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# **EU : EU hosts conference on good practices of ritual slaughter**

## **EU hosts conference on good practices of ritual slaughter**

By M. Apelblat

The Brussels Times (25.10.2022) – <https://bit.ly/3zdQj8H> – The European Commission organised last Thursday a conference with religious communities in the EU with focus on ritual

**slaughter, a sensitive issue which involves principles of religious freedom and animal welfare concerns.**

The conference was held in partnership with the Council of Europe, the OSCE and the UN. It brought together 100 representatives of EU Member States and other national authorities, special envoys and coordinators on combating antisemitism and anti-Muslim hatred, representatives of national Jewish, Muslim and Christian communities, international organisations and independent experts.

Among the participants were ambassador Deborah Lipstadt, the American Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Antisemitism and UN Under-Secretary-General Miguel Moratinos, holding the post of High Representative for the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC).

The conference was held under Chatham House rules, according to which information can be disclosed but statements cannot be attributed to the speakers, and no journalists were invited to it. However, a speech given by Vice-President Margaritis Schinas, Commissioner for Promoting our European Way of Life, was made available for journalists.

According to the Commission, the idea behind the event was to foster an open, frank and constructive discussion between the religious communities and the national authorities. A Commission source told The Brussels Times that it wanted to give space to the participants to talk freely, with the Commission acting as facilitator of the discussions.

***Controversial court ruling***

Vice-President Schinas reminded the audience that freedom of religion is a fundamental right which includes “freedom to change religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or in private, to manifest religion or belief, in worship, teaching, practice and observance”.

“This Commission is determined to promote our European way of life – a model of society, where all citizens feel included irrespective of their belief, their ethnic origin, their cultural or religious background,” he underlined.

“Jewish and Muslim communities are part of a diverse and vibrant Europe. It is our mission, our duty, to ensure that religious minorities feel at home in Europe and are able to live, practice and celebrate their faith like every other member of society.”

On the issue at stake, slaughter based on religious traditions, he said that it is millennia old. “Finding balanced solutions that promote animal welfare while respecting religious traditions has been the subject of many public debates over the past few years. We know workable solutions are possible within the framework of existing EU legislation.”

Referring to current EU legislation (Regulation No 1099/2009 on the protection of animals at the time of killing), he said that the regulation strikes a fair balance. “It gives each Member State a broad discretion regarding the need to reconcile the protection of the welfare of animals and respect

for the freedom of religion.”

He also referred to the interpretation of the regulation by the European Court of Justice (ECJ) in its ruling of 17 December 2020. As previously reported, the court ruled in favour of a Flemish ban of ritual slaughter. Slaughter without stunning is incompatible with Jewish and Muslim religious law and amounts to a ban in practice.

Member states might adopt stricter rules to protect animal welfare but not ban ritual slaughter completely. The court interpreted for the first time the EU legislation and concluded that interference by member states, requiring stunning also in ritual slaughter, meets “an objective of general interest recognised by the EU, namely the promotion of animal welfare.”

### ***Focus on good practices***

The Muslim and Jewish communities in Belgium largely disagree with the ECJ ruling and have joined forces to overrule the ban in the courts – until now without success. They did not respond to questions from The Brussels Times about the conference and its outcome.

Furthermore, the conference did not discuss the possibility of amending the EU regulation although some revision of the regulation is planned by the Commission, according to the source. The focus of the conference was on exchanging good practices of ritual slaughter in the EU member states and

other countries.

According to the 'readout' after the event, the participants held an informative discussion, raising the importance of dialogue, education and exchange of best practice. They agreed that animal welfare is important, as well as freedom of religion or belief, recalling that freedom of religion constitutes one of the fundamental rights enshrined in the EU Charter of Fundamental rights.

They also discussed, that existing EU rules on the matter, which allow slaughter to the extent required for the needs of the concerned religious communities, strike the right balance between animal welfare and religious freedom. Stricter rules by the Member States need to be properly justified.

Asked about good practices, the Commission source highlighted France and The Netherlands, where ritual slaughter without stunning is allowed. According to the EU regulation, member states have freedom of discretion to allow ritual slaughter without stunning if it takes place in approved slaughterhouses.

The conference was foreseen in the Commission's EU Strategy on Combating Antisemitism and Fostering Jewish life (October 2021), when it committed to facilitate the exchange of good practices. In this regard, the conference dispelled prejudices about ritual slaughter and might have laid the groundwork for educating the public that is not more painful to animals than other slaughter methods.

*Photo: The Grand Synagogue in Brussels. Quotation from the Book of Malachi: Do we not all have the same father? Didn't the same God create us? Credit: Wikimedia Commons*

[Further reading about FORB in EU on HRWF website](#)

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