

Table of Contents

- ***EU statement: Freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief***
- ***Faith roundtables provide open forum for believers and non-believers***
- ***Recent arsons targeting churches in Europe***
- ***10 Years of legally binding EU fundamental rights***
- ***Belgian ban on kosher slaughter has Jews worried about what comes next***

EU statement: Freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief

EU (19.09.2019) – Mr. Moderator,

The EU attaches the greatest importance to the promotion and protection of freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief as a fundamental human right and has made it one of the priorities of its human rights foreign policy. The EU Foreign Affairs Council adopted specific Guidelines in June 2013 which contain clearly defined priorities and tools for the promotion of Freedom of Religion or Belief worldwide.

With these Guidelines, the EU reaffirms its determination to promote freedom of religion or belief as a right to be exercised by everyone everywhere, based on the principles of equality, non-discrimination and universality.

In doing so, the EU focuses on the right of individuals, to believe or not to believe, and, alone or in community with others, to freely manifest their beliefs in public or in private, in worship, observance practice and teaching, without fear of intimidation, discrimination, violence or attack. Individuals have also the right to change one's religion or belief or to renounce it. The EU does not consider the merits of the different religions or beliefs, or the lack thereof, but ensures that the right to believe or not to believe is upheld.

Our recommendations are:

- Participating States should fulfil their commitments by facilitating groups, associations and communities built upon religious and/or non-religious beliefs to peacefully operate and publicly manifest their beliefs, and respecting their autonomy. We underline the importance of establishing fair and clear rules and procedures which do not infringe upon OSCE commitments and international human rights standards, as outlined in the OSCE/ODIHR "Guidelines on the legal personality of religious or belief communities".
- States have an obligation to guarantee human rights protection, and to exercise due diligence to prevent, investigate and punish acts of violence against persons based on their religion or belief. Violence or the threat thereof – such as killing, execution, disappearance, torture, sexual violence, abduction and inhuman or degrading treatment – are widespread phenomena that have to be addressed.
- We assert that violence against persons, groups or communities, and against the right of individuals to freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief, is unacceptable under any circumstances, and we strongly encourage state and other influential actors in a society, whether religious or not, to speak out against

acts of violence and to publicly denounce such acts at the highest level. Violence perpetrated under the pretext of a religious prescription or practice, such as violence against women and girls including "honour" killings, female genital mutilation, child early and forced marriages as well as violence perpetrated against persons based on their sexual orientation or gender identity is also unacceptable.

- The promotion of religious tolerance, respect for diversity and mutual understanding are of utmost importance with a view to creating an environment conducive to the full enjoyment by all persons of freedom of religion or belief. The EU calls on states to promote, through the educational system and other means, respect for diversity and mutual understanding by encouraging a wider knowledge of the diversity of religions and beliefs within their jurisdiction.
- States have a duty to protect all persons within their jurisdiction from direct and indirect discrimination on grounds of religion or belief, whatever the reasons advanced for such discrimination. This includes the duty to rescind discriminatory legislation, implement legislation that protects freedom of religion or belief, and halt official practices that cause discrimination, as well as to protect people from discrimination by state and other influential actors, whether religious or non-religious.
- States must fight against violations of freedom of religion or belief in an inclusive manner, whereby avoiding any discrimination in favour of or to the detriment of a particular religion or belief.
- Freedom of religion or belief and the freedom of expression are interdependent, interrelated and mutually reinforcing rights. Taken together, freedom of religion or belief and freedom of expression play an important role in the fight against all forms of intolerance and discrimination based on religion or belief. We highlight the positive role that free and independent media can have on preventing the increase of bias and prejudice based on religion and in promoting mutual respect and understanding, including through specific educational and awareness-raising programmes.
- We stress the important role of political leaders, elected and state officials, as well as civil society and religious leaders, in denouncing in a clear and timely manner public manifestations of intolerance based on religion or belief.
- Freedom of religion or belief is also an essential pillar of safe and peaceful societies. It is linked to freedom of opinion and expression, to freedom of association and peaceful assembly, without which there can be no freedom of religion or belief, as well as other human rights, and fundamental freedoms, all of which contribute to the establishment of pluralistic, tolerant, inclusive and democratic societies. Conversely, violations of freedom of religion or belief are often early warnings of potential tensions or conflicts.
- We are concerned about the persistence of cases of violations of freedom of religion or belief in the OSCE area. These violations, whether committed by state or non-state actors, may take various forms: acts of discrimination or violence on the basis of religion or belief or committed in the name of religion, undue restrictions on freedom of religion or belief. Restrictions often imposed by States include the denial of legal personality to religious or belief communities, denial of access to places of worship, assembly and burial, repression of unregistered religious activities, the outright banning of a religion on the pretext of the fight against terrorism or extremism.

- We encourage the OSCE states to invite UN Human Rights Special Procedures, particularly the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief, and to accept and implement UN recommendations, including from treaty monitoring bodies and the Universal Periodic Review.
- We encourage ODIHR to address the issue of freedom of religion or belief, including its connection to the issue of tolerance and non-discrimination, in the framework of its wider work on the fight against all forms of intolerance and discrimination.
- We support the promotion of opportunities for an open dialogue among representatives of religious and non-religious groups and policy makers on all relevant issues.
- We express our full support for the work of ODIHR and its Advisory Panel on Freedom of Religion or Belief, which provides legal support to participating States in the implementation of their OSCE commitments. We also encourage cooperation between The European Union, the OSCE, the Venice Commission, the Council of Europe and the United Nations Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief.

Thank you.

The Candidate Countries REPUBLIC of NORTH MACEDONIA*, MONTENEGRO*, SERBIA* and ALBANIA*, the Country of the Stabilisation and Association Process and Potential Candidate BOSNIA and HERZEGOVINA, and the EFTA countries ICELAND and LIECHTENSTEIN, members of the European Economic Area, as well as REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA, ARMENIA and GEORGIA align themselves with this statement.

* Republic of North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Albania continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.

Faith roundtables provide open forum for believers and non-believers

By Elena Pavlovska

NewEurope (17.09.2019) - <https://bit.ly/2kNJAzr> - The US State Department organised the Second Ministerial to Advance Religious Freedom in Washington DC during the summer, an annual event that is the largest religious freedom gathering of its kind in the world with more than 1,000 civil society and religious leaders and more than 100 foreign government delegations in attendance.

Participants in the event were reminded that the Pew Research Center, the most renowned and reliable think regarding statistics on religion, found that 80% of the world's population live in a religiously restricted environment.

In an effort to raise awareness about the current state of religious freedom in the world, the ministerial acts a platform to discuss civil society initiatives, including the creation and of 100 International Religious Freedom Roundtables around the globe to help empower civil society to organise around the principle that every person has a right to their religious beliefs.

As expressed by the State Department, roundtables and other similar networks currently exist in Nigeria, Colombia, Brussels (EU), Geneva (UN), Sudan, Ukraine, New York (UN), South Korea, Taiwan, and Italy. More roundtables are expected to launch soon in Romania, Hungary, Iraqi Kurdistan, Indonesia, London, Mexico, Paris, and Mongolia.

The roundtables were first set up in Washington DC more than 10 years ago and quickly became a focal point for the topic of religious freedom for politicians, NGOs, and activists in DC who would have an interest in the issue. The one based in Brussels covers the EU institutions and has existed for several years. Known as the Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) Roundtable Brussels-EU, it acts as an informal group of individuals from civil society who gather regularly to discuss FoRB issues on a non-attribution basis. The participants gather, speak freely when sharing ideas and information, and propose joint advocacy actions to address specific FoRB issues and problems globally.

The participants are free to propose initiatives regarding the protection and promotion of freedom of religion, conscience, and belief in Europe and around the world, and other participants have then the possibility to join these initiatives and self-select into coalitions of the willing on such initiatives”.

The EU Roundtable is chaired by Evangelical Archbishop **Thomas Schirmacher** of Germany, who is also President of the International Society for Human Rights and Chair of the Theological Commission of the World Evangelical Alliance.

“Freedom of religion and belief needs all actors to sit together and exchange knowledge and ideas, government officials, MPs, multi-state actors, large and small religious and secular worldview actors, official representatives of religions or secular worldview, human rights and advocacy organisations, experts, journalists and many more. Only a rather loose roundtable can guarantee space for all to speak, to interact and to arrange ever new coalitions for specific letters, actions and summits and I am glad that this is working more and more in Brussels,” Schirmacher said while speaking with New Europe.

“FoRB is a really important issue in the world of today. Discrimination on the basis of religious affiliation exists everywhere in the world, persecution exists, and too many people are killed every day because of their religious choices. This is not something that governments alone have been able to solve until now. This is not something that NGOs or activists alone have been able to solve. So we expect that together, activists, NGOs, faith-based or not, and governments, we will be able to have more concrete results in getting rid of this issue. The Roundtable is open to all good-will, and honestly, it is maybe the only place today that is really all-inclusive on the topic of FoRB and it already has a track of good results and achievements,” said **Eric Roux**, one of Schirmacher’s five co-chairs, after being contacted by New Europe.

The main principle of these roundtables is all-inclusiveness, and in order to make it a safe space for all, they apply the Chatham House Rule—discussions are off the record and any information disclosed during these meetings may be reported by those present, but the source of that information may not be explicitly or implicitly identified.

Recent arsons targeting churches in Europe

By Willy Fautré, Director of Human Rights Without Frontiers

HRWF (21.08.2019) - Mainline media often report about destruction of places of worship in the framework of military conflicts or clashes between (ethno-)religious communities. Arsons targeting religious places in Europe do occur as well but are un- or underreported.

Along with various other forms of acts of vandalism, they usually remain unnoticed, outside the radar and un-analyzed by researchers and scholars because they are only published in local media and not in English. The EU Fundamental Rights Agency should pay special attention to these incidents.

Here are a few cases that occurred this year in EU member states:

Finland

Suspected arson at Hyvinkää church: a storage facility at the Old Church was destroyed before firefighters were able to get the blaze under control

Yle Uutiset (19.07.2019) - <https://bit.ly/2Zc3Dtn> - Police suspect that a fire at the Old Church in the centre of Hyvinkää, a municipality located about 50 kilometres north of Helsinki, was started deliberately.

"Based on our preliminary investigation, there is reason to suspect that the fire was intentionally ignited," said Crime Commissioner **Leif Malmberg** of the Eastern Uusimaa Police Department. "The case is currently being investigated as an act of arson."

Malmberg added that as the investigation is currently ongoing, the police cannot yet provide any further details, but that no natural cause for the fire was found.

"This was based on a technical investigation which has given us reason to suspect that the fire was intentionally started. There are no suspects at this stage," Malmberg said.

The police have asked for the public's assistance in investigating the incident.

Passerby raised alarm

At approximately 2.30am on Friday, a passerby noticed a fire in a storage building behind the church and alerted authorities.

When the Central Uusimaa Rescue Service arrived, the 30-square-metre warehouse was fully aflame. The storage unit contained gardening tools and supplies, said on-duty firefighter **Harry Häyrynen**, and the warehouse and all of the supplies were completely destroyed by the fire.

A blaze was also noticed to have started in the window frame of a 19th century log building, but firefighters were able to extinguish it before it spread.

"The window was open, and there was hemp being used as insulation. Some smoke had got in, but it has now been ventilated," Häyrynen explained.

The warehouse is about 15 metres away from the Old Church, and the log building is about 25 metres away.

Häyrynen therefore believes it is unlikely that the fire at the log building would come from sparks that had flown from the storage building.

There was no reported injuries caused by the fire.

Hyvinkää Old Church is a log building originally built as a prayer room in 1896, based on the designs of renowned Finnish architect **Yrjö Sadeniemi**. The prayer room was enlarged in 1923 by master builder **Heikki Siikonen**, and the building was consecrated in 1978.

According to the Hyvinkää parish website, the Old Church is a popular location for weddings.

Other sources: [Daily Finland](#), [Helsingin Sanomat](#), [Aamuposti](#)

Read also:

[Serial arson suspect detained in Kokkola](#)

12.6.2018

[Helsinki arson suspect surrenders to police in western Finland](#)

16.12.2018

[Officials suspect arson behind Mikkeli school blaze](#)

20.6.2018

[Young man dies after falling off roof in Hyvinkää](#)

28.5.2018

France

HRWF has covered the issue of the protection of religious community buildings in France in some specific papers such as:

[70,000 law enforcement forces for the protection of places of worship at Easter](#)

[France: About the Protection of Christian Places of Worship](#)

Two suspicious fires in four days in Bourg-Achard Church

Observatory of Christianophobia (01.07.2019) - <https://bit.ly/2KHLJ9S> - Between 26 and 30 June, two fires were discovered in the 13th century Saint-Lô Church in Bourg-Achard (Eure). According to the police in charge of the investigation, there is a high probability that these two fires were deliberately set.

On 26 June, the first fire was discovered by the sacristan, an employee of the diocese. As he went to close the church, he realized that a fire had consumed the altar tablecloth. Lit candles had been placed on the altar in what authorities called "satanic staging with inverted crosses and jewels arranged on the altar." He managed to call for help quickly, which prevented the spread of fire.

On Sunday, June 30, four days later, the church was closed following the first fire. At the end of the afternoon, a passer-by saw smoke coming from the church steeple and alerted firefighters. Inside the church, the organ was in flames. By the time the fire was discovered, the organ had been completely destroyed.

Two fires in less than a week is at least "disturbing," said Jean-Marie Thiébault, 2nd Deputy Mayor. "It's not accidental, it's clear."

Neither he nor the Mayor have any memory of possible threats, or of an incident that would have foreshadowed reprisals against the church.

"We deplore what happened," said the Mayor who announced the installation of security cameras inside the church, paid for by the municipality. "They should be installed in one or two days. It is done to protect the communal church and to continue to receive ceremonies at the request of the parishioners and the priest."

Sources: [Paris Normandie](#), [Paris Normandie](#), [infornormandie](#)

Germany

Arson at St Magnus Church at Schussenried Abbey

Observatory of Christianophobia (29.07.2019) - <https://bit.ly/2ZiYZd4> - An unknown arsonist set fire to a cloth in the St. Magnus church of the Schussenried Abbey in Bad Schussenried on July 29th. The fire then extended to pictures and a wooden cross nearby. A witness noticed the fire and was able to extinguish it. Police are investigating.

The witness describes the arsonist as a 20 to 30-year-old man with short hair and a height of about 165-170 cm. He was wearing a green T-shirt and beige colored shorts.

For information contact police in Bad Schussenried (telephone: 07583/942020).

Source: [Police press release](#)

Suspected arson in Ankum church

Observatory of Christianophobia (01.06.2019) <https://bit.ly/30jRVu7> - The fire department in Ankum was called to a smoldering fire in the St. Nikolaus Catholic Church around noon on 1 June 2019. When the team of 33 firefighters in six firetrucks arrived, the Swedish visitors who had initially discovered the two spots of smoldering fire in the church, had already extinguished them out with water.

According to police, the church wasn't damaged by the fire and the fire department only had to inspect the site and quickly gave the all-clear. Police suspect arson and began their investigation with the help of the Swedish visitors describing two girls running out of the church just before they themselves entered and the church's surveillance video tapes.

Sources: [NOZ](#)

Vandals burn statue of Jesus in Grossholbach Church

Observatory of Christianophobia (19.05.2019) - <https://bit.ly/2Zj5pFf> - Police reported that unknown perpetrators broke in a church window with stones and invaded the interior of the church of the Heiligen Dreifaltigkeit in Großholbach (Westerwald in Rhineland-Palatinate) during the night of May 18th to 19th. Several sacred objects, including statues of saints, were broken. The Jesus figure was removed from the crucifix and burned. The intruders also urinated in the aisle and on several pews.

Mayor Michael Kohlhaas, expressed the shock of the small community: "This hurts. These are values that are simply trampled on."

Police are seeking witnesses.

Contact: Polizeiinspektion Montabaur, Telephone: 02602-9226-0

Sources: [Kath.net](#), [police press release](#), and [Rhein Zeitung](#)

Fires set in Nordhausen church

Observatory Christianophobia (18.05.2019) - <https://bit.ly/30keDIN> - Police announced on May 19th that a tablecloth had been set on fire in the vestibule of St. Blasii's Evangelical church in Nordhausen during the night of 18 May. Fortunately, it did not catch fire completely. There were also traces of fire on a cordon to the church balcony. The professional fire brigade used a thermal imaging camera to scan other areas for evidence of fires. Police are now looking for witnesses who may have seen something suspicious.

Source: [Police press release](#)

United Kingdom

PSNI seeking two over Londonderry church arson

BBC (25.05.2019) - <https://bbc.in/2P7FiB8> - Police investigating an arson attack on a church in Londonderry have said they believe two males may have started the fire.

The fire happened at Holy Family Church in Ballymagroarty shortly after 22:00 BST on Friday night.

The fire service said CCTV showed the fire had been started deliberately by several youths.

Parish priest Fr Paddy O'Kane was visiting a sick man whose son showed him a photograph of the fire.

He thought at first it was "trick photography".

"I thought he was playing a joke," he said.

"I went to the front of the man's house and then I could see smoke rising. The community had gathered. I got a terrible shock."

The parochial house of the church was evacuated and 20 firefighters tackled the blaze.

Fr O'Kane said he had not been allowed back into the building while forensics officers worked on the scene.

Fr O'Kane said he could not understand the motivation of the young men behind the arson attack, but he would pray for them at weekend masses.

"I never can understand vandalism or arson, I don't understand what buzz it gives people," he said.

"I can't understand what goes on in a person's mind that they want to cause damage to other people and how it can make them feel good.

"I feel more sorry for them. There is something badly wrong in their lives whenever they do this."

Group Commander Andy Burns said it had put lives in danger and that a community event was being held in the parochial house when the blaze broke out.

He said the fire was started in a shed to the rear of the parochial house.

The house was damaged, with the heat destroying windows.

'People can lose their lives'

The fire also spread to the church roof and tiles were removed by the fire service to prevent it spreading further, he said.

The CCTV footage had been passed to police for investigation, Group Cmdr Burns added.

"This was arson. This had the potential to spread to the adjoining parochial house, which was occupied, and people can lose their lives in this type of incident," he said.

"We would ask our young people, please do not get involved in setting deliberate fires, setting fires like this is very dangerous."

PSNI Det Con Fielding said: "At this stage we believe two males may have been involved in starting this fire and we are keen to identify them.

"We would like to hear from anyone who was in the area at around the time of the fire or anyone who may have information regarding this crime."

Sinn Féin councillor Michael Cooper condemned the attack: "The mindset of actually going down and deliberately setting fire to a church or any community building defies logic.

"This has caused extreme anger and disbelief in the community who go to this chapel."

SDLP councillor Shauna Cusack described it as a "reckless act".

"I don't know what they were trying to achieve - it put people at risk.

"It also put the fire service at risk too. I really can't understand the mindset of people who would want to destroy a place of worship and somebody's home."

10 Years of legally binding EU fundamental rights

By Ivan Arjona-Pelado

President of the European Office of the Church of Scientology for Public Affairs and Human Rights, and of the Foundation for the Improvement of Life, Culture and Society.

New Europe (27.06.2019) - While it cannot be denied that the transparency and the perspective of people working in the EU institutions are regularly broadening for the better, it is also true that 'institutionalised action' expected as a result of the values expressed in the EU Fundamental Rights Charter, now 10 years after becoming a legally binding instrument, is far from ideal.

This is definitely the case as regards the rights associated with freedom of religion or belief, and non-discrimination based on religious affiliation.

One of the significant improvements in the exercise of the Charter in that field was the designation of a Special Envoy on Freedom of Religion or Belief – though it is notable that the Special Envoy's mandate excludes any responsibility or authority to look within the European Member States with regard to their application of the rights developed in the Charter. In fact, both the UN Special Rapporteurs on Freedom of Religion and Beliefs **Ahmed Shaheed** and **Jan Figel**, a Special Envoy for Promotion of Freedom of Religion outside the EU appointed by the president of the European Commission **Jean-Claude Juncker**, have already stated in various interventions that the EU should be consistent with its policies, both internally and externally.

At the Faith and Freedom Summit event on 2 April in the EU Parliament, Figel said, external credibility that the EU needs is "to show coherence in external and internal policy".

This also brings us to what the EU's principal instruments are for dialogue with belief communities and institutions, which is Article 17 of the TFEU and which states that the Union respects all philosophical and non-confessional organisations equally and that it "shall maintain an open, transparent, and regular dialogue with these churches and organisations".

The guidelines, however, for doing so are very vague and open to arbitrary interpretation and application of who and what they dialogue with and about. This has a negative effect on relations with minorities and needs to be remedied at once.

Humanists have also voiced their concern about this lack of transparency, recently concerning a leaked report from a senior Member of the European Parliament that proposed to give religious groups more control and input into EU legislation.

What is of particular concern is that if the Commission and other bodies of the European institutions favour dialogue with the main religious groups such as KEK and COMECE, which is good in itself, but keep at a minimum dialogue with other minorities, this might, on the one hand, reflect a certain proportionality of the population but on the other hand it does not reflect the principle of equal opportunity and treatment of minorities who have valid input and contribution to European society.

Whilst there is a valid argument that proportionality should grant larger groups more "say", I also believe that new and minority groups, including the humanists or the Muslims, are not being received on the same terms as "traditionally established" religions of the EU. I also believe the "openness" of dialogue that both the Parliament and the Commission are meant to practice, is not that accessible to smaller groups, contrary to

what their tasks oblige them to do and what the EU Fundamental Rights Charter preaches.

I feel the above could be because some officials may feel that interacting with certain 'disfavoured' groups – unlisted, yet somehow known as such through the administrative social culture – would leave them prone to the threat of the "will I lose my job?" syndrome. This syndrome, whilst not acceptable can be understood to exist in a climate where a kind of covert discrimination exists.

More trust and personal abidance with the EU Charter and the ECHR would increase personal integrity and courage, resulting in a far more equitable application of fundamental rights.

Europe, even if less so than before, still has this bad habit of not practising what it preaches. Of course, or at least I believe, life in Europe is generally freer and more benign than in many other areas of the world and provides more opportunities for people to live a life with the hope of achieving freedom according to their own ways of living.

Considering the history of Europe, however, and the role it plays around the world, I sincerely believe the current stasis is not enough because discrimination is still happening, because 'selective religious correctness' happens to be more important than defending the rights of certain minority groups; when the photo [or avoided photo] opportunity becomes more important than practising the dignity, freedoms, equality, solidarity, citizens' rights, and justice proclaimed by the European Charter that are enshrined in the Treaty of Lisbon.

No politician, no administrator, no head of state, nor a person of any religion, belief, or political ideology should ever dare to discriminate against any person or group based on religious affiliation, in the same way, we must not discriminate as based on gender, sexual orientation ethnicity, etc. We should not allow it. They won't dare, or at least won't succeed if we stand together. They will have to either join groups that promote, defend, and protect these fundamental rights, or we will have to resign to their discriminatory and unjust agendas.

Will you fight alone for the rights of your own group? Will you fight with a small selected group abiding just by the selective religiously correct? Or will you defend dignity, freedoms, equality, solidarity, citizens' rights, and justice for all?

I know that truth even if fought, always prevails. I know that sooner or later the values of the Charter will become closer to the fact. How fast we get there, will depend on how deeply-rooted our response is to the above questions and how fast we all make the choice we know is the right one. The choice and the speed will also reflect, positively or otherwise, on the number of days, months or years of unneeded and unjustified suffering.

If we chose rights, equality, and justice for all, we will be together on the side of the EU Fundamental Rights Charter. If you believe your answer needs a review, then I believe that this is good timing to do so. It is my wish that soon children in the streets and schools will be proud of the Europe that we are building together and in which they learn and live what is being called 'European values' – free from any discrimination and knowing that the same principles are also true inside the EU institutions.

Belgian ban on kosher slaughter has Jews worried about what comes next

By Cnaan Liphshiz

Jewish Telegraphic Agency (04.01.2019) - <https://bit.ly/2AB19qS> - Antwerp's Jewish community was still recovering from its Holocaust-era devastation when Wim van den Brande's grandfather opened one of Europe's largest kosher slaughterhouses.

Since its establishment in 1966, the Kosher Poultry factory grew together with the local Jewish community, which numbered only a few thousand people after Nazis and their collaborators murdered most of the Jews in Flanders — the Belgian region whose capital is Antwerp.

By the end of last year, van den Brande's factory was processing 80,000 chickens a month — a testament to how the region's Jewish population has more than quadrupled to 20,000 since 1945.

But all that ended last month, when a law banning methods used in ritual slaughter went into effect, forcing van den Brande, who is not Jewish, to fire his 10 employees and close up shop, in the hope of moving his factory to Hungary.

For van den Brande, 42, and hundreds of meat industry professionals, it means "an attack on traditions and on an entire industry," he told JTA.

It has less immediate implications for Antwerp's Jews — who can simply switch to importing customs-free kosher meat from elsewhere within the European Union trading bloc. Yet many of them view the law both as a declaration that they are not wanted in Belgium, and as the opening shot of further hostile action.

"On the ground, it makes little difference. We still have meat," said Nechemiah Schuldiner, a leader of the Shomre Hadas Orthodox Jewish community of Antwerp. "The problem is the message it sends. It tells Jews: We don't want you here."

Schuldiner fears the law, which he considers a ban, is a "prelude to a ban on importing kosher meat," and a move heralding "new restrictions, be in on milah or other elements of Jewish life." Milah is the Hebrew word for circumcision of men.

The new law requires all animals be stunned before they are slaughtered. Jewish and Muslim religious laws require animals be conscious at the time of their slaughter. Jewish leaders also fear the same political forces — animal and child welfare activists, in league with anti-immigration groups — will move to ban ritual circumcision, performed by Jews and Muslims.

Michael Freilich, editor in chief of the Antwerp-based *Joods Actueel* Jewish magazine, disagrees that the law is a sign Belgian Jews were unwanted. The Flemish authorities, he said, have paid "a great deal of attention to the Jewish community and its needs." But, he added, the methods for ritual slaughter are "too unpopular" in Flanders for the government to ignore.

The law in Flanders was born of a 2014 public debate about the slaughter of animals by Muslims in unregulated slaughterhouses. In Western Europe recently, animal welfare and child welfare activists have found unlikely allies in individuals and politicians critical of the impact of mass immigration to Europe by Muslims.

Jewish customs, similar to Muslim ones but ignored or tolerated for decades, have become collateral damage of this alliance.

In the Netherlands, a fringe animal welfare party in 2011 submitted a bill proposing a ban on all slaughter performed without stunning. It passed in the lower house, largely

thanks to the support of the anti-Islam Party for Freedom. The Dutch senate reversed the ban in 2012.

In 2013, Poland's parliament passed a similar ban amid growing discontent in the predominantly-Catholic nation over the arrival of millions of Muslims into the European Union, of which Poland is a member. The Polish High Court reversed the ban in 2014.

Meanwhile, Denmark's parliament is preparing to vote on a resolution calling to ban non-medical circumcision of boys. The resolution began as a petition started by a small group of anti-circumcision activists but gathered tens of thousands of signatures in the kingdom, whose government has one of Western Europe's most restrictive policies on immigration from the Middle East.

In this context, the law passed in Belgium "is clearly only the beginning," said Ari Mandel, an Antwerp Jew who in 2011 opened Kosher4U, an online store that specializes in shipping kosher products to remote European Jewish communities, such as in Sweden and Norway.

"We're talking about a domino effect. Kosher slaughterhouses can move but moving appears to be a temporary solution, a stay of execution," he added.

Mandel also noted that Antwerp's Orthodox communities have some of the world's strictest kashrut standards, making their rabbis and congregants distrust foreign labels.

Ritual slaughter of animals is allowed in France, Germany, the United Kingdom, Ukraine and Russia, where the vast majority of Europe's Jews live.

Five European Union member states — Sweden, Denmark, Finland, Lithuania and Slovenia — have blanket bans on ritual slaughter. So too do three other non-EU countries in Western Europe: Norway, Switzerland and Iceland.

In Belgium, it is currently illegal only in Flanders, or the Flemish Region, which is one of three states that make up the federal kingdom. Another region, Wallonia, will impose a ban in September. Austria and Estonia also enforce strict supervision of the custom that some Jews there say makes it nearly impossible.

No country in Europe currently forbids nonmedical circumcision of boys.

If Europe is seeing a domino effect where Jewish customs are collateral damage, then communities should consider adapting some of those customs to weather the storm, suggested Michael Freilich, the Jewish paper's editor.

"There is halacha, and Jews are beholden to it," he told JTA, referring to rabbinic law. But some kosher practices also stem from "customs and rabbinical politics" and can be adapted or reformed.

Notably, some Orthodox rabbis permit post-cut stunning – a technique in which animals' necks are cut almost at the same time as they are knocked unconscious. Another potential concession may come from modern stunning methods, including carbon dioxide, that do not injure the animal in ways prohibited by Jewish law.

"Honestly, I've not been able to get rabbis to give me very compelling explanations as to why some of these solutions aren't halakhically acceptable," said Freilich, who is Orthodox and who opposes government restrictions on ritual slaughter.

But some of the rabbis, he said, “told me that they couldn’t sanction certain solutions because doing so would expose them to attack from hardliners.”

These talks “changed my way of thinking about the kosher meat issue,” Freilich added.

As more and more European governments restrict kosher slaughter, Freilich said “the need to adapt Jewish customs to the new reality will grow, and I think we’ll see movement.”