Brotherhood is a problem. People inspired by the Brotherhood are well-dressed and well-educated. They speak our language, and by that I don't just mean English, French or German. I mean they understand our political system and can appeal to us on the basis of things we all believe in, such as religious freedom or human rights. They understand the need for integration, so plead for that as well. They also understand our desire for peaceful relations among religions, especially the Abrahamic religion of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, so many are active in inter-religious dialogue. In short, they seem like perfect Muslim leaders: smart, well-spoken, engaged.

But at heart, their message is antithetical to democracy. Although we understand the need for religion to be a part of public life, we also know that public life can't be dominated by one religion. Virtually all societies in the world have many religions and over time, with globalization and freedom of movement only increasing, societies will become even more multi-religious. One religion cannot monopolize or claim political power without causing social problems.

That's why this ideology is a gateway to violence. The Brotherhood has renounced violence and the majority of its adherents are not violent. But once you accept the fundamentally intolerant idea of one religion dominating society, you'll get people who want to exclude others. And you'll get people who are in a hurry--who want to "Islamicize" their society as quickly as possible. Some of these people will follow a violent path. It's no coincidence that members of al Qaeda have all read the classic authors of the Muslim Brotherhood movement, such as Sayyid Qutb. These authors lay the groundwork for violence through their vision of society. This is why if you imagine the Islamist movement as a tree, the Muslim Brotherhood is the trunk. From it stem groups like al Qaeda and Hamas.

The Brotherhood's links to violence are sometimes very obvious. For all the renunciations of violence, many Brotherhood members endorse violence in certain parts of the world, such as Israel and Iraq. A key Brotherhood cleric,

Youssef al-Qaradawi, has explicitly condoned suicide bombings in those countries as a legitimate practice. This shows that the Brotherhood's renunciation of violence is tactical. Where it looks bad--like in the West--it's renounced. Where they think they can get away with it, such as in the Mideast, they endorse it.

There is another, more subtle problem in the Muslim Brotherhood's message. That is its harping on victimization. Brotherhood political leaders constantly tell Muslims that the world is out to get them. This leads to a sense of "us versus them," a bunker mentality that fosters alienation from the West. I felt this when visiting the ghettos outside Paris last year. There, a large number of young people identified themselves with Palestinians--as if their situation in a democracy was analogous to Gaza or the West Bank.

I think it is fair to say that this ideology has infused organized Islam in Europe. Be it France, Germany or the UK, Muslim brotherhood-inspired groups are the most dynamic and play key roles in liaising with the state or setting the ideological agenda.

This is not an accident. Islamists are by definition well-organized. They are educated and see their mission in life the spread of their ideology. They have worked long and hard to spread their ideology across Europe, which they see as Islam's next frontier.

This can be seen in the Brotherhood's first foothold in the West. In 1958, the German government decided to help Muslims stranded in Munich build a mosque. The authorities set up a mosque construction commission and put in charge of it an Uzbek who had fled the Soviet Union. He, like tens of thousands of others in the aftermath of WWII, ended up in Munich--Munich being the largest city in the US sector of occupied Germany and a beacon for displaced persons after the war.

At the same time, however, members of the Muslim Brotherhood were congregating in Europe after their organization had been banned in Egypt. They were led by the son-in-law of the founder of the Muslim brotherhood. This man, Said Ramadan, first got his PhD from Cologne university and then made his way to Geneva. When plans for the Munich mosque were being discussed, members of the Muslim Brotherhood in Munich called up Ramadan and told him about the new mosque.

Ramadan flew down to Munich and made a splashy entry: When the first meeting of the mosque construction commission was held on Dec. 26, 1958, the Muslims present donated 750 Deutschmarks (about \$3750 at exchange rates then). Ramadan plunked down 1000 marks, or about 5,000 dollars, which at that time was a huge amount.

Within five years, Ramadan and his allies had tossed out the western-oriented Muslims on the commission, essentially hijacking the mosque for their purposes. For two decades, the Islamisches Zentrum Muenchen became the premier mosque in the Brotherhood's franchise. For example, the current *murshid*, or supreme guide of the Brotherhood, Mahdy Akef, was head of the center in the 1980s.

From the 1960s onward, the brotherhood began to spread methodically across Europe. Said Ramadan became sidelined by other leaders of the group, but the organization's ideology came to dominate three key groups: the Union of Islamic Organizations in France (UOIF), the Muslim Association of Britain (MAB) in London and the Islamic Community of Germany (IGD) in Germany, which is the legal successor to the Munich center that Mr. Ramadan founded.

Again, these leaders are *not* controlled by the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. This is not what I mean by the Muslim Brotherhood. Instead, and much more potently, they share a similar vision of political Islam and have worked diligently to achieve it. They are part of a matrix of ideas and personalities that are the most dynamic and influential movement in Europe today.

Indeed, these groups are really the only pan-European Muslim movement. Their leaders meet at conferences, serve on each other's boards and are united under an umbrella group called the Federation of Islamic Organizations in Europe, or FIOE. It is headquartered in a small village in northern England. Founded in 1989, FIOE has set up a series of key institutions that push the Muslim Brotherhood worldview.

In 1992 it set up the Institute for the Study of Human Sciences, best known by its French acronym, IESH. It has campuses in Burgundy, Paris and Wales. The Wales campus recently lost its affiliation with a local public university after authorities became concerned about the curriculum, which visitors have described as heavily influenced by the Saudi fundamentalist ideology of Wahhabism. Each year, the three schools graduate several dozen imams and educate hundreds of Muslims.

In 1995, FIOE set up the European Trust in order to finance its activities. A year later it started the European Council for Fatwa and Research, which is run by the famous cleric, Youssef al-Qaradawi, whom I mentioned earlier as a proponent of suicide bombing.

The fatwa council is a really interesting group. It is made up of entirely of men, most of whom live not in the Arab world. But their goal is to tell European Muslims how to behave. Their advice--fatwas--are sometimes helpful. One query they received was when evening prayers should take place in summertime Scandinavia, where the sun doesn't set. It's a legitimate question and they came up with a thoughtful answer. But some of the answers are problematic, such as

one that implies that marriage law doesn't apply to European Muslims and another that says it is every Muslims' duty to help the Palestinians recover their homeland. Underlying their advice is that European countries' laws are secondary to Islamic law.

Another key assumption is anti-Semitism. I attended one fatwa council meeting, for example, and listened to a speech where one of the council members cited, without sarcasm or irony, the Protocols of the Elders of Zion, a notorious anti-Semitic work, as a legitimate reference work. Not only does this council make a mockery of Islam's long and deep tradition of jurisprudence but it straightjackets Muslims into a worldview that is incompatible with their home countries.

As for FIOE, it's more than an umbrella group. It is the only pan-European Muslim lobbying group. Its members testify before the European parliament and it has talks with the Vatican. This makes FIOE an important lobby group, arguably the most important Muslim lobby group in Europe.

How is all this financed? Is it a natural outgrowth of European Islam, paid for by the hard-earned donations from Europe's Muslim migrants? Hardly. FIOE gets two thirds of its donations from the gulf region. The fatwa council is entirely funded from the Middle East.

So let me summarize: the Muslim Brotherhood controls some of the most dynamic, politically active Muslim groups in key European countries, such as Britain, France and Germany. It has an umbrella group that regularly lobbies major international institutions like the EU and the Vatican. It has schools to train imams. It has a funding mechanism in the guise of a UK-registered charity. And it has a fatwa council to enforce ideological conformity. And all of this is run by a cadre of about 20 officials in several European countries, who sit on each other's boards, speak at each others rallies and write for each others' publications.

Does anyone doubt that this is part of a plan?

You don't have to remember all these groups and acronyms. I realize it's confusing the first time around. The key is that this isn't a natural outgrowth of European Islam. This isn't civil society taking root and sending out shoots. Instead, its like a plant that has been given a super dose of fertilizer or growth steroids. And like such a plant, its fruit is unsafe for human consumption.

Some people are going to say at this point, is this all really a problem? It sounds sort of too complicated and too low-grade. It's not al Qaeda, after all. To that I'd say two things: first, that al Qaeda was the best thing that happened to these groups. Nowadays, our bar is so low that if groups aren't al Qaeda, we're happy. If they're not overtly supporting terrorism, we think they're okay. We don't stop to think where the terrorism comes from, where the fish swim.

Second, I'd explain this by hazarding a comparison here in the U.S. Imagine if African Americans did not have reputable non-governmental representatives like the NAACP. Imagine if there had been no Martin Luther King Jr. Imagine if the main--almost the only--organized voice in the African American community were the Nation of Islam. We would recognize that while this group does some positive things, such as getting them off the streets and into a straight life, its ideology has some nasty undertones and its leaders seem to keep making "mistakes"--uttering racist comments that seem to belie intolerance. And now imagine that the nation of Islam wasn't an indigenous movement but part of a transnational network. And that this overseas movement had links to terrorism. And that here in the U.S., we'd had several terrorist attacks that weren't the work of outsiders but were from young men loosely affiliated with the Nation of Islam. I think this would be pretty worrying. This is exactly what Europe faces right now.

So at this point let me return to the start of this talk. I mentioned it calls into question how European societies are organized. While religious freedom is crucial to any free society, Europe's attitude toward its migrants has bordered on neglect.

Many public officials, for example, don't make an effort to find out the background of the people they meet. In Brussels, a member of the European Parliament told me that FIOE seemed quite moderate but that in her country, the UK, there was this awful group called the Muslim Association of Britain. When I pointed out that this group was a founding member of FIOE, she was astonished. To me, this smacks of neglect--if you're going to deal with someone, take the five minutes to figure out they are. Google them at least.

Sometimes it goes further. When I was in France last year writing a profile of a troubled banlieue--one of the ones that later in the year would explode in violence--I asked an official why his main "dialogue partner" was a group inspired by the Muslim Brotherhood. He said he knew the French government was dealing with the Brotherhood, but only Islamists were educated. They knew the rules of the game. "I never said they were for integration," he told me. "but they have the level to talk to me."

In essence, bureaucracies need other organized groups to talk to. The vast mass of unorganized Muslims by definition can't interact with the state and thus don't become dialogue partners. So they don't set the agenda. Instead, what amounts to radical fringe groups do.

Sometimes, I'm not sure why Europe needs to deal with these groups. We are always told that states need to "dialogue" with Islam but is this really so? What if Europe just treated Muslims like any other religion. Sure, to some degree they have technical issues that need to be fixed. For example, health departments need standards for halal foods or to accommodate Muslims' special funerary needs. But it seems to me that most of these problems could be dealt with by

setting up a blue-ribbon panel, solving a few of these concrete issues and then letting Muslims be part of the normal political system. Most of the other issues we hear of--education, language training or jobs--are not specifically Muslim issues. They affect all immigrants. By dealing with migrants, Europe would defuse the issue and take away the Brotherhood's platform.

But this doesn't mean that these groups should be completely ignored. We can't neglect these groups. What is needed is more information and more debate. Germany has an interesting organization that is worth noting. It is a domestic intelligence agency called the Office for Protection of the Constitution (Verfassungsschutz). There are offices in each of the 16 German states and one at the federal level. Each year, each of these 17 branches put out an annual report on their activities. They list what groups they are monitoring and why. The list goes from communists to fascists with everything in between, including Islamists. These groups are not banned but they are simply listed as undemocratic. For example, if you distribute anti-Semitic literature or call for the caliphate to be restored, you're on the list.

It's not a perfect system but it's quite interesting. The problem with it is there's no clear way to get off the list. And some of the evidence they cite for putting a group on the list is debatable. But it sets the bar for democratic behavior and shines a light on undemocratic activity. I think this is something we all could learn from. It doesn't have to be done by the government but maybe an amalgamation of leading civil rights NGOs could set up an index of undemocratic behavior. Whatever the solution, it's going to require some creativity and vigilance on the part of governments and, most importantly, ordinary citizens.

Ian Johnson is on a year-long leave from The Wall Street Journal's Berlin bureau to write a book on radical Islam in Europe. Before arriving in Germany in 2001, he spent seven years in China, winning the 2001 Pulitzer Prize for International Reporting. The views here are his own and not those of the Journal.

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