MUSLIM LOYALTY AND IDENTITY IN EUROPE:
Discourse Analysis of ECFR Fatwas

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Abstract: This article aims to study the European Council for Fatwa and Research (ECFR)'s fatwas and legal statements concerning Muslims' loyalties to European states. the authoritative Sunni reformist scholarly institution arguments and theses in chronological order. Next, I will examine the resources and limitations of loyalty in the ECFR's fatwas in relation to the European securitization of loyalty. Specifically, emphasis will be placed on how, in the European setting, loyalty to secular states and Islam can coexist, complement each other, or conflict. This article uses a discourse analysis method to examine the ethical assumptions in these fatwas while also contextualizing them in the current debates on politics and ethics, drawing on sociology of religious norms. The study shows that the discourses of the European Council for Fatwa and Research advocate the ideas of multiple loyalties and the harmony and complementarity of political citizenship with religious loyalty to Islam. These findings imply the commitment of Sunni reformism to political loyalty as a moral basis of group identification, the self and the other, and the processes of forming alliances and the quest for social cohesion.

Keywords: Political Loyalty; Islamic law; The European Council for Fatwa and Research

Introduction

The European Council for Fatwa and Research (ECFR) is an independent consultative organization of Muslim jurists, and is based in Dublin, Ireland. Under the direction of Yûsuf al-Qardâwî (1926-2022), fifteen Muslim Sunni scholars created the ECFR in 1997 at the request of the Union of Islamic Organizations in Europe, which many consider to be closely related to the Muslim Brotherhood offshoots in Europe. Many founding members of the ECFR lived in the Middle East albeit they were and still are considered as figures of authority in Islamic law and ethics, in Europe and beyond. The ECFR aims to adapt Islamic jurisprudence to the European context, releasing collective and consensual rulings that respond to the demands of European Muslims in flexible ways.[1] The ECFR has become the most authoritative scholarly organization in the field of Muslim law and ethics in Europe, attracting the attention of scholars and the general Muslim public. It frequently issues fatwas at meetings held in different European cities once a year on average. The ECFR is composed of more than thirty-two Muslim jurists and assumes possibly the role o the primary religious source of advice for Muslims in Europe. In spite of its sometimes conservative nature, the ECFR continues to be influential among Muslim scholars of *fiqh* and committed to the European scene. [2]

Numerous scholars from the West and the Muslim world have conducted extensive research on the ECFR's fatwas. Thus, Karen-Lise Johansen Karman examined how the interpretation of Islamic law in the ECFR's work addresses the challenge of legal pluralism in Europe.[3] Alexandre Caeiro concentrated on the Islamic authority and minority *fiqh* initiatives of the ECFR.[4] Mohammed Ghaly emphasized the cross-border aspect of the ECFR's decisions on bioethics.[5] Lena Larsen investigated the transnational influences on the ECFR's legal discourse[6] as well as women's issues in its fatwas.[7] Adil Hussain Khan discussed how the ECFR shaped the perception of European Islam.[8] Uriya Shavit studied the ideology and practice of the ECFR as well as its effects on particular Muslim populations in Europe[9] while recently Chiara Anna Cascino examined the call to Islam in the activity of the ECFR.[10]

However, the political aspect of the ECFR fatwas has not been the focus of any of this significant research. In particular, with the exception of a few sections in the writings of March[11] and Shavit[12], the ECFR's legal statements on political loyalty and citizenship have been largely disregarded. Consequently, the purpose of this paper is to close the knowledge gap in the academic studies on the ECFR rulings. The ECFR is widely acknowledged as the most conspicuous, consistent, and cohesive body of Islamic law in Europe. However, its importance in political thought has not received enough attention, possibly because religious institutions are not expected to play such a role in secular European contexts. Yet, as political loyalty is an ethical issue as well as a political one, every Islamic institution is expected to hold a reasoned discourse on loyalty since Islamic law pertains to Islamic public ethics and therefore to politics as well. It is particularly

necessary to comprehend how the ECFR, a Sunni reformist institution, envisions political allegiance as a moral basis of group identification, the self and the other, and the processes of forming alliances and the quest for social cohesion.

Between 2006 and 2015, the ECFR published three rulings regarding Muslim loyalty to European states. In this study, I suggest examining the claims and arguments of these discourses. Next, I will discuss the potential and limits of the ECFR's discourse on loyalty in relation to the notion of multiple loyalties, liberal citizenship, and the securitization of political loyalty in Europe, as well as the possibility for compatibility and complementarity between loyalty to Islam and European states

Method

In terms of methodology, this article uses a discourse analysis method to determine the major thesis of a fatwa. I will also scrutinize the arguments presented in support of a particular thesis. While I examine the points at hand, I also put the arguments in the context of the ongoing debates about Islam and Muslim communities in Europe. Additionally, I study the possibilities and constraints of the ECFR's discourse on political loyalty from a standpoint of political philosophy and ethics, looking at concepts such as compatibilism, multiple loyalties, and liberal citizenship.

My approach is grounded in the critical discourse analysis and consists of distinguishing two levels in the analysis. On the one hand, I proceeded with the analysis of the ethical meaning of the discourse, from a presentation of the context, in relation to the social and political issues of this discourse and the debates that frame this discourse. On the other hand, I analyzed elements relating to the discursive performance, that is to say the rhetorical and argumentative elements developed (quotation of the Quran and Muslim authorities), the coherence of the text and the theses which are conveyed in the discourse. Thus, the challenge for us was twofold: to produce an effective approach and to maintain the balance between the exposition of the content, the contextualization, the analysis of the form and the types of arguments and to present the issues of these discourses. We were particularly guided in this critical discourse analysis by the approach of analysis of discourse as part of dispositive (context, debates, institutions) within which it entangles itself with politics and society.[13]

For us, approaching a discourse in its dispositive means that a fatwa makes reference to conflicting claims to knowledge (both Muslim and non-Muslim) and social power dynamics. Thus, a fatwa navigates Muslim standards within these specific knowledge and power dispositives.[14]

I will be analyzing three fatwas. I will begin with the fatwa 62 (2/16) issued by the ECFR in 2006 during its sixteenth session in Istanbul. I will approach this fatwa as a case of the compatibility thesis between loyalty to Islam and to European states. Then, as an illustration of the complementary thesis between religion and citizenship, I will analyse

the ECFR's legal statement written by one of its main jurists, Abdallâh b. Bayya (published by the ECFR in 2014). Finally, I will study the legal statement on the conflicts of loyalties of Muslims in Europe by a leading authority of the ECFR, Yûsuf al-Qardâwî, released in 2015. Following the analysis of these three legal discourses, I will discuss the resources and limits of the ECFR's discourse on loyalty, focusing in particular on the liberal citizenship and loyalty to non-Muslim states and the impact of the ECFR on Muslims in Europe.

Results and Discussion

The Compatibility thesis: Muslim loyalty in European countries

Let us start with the first fatwa about Muslims' loyalty to European states, which was issued by the ECFR in 2006 during its sixteenth session in Istanbul and published as resolution 62 (2/16). Here's how this fatwa unfolds:

Loyalty is a strong bond that links a person to a special, close, and intimate relationship, from which obligations, rights, and duties arise. This relationship has different aspects and multiple dimensions: loyalty may be to belief, or it may be to lineage, people, and homeland. It may be by covenant or contract. The Qur'an and Sunnah refer to all of these meanings. The highest of these loyalties is loyalty to the faith, which includes belief in its pillars, the practice of rituals, and commitment to virtuous morals. This loyalty does not contradict loyalty to the homeland, with which a person is bound by the contract of citizenship, so he should defend the territory of the homeland against any attack.[15]

This fatwa makes five claims about the political loyalty of Muslims to European states. It first introduces the idea of reconciling multiple loyalties; Muslims residing in Europe display several identity dimensions related to their religion, ethnicity, citizenship, and place of origin. As a matter of fact, everyone residing in Europe, outside of Muslim populations, possesses numerous identities. Being born into a family that is Turkish, Indonesian, or Moroccan and living in the Netherlands, for instance, may give rise to divergent religious, ethnic, and political allegiances within these families as well as distinct connections to the Dutch identity.

Second, Islamic ethics recognize the legitimacy of having multiple loyalties and identities, as they do not preclude nonreligious forms of loyalty. Hence, one cannot defend exclusive loyalty to Islam by citing Muslim scripture. This counter-discourse particularly challenges the Salafi ideology of exclusive loyalty to religion based on the principle of *al-walâ' wa-l-barâ'* (*loyalty and disavowal*)). Following 9/11 and the attacks on Afghanistan and Iraq in 2001 and 2003, respectively, the West designated Islam as a geopolitical enemy. This led to extremist reactions within Salafism, which used the doctrine of loyalty and disavowal to ban any political allegiance to the West.

Third, since loyalty is defined in this statement as a question of rights and obligations, it implicitly reminds Muslims of the obligations of trust they have to European

governments and also serves as a reminder to European states to care for Muslims' rights in Europe. Mutual loyalty, as a contract, denotes a commitment on the part of both parties to fulfill the acknowledged obligations and responsibilities.

Fourth, this fatwa states that the highest kind of allegiance is religious loyalty, which includes following moral precepts, engaging in ritual practice, and believing in its tenets. There is a hierarchy of loyalties in this sense, with allegiance to Islam taking precedence over all others. It is clear that this commitment is understood to mean adhering to Islam as a religion and ethics (though some may contend that Islam should be viewed as a political community as well). From the perspective of Sunni reformists, political commitment to secular nations does not imply abandonment of fidelity to Islam as a religion. It simply suggests that, beyond all other obligations, a Muslim's fundamental identity is derived from their loyalty to God (sincere faith) and Islamic principles. This must also be interpreted as a normative declaration by a religious organization, which may not always align with the more nuanced daily experiences of Muslims.

Fifth, this fatwa supports the notion of non-contradiction between allegiance to European states and Islam; it understands loyalty to one's country to mean that Muslims should respect their commitments as citizens, namely by protecting their country of citizenship unconditionally from all attacks (obviously including attacks initiated by Muslims). There could be a conflict between elements four and five in the case that a European state assaults a Muslim country, and in compatibilism fails to maintain the balance of loyalties.

The ECFR reiterated in 2007 in its fatwa 1/17 that "citizenship does not conflict with *walâ' shar'î* (Islamic loyalty), as the presence of a Muslim in a land other than Muslim lands does not require him or her to commit to any of the requirements of citizenship that contradict his religion, such as defending it if it is attacked".[16] The ECFR requires "Muslims to be at the forefront of those who defend their country from harm, and it is not permissible for Muslims to participate in any aggression carried out by their country against any other country, whether it is Islamic or not".[17]

Therefore, the main goal of the ECFR is to persuade Muslim populations who were targeted by the Salafi belief that Islamic loyalty and European citizenship are compatible. The compatibility thesis attempts to reassure its audience that being a citizen does not compromise one's Muslim faith. In keeping with Islamic ethics, it also highlights the moral responsibility of defending one's homeland from aggression (patriotism). All things considered, the discourse of compatibility is trying to reconcile political discourses of allegiance to citizenship with religious discourses of loyalty to Islam, while also legitimizing citizenship and Islamizing its prerequisites.

The Complementary thesis: Loyalty between religion and citizenship

In 2014, the ECFR published a legal judgment written by one of its main jurists, 'Abdallâh b. Bayya, in 2007, and which served as the organization's second statement on loyalty. Born in 1935, Bin Bayya is a Mauritanian Muslim scholar and politician who has had prominent roles in organizations pertaining to Islamic law and ethics in the Gulf States and Europe; Bin Bayya is the head of the UAE Council for Fatwa and a prominent member of the Dublin-based European Council for Fatwa and Research.[18] 'Abdallâh b. Bayya's text is entitled *al-Walâ' bayna al-dîn wa-l-muwâmana* (Loyalty between religion and citizenship) and starts out by stressing the concept of having various loyalties:

> From the perspective of the meaning of *walâ'* (loyalty), it could be different depending on the context, which makes us state that this concept is not rigid or a legal reality like prayer, fasting, and almsgiving, but rather it sometimes means belonging to the religion by supporting it and assisting its people, especially in the case of aggression against it; in this context, we should refer to the Quranic verse 5:55 (Your true allies are God, His Messenger, and the believers— those who keep up the prayer, pay the prescribed alms, and bow down in worship).[19] Loyalty could mean belonging to kinship and in this context we should refer to the Quranic verse 33:6 (In God's Scripture, blood-relatives have a stronger claim than other believers and emigrants, though you may still bestow gifts on your protégé)[20], and the Quranic verse 19:5 (I fear [what] my kinsmen [will do] when I am gone, for my wife is barren, so grant me a successor––a gift from You).[21] Loyalty could be formed by the bond of oath and emancipation from slavery as in the Quranic verse 33:5 (–if you do not know who their fathers are [they are your] 'brothers-in-religion' and protégés)[22]. There is a system of loyalties in Islam, indicated by a group of verses and hadiths of the Prophet, which encourage the development of virtues, whatever their source, and condemn vices, aggression, and tyranny.[23]

In this text, 'Abdallâh b. Bayya both restates and expands upon the idea of displaying many loyalties. As a traditionalist scholar, he illustrates the polysemy of the term "*walâ*'" in Islamic authoritative sources and demonstrates the range of contexts and usages of loyalty in Islamic ethics. As noted by Marina Rustow, *walâ', wilâya, muwâlât* (loyalty) in medieval Islamic political thought indicated that God, friends, allies, sponsors, clients, rulers, political and religious organizations, could all be considered objects of allegiance.[24]

By revealing the various meanings of loyalty found in Islamic authoritative writings, he would be able to convince two audiences who have doubts about Muslim allegiance to non-Muslim states: Salafists who argue that loyalty ought to be based on one's Muslim beliefs only and regular Muslims who are unsure about how to balance their loyalty to Islam with their other commitments.[25] 'Abdallâh b. Bayya also elaborates here on the logic of Muslim loyalties to non-Muslims. Beyond religion, loyalty is a virtue, and betrayal is a vice that is condemned along with other vices. This moral reasoning presents a sensible defense of Muslim loyalties, arguing that Muslims are urged to observe moral

standards in addition to Islamic law (even if the latter can frequently be interpreted as ethical guidelines). Loyalty to one's home nation is, in fact, a necessary quality of virtue; moral coherence is essential in this situation as religious allegiance and patriotism are complementary. 'Abdallâh b. Bayya thus shifts the focus of the discussion to a universal moral framework that holds that both Muslims and non-Muslims share a moral code of virtue that governs plural societies. Yet, the relationship between loyalty to religion and to a nation is complex as Bin Bayya puts it:

> Loyalty can be considered as circles and ranks, and they can communicate and interact instead of clashing and fighting. Loyalty to religion is a given for every Muslim, and indeed for every religious person, and it is the highest peak of the pyramid of loyalties. It does not exclude loyalty to the homeland in the concept of citizenship that we referred to, as it is not incompatible with loyalty to religion as long as the citizenship contract does not include a departure from the religion, abandonment of rituals, or a restriction on a Muslim's freedom to live his faith. The relationship between the citizenship contract and religion can be visualized in areas including what is legally required and of course desirable, such as the right to life, justice, equality, freedoms, protection of property, prevention of arbitrary imprisonment and torture, the right to social security for the poor, the elderly, and the sick, cooperation between members of society for the public good, and the duties that result from it, such as paying taxes and defense on behalf of the homeland against aggression and compliance with the laws in fulfillment of the citizenship contract, and this in reality is included in fulfilling the covenant and respecting its requirements, and this is included in loyalty to the religion (O you who have believed, fulfill [all] contracts).[26]

Herein, 'Abdallâh b. Bayya reaffirms the concepts of coexistence, diversity, and hierarchy of loyalty. Even though religious commitment is the highest kind of loyalty, it can coexist with citizenship and loyalty to one's country for two reasons. On the one hand, a contract that clearly outlines the rights and obligations of Muslim citizens serves as the legal basis for citizenship. One thing, however, might make peaceful coexistence between loyalty to religion and to the homeland impossible: the contract of citizenship should not contain any clause that requires a Muslim to give up their religion, rites, or freedom of practice. In principle, there should be no issues at this point because every European citizenship contract guarantees the freedom of religion. On the other hand, religion and citizenship can coexist ethically since Islamic ethics upholds many of the fundamental human rights that modern constitutions promote, such as the right to life and the pursuit of justice. Modern constitutions and Islamic ethics both strike a balance between these rights and the responsibilities that citizens have to their country of origin (homeland security, for example). Then, for Bin Bayya, Muslims are called to implement Islamic ethics and respect the agreements and contracts with European states, demonstrating political loyalty to their home countries. Abdallâh b. Bayya concludes his statement as follows:

Loyalty to Islam is not a standing and exclusionary wall that bans every worldly relationship with people that do not deny the foundation of faith and do not mix love with hatred or submissiveness and obedience with rejection of Islam. Rather, a Muslim should deal with people in order to bring benefits and ward off harm and should exchange friendly feelings with them and deal with them in accordance with the convention of ethics and good relationships with good words and beneficial deeds, in accordance with God's saying in Quran 2:83: (Speak good words to all people)[27] and the Prophetic saying, as reported by al-Tirmidhî (behave with people with good morals).[28] Friendships should be established, and covenants and deals should be concluded. All of this is approved by reason and accepted by the Prophet's conduct.[29]

If Muslims are not victims of religious persecution in a given European country, Abdallâh b. Bayya advocates for regular interactions with non-Muslims rather than separating Muslims from non-Muslims in the European societies. He refers to the ethics of virtue, restating that a Muslim should act and speak in a way that is respectful of non-Muslims, following the Prophet's model. The ethics of friendship derive from the ethics of virtue, which consist in having cordial interactions and preserving positive ties with non-Muslims. He thus supports an Aristotelian-Conservative theory of loyalty, which states that friendship and affection serve as the basis for loyalty.[30] As Fletcher puts it, "loyalties crystallize in common projects and shared life experiences" since friendship "rests on loyalty, requires an implicit understanding of continuity and reciprocal reliance, caring, relations and shared histories. And so, loyalty does not arise in the abstract but only in the context of particular relations".[31]

On the other hand, the pursuit of the public interest, which calls for collaboration to bring about advantages and prevent harm to others, is another moral justification for maintaining positive ties with non-Muslims. The ethical stance used by ¿Abdallâh b. Bayya in his argument regarding loyalty to non-Muslims may offer a means of bridging the doctrinal gap—and corresponding differences in beliefs—that Salafism emphasizes between Muslims and non-Muslims. It might also be a means of evading Islamic legal regulations for behavior in non-Muslim countries, which typically advise against assimilating into society. By emphasizing values, ethics also help to reconcile the traditional Islamic concept of *walâ'* (loyalty) with the contemporary idea of citizenship.

When loyalties and affiliations conflict

The leading authority of the ECFR, Yûsuf al-Qardâwî, produced the third legal statement on loyalty of Muslims in Europe in 2015. The ECFR republished it on their website in 2020. Yûsuf al-Qardâwî was a well-known Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood figure and a prominent Sunni reformist scholar who resided in Qatar from the 1960s until his passing in 2022. Overall, his contributions to Islamic law and ethics are well-researched, including his key roles in the creation of the European Council for Fatwa and Research in 1997 and the International Union of Muslim Scholars in 2004.[32] On political loyalty, al-Qardâwî asserts that:

In reality, an individual often claims more than one identity. A person's affiliations may be multiple for different considerations, and we do not find any contradiction between them. A person belongs to his family, to his village, to his region, to his country or homeland, to his continent, to his religion, to his community (that is the umma, the largest community which is founded on religion), and he belongs to the human family. Which of these loyalties and affiliations have priority over others? I mean: If loyalty to the country and loyalty to religion conflict, which of them should we prioritize, and which one should we sacrifice? the way we see things in this case is that in the event of a conflict between religion and the homeland, religion takes precedence, because the homeland has an alternative, and religion has no alternative. This is why we saw the Holy Messenger and his companions when religion and homeland conflicted, they emigrated for the sake of God and sacrificed the homeland that did not tolerate their faith, persecuted their mission, and tempted them in their religion. As God Almighty said in Quran 22:40: " those who have been driven unjustly from their homes only for saying, 'Our Lord is God". And God Almighty said in the Quran 59:8: "The poor emigrants who were driven from their homes and pos- sessions, who seek God's favour and approval, those who help God and His Messenger— these are the ones who are true— [shall have a share]".[34] The Holy Qur'an has made it clear in decisive detail: The religion of a Muslim is dearer to him and more beloved to him than everything else, which people cherish and are keen on.[35]

Al-Qardâwî begins his argument by highlighting the various identities and allegiances that a Muslim in Europe may have, listing a person's connections, ranging from family to human brotherhood. This concept appears to be a recurring theme in Islamic discourses on loyalty throughout Europe, especially in the discourse of the ECFR. For him, the diversity of loyalties does not, in theory, imply that a conflict may arise between these loyalties. In a sense, he also adheres to the compatibility thesis that was initially stated in ECFR resolution 62 (2/16). Al-Qardâwî's reference to humanity as an identity and loyalty may be the new aspect in this legal reasoning.

What is noteworthy in al-Qardâwî's statement on loyalty, though, was the likelihood of a clash between these allegiances, particularly in cases when religious and national allegiances collide. Regarding this possibility, he is quite explicit in claiming that religion wins out in times of strife since one cannot change religion while it is possible to change the country of residence. Muslims should leave Europe in case of persecution, the same as Muslims left Mecca in 622. In modern-day Europe, and despite some difficulties over the headscarf in France, no state persecutes Muslims due to their religious beliefs. European states uphold the secular norms of freedom of religion and are generally better societies for religious freedom than most Muslim states. It is also debatable whether it is easier to change a country than a religion. Migration affects families, livelihoods, and moral commitments, and thus a national identity constitutes a person's fundamental identity. A person who immigrates also risks vulnerability to racism and prejudice, as there are laws that discriminate between citizens and non-citizens even in Muslim countries.

Arguably, ideas of religion and nation have changed since the Prophet left Mecca for Medina in 622. In Mecca, the Prophet and the early Muslims faced more than just a danger to their faith—they also faced the possibility of death. Also, it was simpler to relocate in the 7th century due to the tribal aspect of life in Arabia, provided that one could gain from alliances and tribal ties outside of their birthplace. The rights and obligations of a Muslim born in Mecca in the early days of Islam are essentially different from those of a Muslim born in Europe today. It is also important to note that early Muslims' religion included a way of living both publicly and privately as Muslims, governed by Islamic law virtually everywhere. Such a scenario would probably not arise in secular European political systems, and Muslims, as European citizens, also generally accept that European positive laws, not Islamic public law, govern public affairs in Europe.

Resources and limits of the ECFR's discourse on loyalty

Our goal in this section is to critically examine the ramifications of the ECFR's discourse on loyalty, highlighting both its resources and limits for European societies. It is unreasonable to interpret the previously studied discourses of the ECFR as advocating for a liberal position or for cautious allegiance to non-Muslim states. Instead, we ought to regard these discourses as a realist political perspective on loyalty within a coherent ethics that sees all loyalties as multiple, hierarchical and complementary.

Liberal citizenship and loyalty to non-Muslim states

Andrew F. March argues that the ECFR promotes liberal citizenship and loyalty to non-Muslim states. He finds evidence for this position in the ECFR's emphasis on contracts, especially in the *amân* contract of mutual security, which has been used by Muslims to justify contracts of loyal residence and political obligation towards non-Muslims from early Islam on. March also interprets the discourse of the ECFR to be one of looking for Islamic ethics of a dependable, moral, and spiritually based pledge of allegiance, as well as a credible overlapping consensus between Islamic ethics and liberal citizenship.[36]

Although the legal statements of the ECFR underline the importance of Islamic loyalty to non-Muslims and the respect of treaties and obligations, this is by no means an endorsement of liberal citizenship. Rather than liberal citizenship, we should call this Muslim commitment to loyalty towards non-Muslims contractual citizenship, since it stipulates that Muslims should carry out their civic duties without necessarily seeing themselves as philosophically engaged citizens of a state that claims to be liberal. The ECFR prioritizes Islamic commitment over citizenship, even though they see in theory no contradiction between commitment to contracts and living in liberal societies. The key element, however, that should distinguish commitment to political loyalty and conviction in the liberal citizenship is that for the ECFR, allegiance to Islam should take precedence over allegiance to the liberal state in the event of a conflict between the two loyalties.

Limits to loyalty

Every side involved in the debate about Muslim allegiance in Europe has its limitations. Apart from the securitization limit (in the sense that the securitization of Islam puts limits on trust in Muslims), the marginalization of Muslims in European societies raises questions about the European liberal state's inclusivity and its ability to be devoted to all of its residents. Despite the fact that Muslim citizens are claimed by European laws and states, their influence on the political and social fabric, including the media, is constrained.[37] The ECFR's discourse has a boundary of its own since it still upholds the hierarchy of allegiances, which places religion at the top. This demonstrates that Muslim jurists refuse the reality that nation-states have taken the place of religions as the ultimate source of authority and reference in the West.

Perhaps one of the most significant obstacles to mutual loyalty is the foreign policy of European states in the Middle East. Western Europe is accused by many Muslims of endorsing aggressive Middle Eastern policies due to its cooperation with terrorist organizations and US military intervention in the region. Some Muslims in Europe make connections between domestic politics in European countries and European actions in the Middle East. As most Muslims in Europe have affinities with other Muslims in the Middle East (and some of them publicly support Muslims in the region), clashing thus with the agendas of many European governments, distrust arises between the two sides.[38]

Since the majority of the ECFR's members are Muslim jurists who either reside in or travel between the Middle East and Europe may be instructive in and of itself. Their understanding of politics, society, and geopolitics is significantly influenced by events in the Middle East. It is also critical to remember that Europe's involvement in Western hegemony in the Middle East has shaped its economy and politics, and that any challenge to this hegemony overseas has an impact on Europe's internal political and economic structure.

The Impact of the ECFR's fatwas

One of the issues that can be raised in connection with the ECFR's fatwas on political loyalty is how they might affect Muslims and non-Muslims alike and what advantages or disadvantages they might have. Unfortunately, the only way to obtain such data is through qualitative research using questionnaires and interviews with a sizable sample of participants in European countries. However, there are some scholarly literature elements and field observations I made that help us formulate the impact question. On the one hand, many religious scholars who are authoritative in the ECFR come from the UK and France. These religious leaders represent the most well-known and authoritative mosques and associations in these two countries. As individual figures of authority, their impact on their local communities is undeniable.

On the other hand, recently, Uriya Shavit and Fabian Spengler conducted a study in Dortmund, Germany, on the local influence of the ECFR fatwas ; they came to the conclusion that the ECFR lacks the organizational and financial means to effectively disseminate its discourse and that very few people are aware of its presence. Furthermore, the majority of Muslims in the Dortmund Muslim communities do not adhere to a reform-oriented understanding of Islamic law and the kind of cohesive discourse advocated by the ECFR, favoring the authority of imams who have similar ethnic, religious, and national backgrounds as the immigrant communities themselves.[39] Without investigating the other local communities in Europe, this finding cannot be generalized nor ignored.

My own research on Sunni figures of authority in Belgium suggests that there is disagreement over the ECFR's bold *ijtihâd*. The top body of religious experts in Belgium, the Council of Theologians, challenges the ECFR's authority on many matters. The council is mostly presided over by Moroccan religious scholars who adhere to a conservative Mâlikî interpretation of Islamic law. Yet, Al-Khalil Mosque, the most significant mosque in Brussels (Belgium), follows the ECFR's fatwas, although the majority of the city's mosques (roughly seventy) favor traditionalist interpretations of sharia following the mâliki or ℆anafî madhhabs, depending on whether the immigrant communities originate from Morocco, Turkey, or Pakistan. [40] Overall, it is difficult to assert that the ECFR has a broad influence in Europe due to the confusion of Sunni leadership and the fragmentation of authority and processes of producing Islamic knowledge.[41]

Conclusion

The analysis of the European Council for Fatwa and Research's legal discourses on Muslim allegiances in Europe demonstrates commitment to the concepts of multiple loyalties, as well as the compatibility and complementarity of political citizenship and religious loyalty to Islam. The study does, however, also show awareness of the backdrop of Islam's securitization and the hierarchy of allegiance, which places religion above loyalty to the homeland in cases of conflict. The ECFR's legal discourse endorses an Islamic ethical engagement with loyalty as respect for contracts and duties rather than a belief in liberal citizenship's authoritativeness.

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