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EU annual report on human rights and democracy: Freedom of religion or belief

EU (01.07.2018) - <https://bit.ly/2uEaKJR> - The EU is determined to continue promoting freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) as a right to be exercised by everyone everywhere, based on the principles of equality, non-discrimination and universality.

In 2017, the EU continued strengthening the implementation of the Guidelines on the Promotion and Protection of Freedom of Religion or Belief and carrying out the commitments under action the EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2015-2019. Their implementation remained a key priority for EU action, which was strengthened through the EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2015-2019.

During 2017 the EU regularly raised FoRB at different levels of political dialogue, including in 15 of its human rights dialogues and in consultations with partner countries. The EU also reacted with public statements condemning restrictions to freedom of religion in Russia and Indonesia, but also used private démarches to raise restrictions of FoRB in several partner countries.

The EUSR Stavros Lambrinidis continued to be actively engaged in the issue of FoRB and the promotion of EU Guidelines in his official visits, in his meetings with government officials in third countries, and at the UN. He has also placed special emphasis on the implementation of the UN Rabat Plan of Action that includes positive elements for addressing 'hate speech' and for countering violence perpetrated in the name of religion, most recently in 2017 during the Madrid Conference on ethnic and religious violence in the Middle East in May 2017, and the High-Level Forum on Combating Anti-Muslim Discrimination and Hatred, held in New York on 17 January. This forum mobilised a broad spectrum of faith-based civil society to discuss concrete and innovative ways of combating anti-muslim discrimination. He also continued engaging with the UN Special Rapporteur on FoRB and met with international organisations, and with a number of representatives of religious or belief groups.

The European External Action Service's (EEAS) stepped up its efforts to raise awareness of the Guidelines and FoRB-related issues among its staff and representatives of the EU Member States by organising various training sessions and workshops: most recently the EEAS training module on Religion and Foreign Policy, Brussels, 13 and 14 June 2017, and the Human Rights and Democratisation training on 19 June 2017. The EEAS also runs broader training modules on Political Islam, Islam in Politics with focus, inter alia, on minority rights within a Muslim majority setting, with the most recent session taking place on 18 October 2017.

In the course of 2017 the EEAS Task Force on religion and culture hosted a number of discussions on the place of religion in society. The EEAS also participated in and co-chaired the Transatlantic Policy Network on Religion and Diplomacy (TPNRD). A number of concrete initiatives combining FoRB and the wider agenda of diversity and tolerance

have grown out of this network, building on and giving further momentum to already existing work and dialogues with the OSCE, UN and Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC).

BAN OF JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES ACTIVITIES IN RUSSIA

On 17 July 2017 the Russian Supreme Court upheld its previous decision to liquidate all legal entities of Jehovah's Witnesses (JW) in Russia, terminate their activity and confiscate their property, alleging extremist activity. The decision confirms the ban on the peaceful worship of Jehovah's Witnesses throughout the country.

The EU undertook a number of actions in support of the Jehovah's Witnesses and urged the Russian authorities to ensure freedom of religion. The EU Delegation to Russia met with representatives of JW in Moscow on 4 April and 13 July 2017 and kept in close contact with them. European External Action Service officials have also met with representatives of the JW in Brussels. EU and Member States' diplomats attended several sessions of the Supreme Court hearing including the hearing of the appeal on 17 July 2017.

On 24 April 2017 the HR/VP Mogherini raised this issue, as well as other human rights concerns, when she met with Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov in Moscow. The EU issued statements condemning the harassment and persecution against Jehovah's Witnesses at the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe's Permanent Council meetings of 30 March, 27 April and 20 July 2017 as well as in the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers on 5 April 2017.

The EU will continue urging the Russian authorities to ensure that JW, along with other religious groups, are able to peacefully enjoy freedom of assembly without interference, as guaranteed by the Constitution of the Russian Federation, Russia's international commitments and international human rights standards.

On the Commission side, the work of Mr. Jan Figel, Special Envoy (SE) for the promotion of FoRB outside the EU, has played an important role in raising awareness of FoRB and support for the implementation of the EU Guidelines on it. The Guidelines provide the backbone for the SE's action at various levels, notably support to EU Delegations and country stakeholders implementing the policy, engagement in international processes and dialogue with civil society and religious actors. This is illustrated by his country visits, notably in Iraq, Sudan, Senegal and Pakistan, as well as in increased visibility for FoRB in the development cooperation scene: for example, a special thematic prize of the Lorenzo Natali Media Prize was awarded on FoRB during the European Development Days . The Media Prize is an award granted by the European Commission to journalists from all over the world for their outstanding works on development.

Regarding implementation, the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights has been mobilised for FoRB-related activities in all regions of the world with at least 45 specific FoRB projects, accounting for at least EUR 17 million in the period 2007-17. Moreover, the 2017 global call for proposals published in September 2017 also addresses freedom of religion or belief, in particular, the contribution of civil society to the implementation of the 2013

EU Guidelines. These include, inter alia, the promotion of dialogue, and an emphasis on the role of religious and other leaders in these processes (indicative amount EUR 5 million) . The projects will be selected in 2018.

The Commission's call for proposals with the title: 'Intercultural Dialogue and Culture' was published in March 2017. This programme envisages cooperation with partner countries on intercultural dialogue for peaceful inter-community relations 'using

intercultural dialogue as a tool to increase understanding and tolerance'. One of the specific objectives of the call is to enhance cultural pluralism and intercultural understanding, including aspects relating to religion or belief. Selected projects will be contracted by the end of 2017.

The EU continued to work to ensure that FoRB remains prominent on the UN agenda, and the EU was the lead sponsor of a Resolution on FoRB both in the Human Rights Council (HRC) and the UN General Assembly (third committee). In November 2017, the EU FoRB resolution to the UNGA 72 was adopted by consensus with 78 cosponsors – three more than in 2016. The FoRB resolution identifies obstacles to the enjoyment of the right to freedom of religion or belief and presents recommendations on ways to overcome these obstacles. It also calls upon states to protect, respect and promote the right to freedom of religion or belief.

During the March 2017 HRC the FoRB resolution was also adopted by consensus with minor technical updates, as a result of parallel negotiations with the OIC on the Resolution 'Combating intolerance, negative stereotyping, stigmatization, discrimination, incitement to violence and violence against persons based on religion or belief' .

In the margins of the Human Rights Council's 34th session in March 2017, the EU, in cooperation with the Special Rapporteur and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights organised an event on FoRB entitled 'Towards an agenda for implementation'. The panel offered the opportunity to take stock of the progress made to advance the enjoyment of the freedom of religion or belief, and to identify a way forward to boost the enjoyment of this fundamental freedom.

Some Jewish issues in Denmark, France, Germany, Belgium, Hungary

HRWF (02.06.2018) – Various issues concerning Jews in Europe have recently gained momentum in the media: the debate on the ban of circumcision in Iceland and other Scandinavian countries, acts of violence targeting Jews in other countries. See hereafter a short overview concerning their situation in several EU countries.

Danish parliament set to debate proposal to ban circumcision

By **[Cnaan Liphshiz](#)**

[JTA](#) (01.06.2018) — <https://bit.ly/2sq3WPI> - Denmark's parliament is set to debate and possibly vote on whether nonmedical circumcision of boys should be banned after more than 50,000 people signed a petition requesting its criminalization.

The [petition](#) by the group Denmark Intact crossed the 50,000 mark Friday, four months after its launch. According to regulations passed in January, petitions approved for posting on the Danish parliament's website are brought to a vote as nonbinding motions if they receive that level of support within six months.

The petition describes circumcision as a form of abuse and corporal punishment, equating it with female genital mutilation. The petition states that parents who have their children circumcised outside Denmark should be exposed to legal action in Denmark, which has 8,000 Jews and tens of thousands of Muslims.

But last week, spokespeople for all the parties in the Danish parliament stated their faction's positions on the issue. The tally showed that a majority of lawmakers would

vote against supporting a ban if the issue is brought to a vote, the Kristeligt Dagblad daily newspaper [reported](#). Nonetheless, a vote on the petition is likely to take place in the fall unless its language is deemed unconstitutional.

Some parties, including large coalition partners, are split on the issue. But Finn Rudaizky, a former leader of the Jewish community of Denmark, said "parliament will not change the law" that currently allows circumcision. Still, he said, the petition "does mean a great deal because it shows just how many have involved themselves with this issue."

Whereas some of those who oppose nonmedical circumcision do so because of their understanding of children's rights, "many others use the situation to show that they are against Jews, Muslims and they can express anti-Semitism and xenophobia without admitting to it," Rudaizky said. "I am not proud of this situation."

No country in Europe has banned circumcision since the defeat of fascism in World War II.

In 2014, Denmark joined a handful of European Union countries that forbid the slaughter of animals for meat without stunning, as required by Jewish and Muslim religious laws. Earlier this week, Denmark joined several EU countries banning the wearing in public of face-covering garments, such as the burka and nikab veils favored by some Muslim women.

Iceland's parliament earlier this year briefly processed a bill to ban circumcision. It was put on ice following a parliamentary committee's recommendation to nix it amid international pressure.

Opposition to circumcision and the ritual slaughter of animals in Europe features liberal activists who cite humanist motivations and anti-immigration individuals who view the customs as undesirable foreign imports.

French public schools told to enforce 2004 ban on kippah, Muslim head cover

JTA (01.06.2018) — <https://bit.ly/2J334L7> - The French Education Ministry sent out a circular reminding teachers that wearing religious symbols in public schools is illegal and urging them to punish noncompliant students.

The reminder appeared in an 83-page document sent Wednesday to thousands of public schools throughout France titled "handbook on laïcité," a French-language word describing the principal of ensuring both religious freedom and the separation of religion from the state.

Like a document distributed in 2016 on the same subject, the handbook lists both the Jewish kippah, or yarmulke, as forbidden to be worn in public schools, along with head covers favored by Muslim females and large cross pendants. But it goes further than the earlier document in that it instructs teachers to pursue disciplinary measures against those who "test the application" of these rules, as per a law from 2004, the Marianne magazine [reported](#) Friday.

The handbook states it seeks primarily to "check the spread of extremist viewpoints," a statement many take to mean radical Islam. It also calls for disciplinary action against students who refuse for religious reasons to partake in activities that some devout individuals consider improper, such as swimming lessons with members of both genders or sexual education classes.

Long skirts that appear to comply with religious requirements also are not allowed.

However, the handbook also says that the application of the ban on religious symbols should be "on a per-case basis," [according](#) to *La Depeche* daily.

Whereas in the 1990s the majority of Jewish children attended public schools in France, only a third of them do so today, according to Francis Kalifat, the head of the CRIF umbrella group of French Jewish communities. Thousands have left the public education system due to anti-Semitism, he said, including virtually all of the children from observant families where males wear a kippah and girls wear long skirts.

Still, in some places, including the affluent Paris suburb of Neuilly-sur-Seine, Jewish parents enroll their children in public schools that are considered safer than others because Jews comprise more than half of the student body. But even there, more observant parents tend to enroll their children in Jewish private schools.

Meyer Habib, a lawmaker in the lower house of the French parliament and a former vice president of the CRIF, said he supported the regulations, which he said would have little to no effect on the daily lives of French Jews.

Still, he urged selective enforcement of the regulations.

"Jewish symbols must not be treated the same as characteristics of radical Islam," he told Ynet. "We've never killed innocents in Europe generally and in France specifically in the names of Jewish values," he said of Jews.

Germany's Jews urged not to wear kippahs after attacks

BBC (24.04.2018) - <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-43884075> - The leader of Germany's Jewish community has advised Jews to avoid wearing traditional skullcaps (kippahs) following anti-Semitic attacks.

Josef Schuster, the president of the Central Council of Jews in Germany, told Berlin public radio that Jews should exercise caution in big cities. His comments come ahead of a "Berlin Wears Kippah" solidarity march in the German capital on Wednesday.

[Last week, two young men wearing kippahs were assaulted in the city.](#) The attacker was filmed shouting anti-Semitic abuse.

Jewish organisations in Germany have expressed alarm over a number of recent anti-Semitic insults and threats in schools.

At the weekend, Chancellor Angela Merkel condemned what she described as "another form of anti-Semitism".

She told Israel's Channel 10 TV network that aside from anti-Semitism by right-wing groups, similar threats were coming from some Muslim refugees in the country.

What did Josef Schuster say?

"Defiantly showing your colours would in principle be the right way to go [to tackle anti-Semitism]," he said.

"Nevertheless, I would advise individual people against openly wearing a kippah in big German cities," Mr Schuster added.

But he also stressed that if Germans refused to stand up to anti-Semitism "our democracy would be at risk".

"This is not only about anti-Semitism - it goes along with racism, it goes along with xenophobia. You need a clear stop sign here."

What about reaction from other groups?

Mr Schuster's comments apparently contradict the position taken on the kippah issue by the Berlin-based *Jewish Forum for Democracy and Against Anti-Semitism* - the organisation which shared video of last week's attack on Facebook (<https://jfda.de/blog/2018/04/17/antisemitischer-angriff-in-berlin-prenzlauer-berg/>)

"I used to always advise my Jewish friends and acquaintances not to wear a kippah so as not to show their Jewish identity. I changed my opinion," a spokesman said last week.

"We must take up this fight and be visible again in public."

Separately, the head of Germany's *Central Council of Muslims* condemned recent anti-Semitic attacks.

"Anti-Semitism, racism and hatred are great sins in Islam, therefore we will also never tolerate that," Aiman Mazyek told Germany's Rheinische Post newspaper.

Germany's Jewish population has grown rapidly since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989.

Before 1989, the population was below 30,000 but an influx of Jews, mainly from the former Soviet Union, has raised the number to more than 200,000.

Belgian TV cannot find a single Jew to agree to wear a yarmulke in public

Elder of Ziyon (28.05.2018) - <http://elderofziyon.blogspot.com/2018/05/belgian-tv-cannot-find-single-jew-to.html> - Natasha Mann, a reporter for Belgian broadcaster RTBF, was preparing a report on antisemitism in Belgium and wanted to have a visual of a Jew being seen in Brussels in a Jewish skullcap.

So she asked around the Jewish community to find someone who would be willing to be part of the story, just to walk around the capital for the cameras.

For ten years, most observant Jews in Brussels have been wearing caps or hats to avoid being seen publicly as Jews and to avoid being attacked.

After three weeks of looking for a single Jew to be part of the story, she had to give up. The Jewish community is so frightened of Jew-haters that literally none of them would agree to publicly wear the most basic and unobtrusive of Jewish symbols.

First, Mann contacted a couple of rabbis. After finding out which neighborhood Mann wanted them to appear in, they declined. The Chief Rabbi, who was attacked a number of years ago, originally accepted the idea but the community leaders convinced him it was not a good idea.

Mann went to other Jewish community leaders. She thought she hit paydirt when one man said he wanted to do the story, saying that he is sick of being harassed for being a Jew. Mann asked him, "Do you complain to police when you hear antisemitic insults?" He answered back, "Do you complain to police when men whistle at you in the street?" Ultimately, he declined to do the story as well.

Joel Rubinfeld, the president of the Belgian league against anti-Semitism, who normally does not wear a yarmulke, agreed to do the story - but only if he is escorted by a security officer who is in contact with the police. It is too complicated.

The story ran without the visual Mann wanted, which says a lot about how fearful the Jewish community in Belgium is, today.

Here is the story that was broadcast, without a single Jew willing to wear a yarmulke - and with a teen victim of antisemitism and his mother too afraid to show their faces (<http://elderofziyon.blogspot.com/2018/05/belgian-tv-cannot-find-single-jew-to.html>)

The safest country for European Jews? Try Hungary

By David P. Goldman

PJ Media (28.05.2018) - <https://pjmedia.com/spengler/the-safest-country-for-european-jews-try-hungary/> - Last Friday evening I put on a kippah and walked half an hour across Budapest to the Keren Or synagogue maintained by the Budapest Chabad.

After violent attacks on Jews in German streets, the leaders of Germany's Jewish community warned Jews last month [not to wear a kippah](#) or any other visible sign of Jewish identification in public.

The French community issued such warnings years ago.

[Belgian TV](#) could not find a single Jew in Brussels willing to wear a kippah in public. I walked across Budapest four times (for Friday evening and Saturday daytime services), and no-one looked at my kippah twice. At services I met Hasidim who had walked to synagogue with kaftan and *shtreimel*, the traditional round fur hat. Whatever residual anti-Semitism remains among Hungarians, it doesn't interfere with the open embrace of Jewish life. There are no risks to Jews because there are very few Muslim migrants.

On any given Friday evening, the Keren Or synagogue—one of several Chabad houses in Budapest—hosts two hundred people for dinner. Jewish life isn't just flourishing in Budapest. It's roaring with *ruach*, and livened by a growing Israeli presence. About 100,000 Israelis have dual Hungarian citizenship; many own property in the country and vote in Hungarian elections.

EU Statement on the situation of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia

OSCE Permanent Council N° 1185, Vienna

HRWF salutes the continuous efforts of the European Union and the OSCE to defend the rights of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia but regrets that many faith-based organizations defending religious freedom and human rights NGOs keep silent about the ban of their movement in Russia (170,000 JW deprived of the right to religious freedom), the confiscation of all their property (395 congregations), the numerous criminal cases opened against them (20, as of 25 May) and the imprisonment of 7 of their members.

EU (10.05.2018) - <https://www.osce.org/permanent-council/381820?download=true> - The European Union is deeply concerned by the recent reports of increased government

harassment of Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia, which includes police raids of private homes, arbitrary detentions and intimidation.

As we have stated previously in many other occasions, members of the Jehovah's Witnesses, like all other individuals, must be able to peacefully enjoy freedom of religion or belief as well as freedom of assembly without discrimination, as guaranteed by the Constitution of the Russian Federation and Russia's international commitments.

On April 20, 2017, the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation banned the Administrative Center of Jehovah's Witnesses and all 395 of the Witnesses' local legal entities on grounds of "extremism". The Russian government claimed that although it was liquidating the legal entities of Jehovah's Witnesses, individual Witnesses would be free to practice their faith. However, the government's claim is inconsistent with its actions. Over the past year, authorities have launched nine criminal investigations and five Jehovah's Witnesses are currently in detention. All could face possible prison sentences of up to ten years merely for meeting together for peaceful worship. In addition to the criminal cases, around 90-100 properties belonging to Jehovah's Witnesses have been confiscated by the Russian state based on court decision, and an additional 100 properties are currently in court proceedings. The Russian authorities have also threatened to deprive Jehovah's Witnesses of parental rights.

The EU reiterates its call on Russia and all other OSCE participating States to respect its international commitments on freedom of religion or belief, freedom of expression and freedom of assembly. OSCE participating States have repeatedly affirmed the importance of freedom of religion or belief as a pillar of the concept of comprehensive security.

The EU will continue to follow closely the developments concerning the Jehovah's Witnesses across the OSCE region and are worried about information received concerning several participating States limiting Jehovah's Witnesses' right to practice their faith.

The freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief is a fundamental right of every human being, without discrimination. This right is enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and our shared OSCE commitments. Freedom of religion or belief includes the freedom to manifest one's religion or belief, individually or in community with others, in public or private, through worship, observance, practice and teaching. The EU continues to promote freedom of religion or belief, a right that must be respected and promoted everywhere on the basis of the principles of equality, nondiscrimination and universality.

The Candidate Countries the FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA, MONTENEGRO* and ALBANIA*, the Country of the Stabilisation and Association Process and Potential Candidate BOSNIA and HERZEGOVINA, and the EFTA countries ICELAND and NORWAY, members of the European Economic Area, as well as UKRAINE, GEORGIA and SAN MARINO align themselves with this statement.*

** The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Albania continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.*