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'Put your star away': Jewish singer refused service at German hotel

When German musician Gil Ofarim arrived at a hotel in Leipzig, he says he was told to put away his Star of David necklace or he would not be allowed to check in. Hundreds of people came out to protest in solidarity.

DW (05.10.2021) - <https://bit.ly/3AeRHW5> - A hotel in the eastern German city of Leipzig was facing [accusations of antisemitism](#) on Tuesday after a musician said he was denied service for wearing a Star of David.

The video sparked sharp criticism from Germany's Jewish communities and drew the attention of police.

What happened?

In a video posted on social media, German musician Gil Ofarim said he attempted to check in to the Hotel Westin in Leipzig on Monday evening. Ofarim, who is Jewish, was wearing a necklace with a Star of David pendant.

Due to technical issues with the hotel's computers, a long line had formed at the reception. Ofarim noticed that others in the line were waved forward, but he was not called up.

"What's going on? Why is everyone else being called up ahead of me?" Ofarim says he asked the worker behind the desk.

The hotel employee then told him they were trying to reduce the line, but did not acknowledge that Ofarim was also standing in line.

"Then someone called out from the corner: 'Put your star away,'" the singer says.

Ofarim said that the hotel worker then repeated the call for Ofarim to remove or hide his Star of David, saying that "once you put it away, then you can check in." A visibly upset Ofarim ends the video with the words: "Germany, 2021."

Police 'informed' about incident

Leipzig police told DW they were alerted to Ofarim's video and were currently processing it.

"We were informed by our social media team about the case," police spokesperson Theresa Leverenz told DW.

"We have secured the video and are preparing to send it to prosecutors for consideration," she added.

Authorities did not comment on whether any criminal charges have been filed, saying the case was in its early stages.

How has the hotel responded?

A spokesperson for the Westin Leipzig told news agency dpa that the hotel was deeply concerned and was taking the case "extremely seriously."

The hotel's parent company has tried to reach out to the singer to understand what happened. The spokesperson also emphasized that the hotel's goal was to treat guests and employees with respect, regardless of their religion.

Protesters gather in Leipzig

The incident described in Ofarim's video prompted a wave of shocked responses on social media.

On Tuesday evening, hundreds of protesters in Leipzig gathered in front of the hotel to demonstrate against antisemitism.

At least 600 people were in attendance, according to local newspaper *Leipziger Zeitung*. Hotel employees also stood near the entrance, holding up a banner in what appeared to be a show of solidarity.

The incident also sparked [swift condemnation from Germany's Jewish communities](#).

"The antisemitic hostility against Gil Ofarim is appalling," Josef Schuster, the president of Germany's Central Council of Jews, said in a statement posted on Twitter.

He said he hoped the Westin would take action against those involved and hoped that Jewish people in Germany "will be met with solidarity in the future whenever we are attacked."

Who is Gil Ofarim?

The 39-year-old is the son of Israeli star musician Abi Ofarim.

Himself a singer and songwriter, Ofarim has played in two rock bands and has released music in German and in English.

In 2017, he won "Let's Dance," the German version of the celebrity ballroom dancing show Dancing with the Stars or Strictly Come Dancing, and has also acted in several TV shows and done voiceover work for dubbed films.

Correction: This story was updated to remove a sentence that said Ofarim did not name the hotel in the Facebook video he posted; Ofarim did mention the Westin hotel in the video.

Photo: Gerald Matzka/dpa/picture alliance

FECRIS admits: Hamburg Case lost against Jehovah's Witnesses was "a lesson"

While in a public press release the lost case was presented as a victory, in its General Assembly the organization acknowledged things went differently.

by Massimo Introvigne

Bitter Winter (13.09.2021) – Excerpt from FECRIS' report at their 2020 General Assembly:

2.1. Le procès Témoins de JEHOVAH/ FECRIS = énorme travail, heureusement assisté de Jean-Pierre JOUGLA.

Objet du litige: Le site de la FECRIS a publié au cours des années, des interventions comportant des points concernant les Témoins de Jéhovah (TJ).

La Fédération allemande des TJ a attaqué la FECRIS pour propos diffamatoires.

Les dernières conclusions ont été remises le 23 octobre 2020.

Le jugement final a été rendu en Allemand, le 27 novembre 2020; la décision et ses motifs sont en cours de traduction.

Précision de JP. Jouglà: "Ce procès doit nous servir de leçon. Les intervenants doivent pouvoir apporter la preuve de ce qu'ils avant".

Conclusion: à l'avenir les textes écrits ne seront pas publiés sur le site de la Fédération (précaution/sécurité)

(Source: Item 2.1 of the report of FECRIS General Assembly of 11/27/2000).

On November 27, 2020, FECRIS, the European Federation of Centres of Research and Information on Cults and Sects, an umbrella organization for anti-cult movements in Europe and beyond, significantly funded by the French government, [lost a landmark](#)

[case](#) at the District Court of Hamburg, in Germany, where it was found guilty of 18 counts of untrue factual allegations against the Jehovah's Witnesses.

On May 24, 2021, *Bitter Winter* [published a commentary](#) of the decision.

On May 30, 2021, i.e., six days after *Bitter Winter's* article (and six months after the decision, proving that it was indeed answering *Bitter Winter*, and without our article it would never have commented the judgement in public), FECRIS published [a press release about the case](#).

In the press release, FECRIS falsely claimed that it had won a case that it had in fact lost. Since the Jehovah's Witnesses had claimed that 32 FECRIS statements were defamatory, and the court found 17 of them defamatory, one partially defamatory, and 14 non-defamatory, FECRIS claimed that it had successfully defended its case in Hamburg. Obviously, it had not, as evidenced by the fact that FECRIS was sentenced to pay some money to the Jehovah's Witnesses rather than vice versa. FECRIS claimed that the 14 statements declared non-defamatory were "essential" and the 18 points for which they were sentenced were "ancillary." This was totally arbitrary. As evidenced in our article, the statements found defamatory by the court concerned some of the main claims of FECRIS' usual campaigns against the Jehovah's Witnesses.

Lawyers know that defamation cases are difficult. Not all false statements constitute defamation. Some statements may be inaccurate, yet the courts may regard them as protected by free speech and falling outside the scope of statutes against defamation. Organizations and tabloids that resort to systematic defamation know that they will be often sued, about several statements, and that they will be sentenced for some and found not guilty for others. Their strategy is normally to downplay the negative decisions and claim victory when only some of the statements for which they were sued, but not all, are found defamatory (a common occurrence even in the most successful defamation cases). They would also falsely claim that, when their statements have been found as non-defamatory, the courts have "certified" that they are "true"—while in fact a statement may be both inaccurate and outside the scope of defamation.

Typically, FECRIS' press release gave the false impression that the Court of Hamburg had validated the 14 statements it had considered non-defamatory as true. In fact, the Court itself had warned against such an interpretation, noting that in German law "expressions of opinion enjoy extensive protection. Accordingly, inaccurate opinions also share in the scope of protection." One clear example of an "inaccurate opinion" regarded as non-defamatory, which FECRIS mentions in its statement as if it had been confirmed as true by the Hamburg judges, is that "all claims of persecution of the Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia are just primitive propaganda." We even wonder whether FECRIS really believes this statement to be true, after the persecution of the Jehovah's Witnesses in Russia has been repeatedly denounced by the United Nations, the European Union, and several Western governments, including the German one.

We have now evidence that, while publicly claiming "victory" in the Hamburg case, FECRIS is well aware that things went otherwise. On November 28, 2020, FECRIS' General Assembly was held by videoconference. One of the items discussed was the Hamburg case. The Assembly was informed of the "enormous work, happily helped by Jean-Pierre Jougla." According to his LinkedIn profile, Jougla is a "honorary attorney" (avocat honoraire), a peculiar French (and Belgian) position indicating somebody, normally retired, who maintains the title of attorney and some of its functions, but can no longer act as an attorney in court cases, except in special circumstances.

Jougla commented that “this case should be a lesson for us. Contributors should be able to prove what they assert.” The Assembly concluded that for reasons of “precaution and security” “in the future the written texts [of the speeches given at FECRIS conferences] will no longer be published on the web site of the Federation.”

See the full article [here](#)

P.S. The court decision is available in German and in English on [HRWF website](#).

Photo : Jehovah's Witnesses evangelizing in Frankfurt, Germany. Source: jw.org.

The Bavarian State Administrative Court of Appeal rules that applying the “sect filter” is illegal

A musician refused to submit the requested “protective declaration” that she does not “use the technology” or attend courses of Scientology. She was right, the court said.

By Massimo Introvigne

Bitter Winter (07.08.2021) - <https://bit.ly/37OqZYG> - A historical decision was rendered by the 4th Senate of the State Administrative Court of Appeal of Bavaria, with reasons communicated on August 3, 2021, overturning a first instance judgment by the Administrative Court of Munich dated August 28, 2019, on the controversial issue of a “sect filter” used by the City of Munich. “Sect filters” are documents required by local governments, businesses and political parties in some areas of Germany. Anybody looking for a job, or for doing business with these institutions and companies, should sign a statement that s/he is not a Scientologist nor does s/he “use the technology of L. Ron Hubbard” (the founder of Scientology).

The City of Munich subsidizes electromobility, and the use of electrical vehicles, including electrical bikes called “pedelecs” for the purpose of environmental protection. A musician applied to receive a grant for purchasing a pedelec on August 6, 2018. As part of her application she was required to sign a “sect filter” declaring that “she will not apply, teach, or otherwise disseminate any of the contents or methods or technology of L. Ron Hubbard and that she will not attend any courses or seminars based on this technology.” She refused, and on December 12, 2019, the City of Munich rejected her application.

She sued the city, but on August 28, 2019, the Administrative Court of Munich found against her, stating that the city was “free to decide which group of persons is to be supported by voluntary financial contributions,” and exclude citizens supporting Scientology, based on the fact that “in the 2018 Bavarian Report on the Protection of the Constitution, the program and activities of the Scientology organization were declared incompatible with the fundamental principles of the free democratic basic order.” The first instance court noted that, notwithstanding this evaluation, the musician still had a

right to attend courses of Scientology, as she did for forty years, based on general principles of freedom of opinion and religion, but she had no right to get the electromobility subsidy. The city also suspected that the woman might use the pedelec for missionary activities on behalf of the Church of Scientology, which the city does not want to support.

The musician appealed, noting that she had clearly stated that she "is a freelance musician and plays mainly in classical orchestras; she wants to use the pedelec to get to rehearsals and performances." She never performed missionary activities on behalf of Scientology, and considered the claim that she would need a bike for such purposes as absurd. She also questioned the accuracy of the assessment of the Bavarian Office for the Protection of the Constitution, based on her long experience as a Scientologist. And she claimed that the wording of the "sect filter" is "vague and excessive," as it refers to any and all "contents" and "methods" L. Ron Hubbard may have taught in thousands of pages of works, and to any and all courses and seminars based on Hubbard's ideas, which deal with a wide variety of fields. Also, the "sect filter" requires those who sign it to disclose their religious adherence and belief, which is prohibited by both the German Constitution and international human rights law.

The city objected that a freelance musician is not a private individual but, since she bills for her services, she is a "business" or a "company," and since 1996 the Bavarian State Government had announced that they regard any business run by a Scientologist as "run according to the technology of L. Ron Hubbard" and thus "a component of the overall Scientology organization." That this applied to the activity of the musician was denied by the Bavarian State Administrative Court.

The Administrative Court of Appeal concluded that the city's decision "is unlawful and violates the plaintiff's rights." Imposing a "sect filter" before granting electromobility funding violates the constitutional guarantee of religious freedom and the constitutional principle of equality before the law, which requires that citizens should not be subject to disadvantages by reason of one's race, origin, language, belief or religious or philosophical conviction, the court concluded.

Read the full article [here](#)

Photo: *"No support for buying a pedelec (above) if you don't renounce Scientology," the City of Munich said.*

Fake News: FECRIS sentenced for 17 slanderous statements in Germany but claiming victory in a press release (!)

FECRIS fined for repeated derogatory statements about Jehovah's Witnesses

HRWF (09.07.2021) - On 27 November 2020, the District Court of Hamburg condemned FECRIS (European Federation of Centres of Research and Information on Cults and Sect) for defaming the general movement of Jehovah's Witnesses in public statements made in the framework of its conferences from 2009 to 2017 that were posted later on its website.

Before deciding to go to court, Jehovah's Witnesses had sent a warning notice via their authorized legal representatives on 18 May 2018 but FECRIS did not react.

The German court verdict in the case [Jehovah's Witnesses in Germany v. FECRIS \(File ref. 324 O 434/18\)](#) concerned a long list of 32 claimed defamatory statements: 17 were fully justified and one was partially justified by the Court.

On 30 May 2021, after Bitter Winter had exposed this case, FECRIS published a [press release](#) where it claimed that it had "won" the Hamburg case. This was repeated by some FECRIS affiliates in different countries, but it was just an attempt to throw dust in the eyes of those who have not read the decision. The court decision is available in German and in English on [HRWF website](#).

Since the Jehovah's Witnesses had claimed that 32 FECRIS statements were defamatory, and the court found 17 of them defamatory, one partially defamatory, and 14 non-defamatory, FECRIS claimed that it had "won" the case since the 14 statements declared non-defamatory were "essential," and the 18 points for which they were sentenced were "ancillary."

Court decision concerning the 32 disputed statements: Official text

- "Under penalty of a Court-imposed administrative fine for each case of infringement – or, in the event this cannot be collected, administrative detention or administrative detention for up to six months – the Defendant shall refrain from distributing and/or causing to be distributed the following regarding the Plaintiff and its members, as has been done on www.fecris.org" and the Court listed the litigious statements concerned."
- Additionally, the Court ruled that "the value of the matter in dispute is set at EUR 176,000."

- FECRIS is ordered to pay Jehovah's Witnesses in Germany EUR 2,217.45 in prelitigation costs.
- Jehovah's Witnesses must bear 46% and FECRIS 54% of the costs of the lawsuit.
- "The judgment is provisionally enforceable with regard to the operative part under point I. of the judgment, but only against provision of security to the amount of EUR 94,500; otherwise, in each case, against security to the amount of 110% of the respective amounts to be enforced."

FECRIS' distortion of the court decision debunked by Massimo Introvigne in Bitter Winter: Excerpt

"Lawyers know that attacking untrue factual allegations is difficult, and the border between permissible, if strongly worded, critical statements and illegal slander is difficult to determine.

The German Jehovah's Witnesses asked the District Court of Hamburg to examine 32 statements. The court found 17 of them defamatory, one partially defamatory, and 14 non-defamatory. The court noted that in German law "expressions of opinion enjoy extensive protection. Accordingly, inaccurate opinions also share in the scope of protection." In several cases, the court agreed with the Jehovah's Witnesses that FECRIS statements were "inaccurate," but ruled them beyond the scope of defamation. 4 out of 32 statements were even judged to be inadmissible expressions of opinion, i.e., beyond the borders of legitimate freedom of expression.

Consistently with case law in other European countries, the Hamburg judges also stated that in the field of religious and anti-religious controversy strong-worded expressions are common, and cannot be censored as defamation, concluding that calling the Jehovah's Witnesses "disrespectful of human rights" remains within the limits of freedom of expression. I may personally disagree with this evaluation, but where these limits lie is never easy to assess.

In the majority of the cases, however, the court found that FECRIS had crossed the border of defamation. The Hamburg judges also established the principle that the fact that Russian authorities or courts had included negative evaluations of the Jehovah's Witnesses in their official documents or decisions does not entitle a German defendant to repeat or republish them, if they are inherently defamatory and false.

In this Russian-derivative category of statements are that among the "characteristic features" of the Jehovah's Witnesses are "illegal possession of property," the fact that they "took possession of citizens' apartments," commit "religiously motivated crimes," bring "adult and children to their death." They were all found to be untrue factual allegations by a decision that should serve as a warning to all FECRIS-affiliated organizations. That defamatory statements about the Jehovah's Witnesses come from Russian official documents does not mean that organizations in democratic countries are free to reprint them.

The court also found that FECRIS distorts the theology and practices of the Jehovah's Witnesses with the intention of defaming them. FECRIS falsely claimed that the Jehovah's Witnesses teach that "there is a difference between men and women who receive the heavenly calling from God, in that only women 'must receive a change of nature,' but not men," that women who serve as door-to-door missionaries are "women slaves," and children are "compelled" to participate in the public preaching, that women in the family should not only submit to their husbands but also "to their male children," are "forbidden

to divorce without being immediately excommunicated," and "cannot rebel within the home without being immediately judged by the congregation's elders." That Jehovah's Witnesses teenagers caught kissing are automatically "taken to a JW's judicial committee," and that a young woman who stays overnight in the home of a male friend would be found guilty by a judicial committee even in the absence of other elements indicating an improper relationship, were also judged to be false and defamatory statements. Another false claim the court regarded as defamatory was that the Jehovah's Witnesses have announced 26 different dates for the end of the world and are now predicting it for the year 2034.

FECRIS was also found guilty of defamation for reporting inaccurately that the Royal Australian Commission report on sexual abuse found "4,000 cases of victims of pedophilia in Australia" among the Jehovah's Witnesses. In fact, the Australian Witnesses had given to the Royal Commission all disciplinary reports and referrals, proven and unproven, that had been submitted to the Jehovah's Witnesses organization in Australia over a 65-year period, for a total of 1,006 reports—which obviously did not mean that there had been 1,006 cases of sexual abuse among them, and certainly not 4,000.

The Hamburg judges found that accusations of covering up sexual abuse cases raised by FECRIS against the Jehovah's Witnesses are often based on false and defamatory statements, such as, "The child is brought forward to explain in detail what happened. They must remember each act, and the elders ask precise questions," the child's mother "cannot be in attendance," and "the child must meet the rapist." These statements, the court said, are factually "untrue," as in fact "a child only testifies before the elders if the child absolutely wants to and if this is granted," the child's mother may be called in for "moral support," and "the elders never require victims to put forward their allegations in the presence of the accused." FECRIS' statement that, when a perpetrator of sexual abuse of minors has been identified, the elders do not warn families with minor children in their own and neighboring congregations by disclosing the name of the guilty person was found to be partially defamatory. The court concluded that elders properly advise families with minor children of their own congregation, but that plaintiffs did not prove that they also warn neighboring congregations.

Sometimes, it is unclear whether FECRIS activists, who claim to be experts on "cults," are in bad faith or simply incompetent. They published the case of a 17-year-old Dutch girl who died during a measles epidemic in 2013 after her parents had refused vaccination for religious reasons and implied she was a Jehovah's Witnesses. In fact, she was a member of a Calvinist Christian Reformed congregation, i.e., belonged to a church known for being a staunch opponent of the Jehovah's Witnesses.

Interestingly, on January 5, 2021, FECRIS petitioned a correction of the judgment's section addressing the facts of the case. FECRIS requested that in the facts of the judgment the sentence, "The statements refer neither directly nor indirectly to Jehovah's Witnesses," should be corrected as follows: "The statements do not refer to the plaintiff."

FECRIS obviously intended to limit the scope of the decision to the German organization of the Jehovah's Witnesses that was the plaintiff in the case, and remain free to defame Jehovah's Witnesses in general. In its decision dated January 22, 2021, the court shared the Jehovah's Witnesses' position that the German public corporation can legally represent Jehovah's Witnesses in Germany and defend their personal rights and reputation.

FECRIS comes out of the Hamburg decision with its image of an organization of "experts," who deserve to be supported by taxpayers' money in France and elsewhere, deeply shattered. It rather emerges as a coalition of purveyors of fake news, which systematically use defamation to attack groups they label as "cults." Hopefully, the German decision will become a model for others in different jurisdictions, teaching FECRIS-affiliated anti-cult movements that they may have powerful patrons but are not above the law."

Germany's military appoints first rabbi since before Holocaust

At a time of frequent reports of right-wing extremism within the military and rising antisemitism in German society, the reestablishment of Jewish military chaplaincy is a clear statement, 76 years after the end of WWII.

By Christoph Strack

DW (21.06.2021) - <https://bit.ly/2TRgznA> - Forty-two-year-old Zsolt Balla is one of Germany's most prominent rabbis. He has been a member of the Orthodox Rabbinical Conference of Germany for nine years, and the leading rabbi of the eastern state of Saxony for two.

"It is our goal to make it normal again for Jewish citizens to serve in the German army," he said on the occasion of his appointment.

Field rabbis in World War I

The installation of a Jewish chaplain in the military marks a significant day for Germany and its Jewish community. Balla is not by any means [the first German military rabbi](#). When World War I broke out in July 1914, some 12,000 Jewish Germans volunteered to serve in the military. Establishing a Jewish military chaplaincy became important in view of the large number of Jewish front-line soldiers. So, by September 1914, the first rabbis were introduced as chaplains.

The best-known Jewish field chaplain — one of nearly 30 in wartime — was the scholar and theologian Leo Baeck (1873-1956). Now considered the most prominent 20th-century German rabbi, Baeck survived the Theresienstadt concentration camp and later settled in London, where he served as the chairman of the World Union for Progressive Judaism.

But the Jewish military chaplaincy that Baeck and others carried out would be eliminated in the two decades that followed World War I as the Nazis came to power. Hitler reorganized the country's armed forces into the newly formed Wehrmacht and dismissed all Jews from the military, including the Jewish chaplains, as part of the Nazi persecution of Jewish people across all aspects of society. The Wehrmacht was disbanded in 1945 after the end of WWII.

A political signal

Nine decades on, the renewed creation of Jewish chaplaincy is seen as a milestone for Germany's modern armed forces, the Bundeswehr, which was created in 1955.

A [state treaty introducing chaplaincy for Jewish soldiers](#) was signed by the German government and the Central Council of Jews in Germany in December 2019.

"That this is possible and becoming a reality after the inconceivable crimes committed by Germany makes me humble and grateful," Defense Minister Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer said at its signing.

The rabbinical appointment comes at a time when the German army has been in the headlines because of radical right-wing extremism in its ranks. The defense minister spoke Monday at a synagogue in Leipzig, saying that the Jewish military chaplaincy will join the Protestant and Catholic chaplaincies in offering "important support for our soldiers." The Bundeswehr also announced in 2019 that [it intends to recruit Muslim chaplains](#).

Kramp-Karrenbauer called the appointment "a great sign of trust" and added that "in view of our history, is also a cause for humility." At the same time, she said, the installation of a military rabbinate indicates "a great commitment to our democracy, for our open, diverse and tolerant society."

In recent years, Germany's armed forces have repeatedly come under fire over suspicions that some members have far-right sympathies. In 2018, then-Defense Minister Ursula von der Leyen ordered the military to purge all links to the wartime Wehrmacht when it emerged that Nazi-era army memorabilia was openly displayed at one of its barracks. Since then, her successor Kramp-Karrenbauer has vowed to take decisive action against cases of radicalism in the security forces after [a string of scandals over far-right networks in the police and military](#).

Germany's Military Counterintelligence Service said last [year some 600 Bundeswehr soldiers were suspected of right-wing extremism](#).

How many Jewish soldiers are serving at present in the Bundeswehr is not known. Currently, the Ministry of Defense estimates there are about 300 Jewish soldiers in the Bundeswehr.

At the synagogue on Monday, the president of the Central Council of Jews in Germany, Josef Schuster, drew a distinction between [Germany's modern armed forces](#) and the Nazi-era military. "The Bundeswehr has nothing in common with the former Wehrmacht, and that is the only reason why it is possible today for us to introduce a federal military rabbi," he said.

German Jewish life across society

Balla, who now takes on the title of "federal military rabbi" in addition to his other rabbinical work, hopes in any case that his being in the role contributes to the normality of Jewish life in all aspects of German society. He knows from his experience in youth work "that there are young Jews who can envisage a career as a soldier," he said in an interview with the *Jüdische Allgemeine* newspaper. "We hope that here in Germany, despite the country's history, it will eventually become normal for Jews to take this career path."

Born in Budapest in 1979, Balla is the son of a lieutenant colonel in the Hungarian People's Army. "I learned from my father to respect the work of soldiers very much," he says. It is important to him that as a part-time military rabbi, he and 10 other clergy people — liberal or Orthodox — are not only responsible for accompanying Jewish servicemen and women.

This is not about religious instruction, but about the ethical foundations of soldierly action, Balla said. "It is another important task for us rabbis to [also take preventive action against antisemitism](#) among all soldiers. There is a lot to do in this respect," he

says. It must be clear, he adds, "that the Bundeswehr is a place where people are committed to democratic values."

A clear statement in an important year

The father of three is no stranger to trailblazing. When he was ordained as an Orthodox rabbi in Munich in 2009, Balla was one of the first Orthodox rabbis who had been trained in Germany since 1938.

Now, the introduction of the first military chaplain in the modern-day Bundeswehr and the start of Jewish military chaplaincy comes as the country celebrates 1,700 years of Jewish life in Germany.

Monday's event in the small Leipzig synagogue is intended as a clear statement that Jews have a place everywhere in German society.

Photo: Copyright Sebastian Kahnert/dpa-Zentralbild/ZB/dpa/picture alliance

German police launch hunt for synagogue arsonist

A masked man was seen pouring liquid on the synagogue's exterior wall, which was then set alight. The attack in the southern city of Ulm has been slammed as "vile."

DW (05.06.21) - <https://bit.ly/2T2OGbA> - Police in the German state of Baden-Württemberg said fire crews called by the witness promptly extinguished the incendiary fluid that left the synagogue's facade covered in soot and damaged a pane of glass. State Premier Winfried Kretschmann described the Saturday morning incident as a "vile attack."

"It shows the insidious face of **antisemitism**, which we oppose clearly and unambiguously," said Kretschmann.

Throwing incendiary devices at synagogues was "repulsive," said Thomas Strobl, interior minister for the state.

Anyone who tried to set fire to a Jewish place of worship would be "met with the full force of the law," insisted Strobl, a senior member of Chancellor Angela Merkel's Christian Democrats (CDU), who govern with the Greens in the southwestern state.

Precautions for Jewish residents

Kretschmann's bureau said Baden-Württemberg's Office of Criminal Investigation (LKA) had sent cybercrime and forensic experts to Ulm, a university city of 125,000 on the Danube River bordering Bavaria, some 90 kilometers (55 miles) from Stuttgart. Consultations were taking place with Jewish community members in Ulm, where security had been "ramped up" and risk assessments made for Jewish facilities in other parts of the state, added Kretschmann's chancellery.

Ulm's synagogue, which opened in 2012, stands near the site of its old house of worship that was [gutted by Nazi German paramilitaries on Pogrom Night of November 1938](#) and later demolished by the city's Nazi-era administration.

[At that 2012 opening](#), Kretschmann said German society must never again fail the Jewish people, and the model of cooperation between state and religion must be fostered and cultivated.

Echoes of Halle attack

Saturday's arson attack precedes a [regional election Sunday](#) in Germany's eastern state of Saxony-Anhalt, whose [city of Halle was the scene of a synagogue attack in October 2019](#) that ended in two deaths.

A lone gunman attempted to blast his way into Halle's synagogue, where, inside, 51 people were observing Yom Kippur, the holiest day in the Jewish calendar.

His arsenal failed to breach its locked outer gates. He shot dead two other people — a 40-year-old woman passerby and a 20-year-old painter eating his lunch in a nearby kebab shop.

Photo : Cybercrime and forensic experts have been sent to Ulm-[ipj/mm](#) (epd, dpa, AFP)

FECRIS sentenced for slanderous statements about Jehovah's Witnesses

Willy Fautré, Human Rights Without Frontiers

HRWF (25.05.2021) - A German court has condemned FECRIS (European Federation of Centres of Research and Information on Cults and Sect) for defaming the general movement of Jehovah's Witnesses in public statements made in the framework of its conferences from 2009 to 2017 that were posted later on its website.

On 27 November 2020, the District Court of Hamburg released its verdict in the case *Jehovah's Witnesses in Germany v. FECRIS* (File ref. 324 O 434/18) about a long list of 32 claimed defamatory statements: 17 were fully justified and one was partially justified by the Court.

Facts of the case

On its website – www.fecris.org – the Defendant has published reports from its annual conferences as well as articles in the German language, that are disputed. Among others:

“On May 19, 2017, report on the European conference in Brussels, “Cult undue influence and the process of radicalization, a question for debate” (hereinafter: “2017 Brussels Report”; Annex K1; applications 1.1–1.6)

On June 21, 2016, report on the European conference in Sofia, “Women in cults, gurus and victims” (hereinafter: “2016 Sofia Report”; AnnexK17; applications 1.7–1.18)

On March 24, 2014, report on the European conference in Brussels, “Cults and the False Debate on Human Rights” (hereinafter: “2014 Brussels Report”; Annex K27; applications 1.19)

On October 13, 2012, report on the conference in Salses-le-Chateau, "Apocalyptic cults: failed utopias and consequences for followers" (hereinafter: "2012 Salses-le-Chateau Report"; Annex K30; applications 1.20–1.21)

On May 7, 2011, report on the conference in Warsaw, "Systematic abuse in cults: testimonies and evidence" (hereinafter: "2011 Warsaw Report"; Annex K33; applications 1.22–1.26)

Report on the conference in St. Petersburg, "Destructive Cults and Human Rights" on May 15 and 16, 2009 (hereinafter: "2009 St. Petersburg Report"; Annex K34; applications 1.26–1.29)

Report on the conference "State responsibility to protect citizens against destructive cults" in Pisa on April 12, 2008 (hereinafter: "2008 Pisa Report"; Annex K36; applications 1.30–1.31)

Article entitled "Cults and European Values" (Annex K37; application 1.32)

On account of the statements in dispute, the Plaintiff sent a warning notice via its authorized legal representatives on May 18, 2018 and asked the Defendant to submit a declaration of discontinuance that carried a penalty (Annex K39). The Defendant did not react to the warning notice." (Source: The court decision, available in German and in English on [HRWF website](#)).

Court decision concerning the 32 disputed statements

- "Under penalty of a Court-imposed administrative fine for each case of infringement – or, in the event this cannot be collected, administrative detention or administrative detention for up to six months – the Defendant shall refrain from distributing and/or causing to be distributed the following regarding the Plaintiff and its members, as has been done on www.fecris.org" and the Court listed the litigious statements concerned."
- Additionally, the Court ruled that "the value of the matter in dispute is set at EUR 176,000."
- FECRIS is ordered to pay Jehovah's Witnesses in Germany EUR 2,217.45 in prelitigation costs.
- Jehovah's Witnesses must bear 46% and FECRIS 54% of the costs of the lawsuit.
- "The judgment is provisionally enforceable with regard to the operative part under point I. of the judgment, but only against provision of security to the amount of EUR 94,500; otherwise, in each case, against security to the amount of 110% of the respective amounts to be enforced."

Anti-Semitism in Germany : « As Muslims, we must tackle this »

In Germany, protests about the Israel-Gaza conflict involved antisemitic outbursts. Local Muslim communities have distanced themselves from these.

By Kersten Knipp

DW(19.05.2021) - <https://bit.ly/3wcjKEa> - He knew exactly why he was going to the demonstration. Mazen, a 30-year-old Syrian refugee, wanted to protest against the violence he believed Israel was inflicting unjustly. And he explained his motivation for attending the demonstration like this: "My friends and I are opposed to the illegal expulsion of people from their homes. We say no to the killing of children and the unnecessary bombing of buildings and vital infrastructure."

Mazen, who did not want to use his full name, displays a position that the general German public finds controversial. Not least because the parties to this conflict and their supporters present crucial details in different ways.

Israel explains its evictions in the Jerusalem neighborhood of Sheik Jarrah as property disputes. As a result of the 1949 peace agreement, the law says Jews who were pushed out of east Jerusalem during fighting may reclaim their lost property. The Palestinians say this is illegal expropriation.

With regard to the victims of the armed conflict with Hamas, the Israeli military says that the Islamist terror organization places military assets in the midst of civilian populations and that Israel warns civilians before planned attacks. At the same time, Amnesty International is demanding that such Israeli attacks be investigated as war crimes by the International Criminal Court.

Mazen has a strong opinion on Israel: "I would be a liar if I said that we want to be friends with the state of Israel. But it's there, it exists. We must deal with it." This attitude did not prevent him from joining a protest that was planned jointly by Palestinian and Israeli organizations that are critical of Israel's stance on the Palestinian Territories.

"The whole protest is not antisemitic"

Although Mazen did not see any at the demonstration he attended, he concedes that there had been antisemitic actions at others. "You can't control everyone," he pointed out.

There are always a handful of people at demonstrations who will behave badly, he says. "It was the same in Syria. We would all be demonstrating for democratic values but there would always be some guy in the crowd calling for an Islamic state. In Germany, you get some people calling out antisemitic things. But you cannot say that the whole protest is antisemitic because of that."

At the same time, it is impossible for Germans to ignore the antisemitic utterances from some larger groups at other demonstrations. Participants at a demonstration in Gelsenkirchen yelled out "shit Jews." This has triggered a debate about antisemitism among Muslims and migrants and the community has come under pressure to justify itself.

Referring to a video from the Gelsenkirchen protests, Aiman Mazyek, who heads the Central Committee of Muslims in Germany, made his opinions clear: "(I) definitively condemn such disgusting scenes," he wrote on Twitter. "Those who deplore racism but then spread antisemitic hatred themselves have forfeited everything."

Naming the problem

Eren Guvercin, the founder of the Muslim Alhambra Society in Germany, which promotes international understanding, isn't surprised by the video. Antisemitism among Muslims in

Germany becomes visible occasionally, and most commonly when violence in the Middle East escalates. "But that doesn't mean it doesn't exist in quieter times as well," he said.

Antisemitism is a central ideological component for a number of extremist Islamist organizations, Guvercin explained, and these also try to promote it in more moderate Muslim communities. "This is something we have to deal with as Muslims first and foremost. But often this fails because the problem cannot even be named."

Clearly antisemitic slogans were shouted in some cases, conceded Bulent Ucar, a professor of Islamic theology at Osnabrück University. "There are good arguments against Israel's policy of occupation and dispossession, which is against international law," he told DW. "But there are also polarizing actors, who are loading this political dispute in the Middle East with antisemitism, and then trying to transfer it to Europe. This is not at all acceptable. There is no justification for Jews in Germany to be threatened and harassed. That's inexcusable and a total no-go."

Legitimate criticism or antisemitism?

Orkide Ezgimen, who heads the Discover Diversity project at the Kreuzberg Initiative against antisemitism in Berlin, agrees that different motivations were on display at the demonstrations. There was criticism of Israel's actions against the Palestinians but also a lot of potential for aggressive behavior, some of which include antisemitic sentiments.

"These reference German history, such as the Holocaust," she said. "That is clearly antisemitic. Of course, in a democracy one has the right to demonstrate against the policies of another country — but not in all forms. In the case of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, you have to distinguish very clearly between legitimate criticism and antisemitism."

Problematic reactions

Islamic scholar Lamyia Kaddor makes another important point: "The attacks on synagogues are terrible, they are a disgrace," she emphasized. But the reactions to them from German society are also problematic, she added. "We have been dealing with this [antisemitism] for a long time in this country. But we should not be pitting one minority against another minority. That will only divide our communities further."

As a Muslim, Rachid Amjahad, head of the Düsseldorf-based Society for the Culture and Science of the Maghreb, believes it's crucial to speak out clearly against antisemitism. At the same time, he is opposed to collectively blaming local Muslim communities for the antisemitic attacks. It has always impacted him deeply when mosques are attacked in Germany. "Of course, we wish for solidarity then," he said. "On the other hand, we also have to provide this solidarity when other denominations' institutions are attacked. Solidarity is not a one-way street."

Not acceptable

Guvercin of the Alhambra Society goes a step further. He deplores what he calls the "double standards" among some of the participants of pro-Palestinian demonstrations in Germany: "Those who chant 'shit Jews' in front of synagogues and reject Israel's right to exist are antisemitic and have no interest in peace," he said. "Those who romanticize nihilistic terror organizations like Hamas and who justify their terrorism with reference to the Israeli government's policies, are only accepting the destructive tendencies of a terror organization. This is not acceptable to me as a Muslim."

Theology professor Ucar says that antisemitic tendencies are not all the same. The origin of the families and personal experience also make a difference. "A Muslim from Bosnia, for example, usually has a very different relationship to Israel than a Syrian, for example," he said. Irrespective of this, there is a need for more dialogue, personal exchanges and encounters between Muslims and Jews.

Religious conflicts

In the long term, there is something else to consider, Ezgimen of the Kreuzberg Initiative, said. On one hand, Germany's historical responsibility because of the Holocaust is "completely correct," said Ezgimen, who works mostly with refugees. "But German politics has not yet succeeded in spreading that message to all parts of the population equally," she explained. "A lot of people who have a non-German origin story are dealing with a German culture of remembrance that confronts them with the suffering of others." Sometimes this gives refugees from war and crisis zones the impression that their own experiences are seen as less important. "This quickly leads to a struggle for recognition," she suggested.

In the short term, the focus should be on keeping the impact of the Middle East conflict on Germany in check, said Maghreb Society activist Amjahad. "If protests are being held in front of synagogues, that becomes very dangerous," he concluded. "Because then it turns a territorial conflict into a religious one. And that will be very difficult to resolve."

Photo : Christian MANG – REUTERS

German government makes hate-motivated insults a crime

AP News (12.05.2021) - <https://bit.ly/2Rkp6OQ> - The German government passed a new law on Wednesday making hate-motivated insults a criminal offence that can be punished with a monetary fine or prison of up to two years.

Germany's justice minister said the new law is meant to protect Jews, Muslims, gays, people with disabilities and others.

"It is our responsibility to protect every single person in our society from hostility and exclusion," Christine Lambrecht said, the German news agency dpa reported.

The new measure, which still needs parliamentary approval, includes insulting hate messages sent as texts, emails or letters.

"Members of Jewish or Muslim communities are being taunted and disparaged," Lambrecht said.

Hate crimes and attacks against minorities have been on the rise in Germany in recent years and with the skyrocketing use of social media, targeted insults are becoming commonplace, groups that track hate crimes say.

Under existing legislation, because the insults are personal and not public, they couldn't be punished as incitement to racial hatred.

Germany outlaws Islamist organization Ansaar International

Interior Minister Horst Seehofer has banned the Düsseldorf-based Islamist association on suspicion of financing terrorist groups abroad such as the Palestinian Hamas and al-Shabab in Somalia.

Die Welt (05.05.2021) - <https://bit.ly/3tQkIUM> - Interior Minister Horst Seehofer announced on Wednesday that Germany has banned the Islamist organization Ansaar International and several of its sub-organizations.

"The network finances terrorism worldwide with donations," Seehofer's spokesman Steve Alter tweeted on Wednesday.

Alter quoted Seehofer as saying: "If you want to fight terror, you have to dry up its sources of money."

The Düsseldorf-based Islamist association stands accused of sending funds to terrorist groups abroad including the Al-Nusra Front in Syria, the Palestinian Hamas (which is on a European Union terrorism blacklist) and [Al-Shabab in Somalia](#).

The interior ministry said that some of the money donated would go to projects that could be counted as "directly within the sphere of activity of one or another of these terrorist organizations."

It said some of the group's missionary activities also contravened German law. Where were raids conducted?

Raids were carried out across 10 states on Wednesday morning. Affected states included Rhineland-Palatinate, Baden-Württemberg, Bavaria, Berlin, Brandenburg, Hamburg, North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW), Lower Saxony, Schleswig-Holstein and Hesse.

About half of the 90 people affected were in NRW, the state which Düsseldorf is situated in.

Ansaar International's website says that its humanitarian projects help "people in need at home and abroad," with projects in Lebanon, Sudan and the Palestinian territories advertised.

Which other groups were banned?

The network of associations that have now been banned also includes the Änis Ben-Hatira Foundation (named after the German-Tunisian football player), the Somali Committee for Information and Advice in Darmstadt, the women's rights association ANS.Justice, and second-hand charity stores Umma Shop and Better World Appeal.

German newspaper *die Zeit* reported on its website that the so-called sub-organizations were formally independent but were in fact a network financially dependent on one another, "serving the sole purpose of disguising the flow of money" under the control of the chairman of Ansaar International.

Security authorities carried out a major raid on the Ansaar network in April 2019 during which extensive material was seized, prompting a series of investigations and becoming the starting point for the ban.

Who are Germany's Salafists?

Ansaar and an affiliated organization "spread a Salafist world view and finance terror around the world under the guise of humanitarian aid," Seehofer said.

Children from Germany would be sent to institutions set up by Ansaar International abroad "in order to internalize Salafist extremist content there and carry it back to Germany," he added.

[Some Salafists](#) — strict Sunni Muslims — seek the implementation of Sharia law. Militants advocate violence to establish states with theocratic rule.

Germany's domestic intelligence said in its annual report last year that the country's number of Salafists had increased to an all-time high of 12,150 in 2019, listing them among "Islamist extremists."

According to the report, the number of Salafists had more than tripled since 2011 and the Salafist scene in Germany was going through a "consolidation stage," with followers keeping a low public profile.

Scientology: A conflict between German judicial integrity and prejudiced administrative agencies

By Martin Weightman, Director of All Faiths Network in the UK



New Europe (20.04.2021) - <https://bit.ly/2Yb5SP8> - Certain segments of German politics and administrative agencies have a disreputable approach to freedom of religion that has been perpetuated for the last 30 or more years and which continues to exist as a festering sore in German society.

The latest judgement from the State Administrative Court of Appeal of Baden-Wurttemberg illustrates this most vividly.

The case involved a skilled electrical technician who had been working in secure areas of German and European airports for many years, with irreproachable conduct and contributing to the security of those airports, who happened to have Scientology as his religion.

He was not disseminating Scientology at his work nor involved in any other questionable conduct but for reasons unknown, his membership of Scientology was made known to the State Air Traffic Security Agency who were tipped off by the State Office for the Protection of the Constitution. This was enough for him to be labelled as "unreliable" for no other reason than his long-term religious beliefs. As a result, he lost his job and decided to sue the state for unfair dismissal.

The judgement in the first instance before the Administrative Court of Stuttgart found that he was unfairly dismissed. The State appealed the decision before the Administrative Court of Appeal of Baden Wurttemberg which, in a decision rendered the 4th of March 2021, consequently dismissed the appeal finding that there was no wrongdoing "neither by the plaintiff himself nor for the Scientology Organization" and that Scientology membership does not forward anti-constitutional endeavours.

Hats off to the German courts, but shame on the state agencies that brought this about. Were this an isolated incident it could, perhaps, be put down to some momentary loss of focus, but it is not. For more than 20 years, Scientology has been the target of state agencies.

One far-reaching result of this being numerous examples where various state government agencies require that people working for the government, or private companies that contract with public bodies must sign a statement that they are not a member of the Church of Scientology, nor will work or associate with members of the church. If you do not sign the statement, then you will not get the job or the company will not be able to engage in government-funded contracts. Even these statements have been struck down by some courts but they still continue to be practiced.

There are, in fact, many documented cases of this. The underbelly of the state encourages these practices – certainly not all sectors, but at least a significant number that maintains a wall of discrimination against members of society simply because of their religious beliefs.

Scientologists have been forced to go to court to fight for their right to practice their religion. Government agencies have consistently attempted to label the practice of Scientology as non-religious, yet again and again, in dozens of court cases over the last 35 years, Scientology has won case after case which has affirmed the practice of Scientology is a bona fide religious belief. Perhaps one of the most notable is the decision in *Krüger v. State of Hamburg*, where the Hamburg State Administrative Court of Appeal found in 2004 that Scientologists could claim protection of Article 4 of the German Basic Law, which protects the right to freedom of religion or belief.

The Krüger decision became final when the Federal Supreme Administrative Court on December 15, 2005, upheld it, making it clear that Scientology was a genuine religion and that based on facts, “the reprimand of the defendant, that the decision under appeal would be based on an incorrect understanding of these terms because the teachings of L. Ron Hubbard about the world as a whole as well as to the origin and aim of human life would lack elements in the meaning of transcendental or immanent relations, is unfounded.”

It cannot be a sign of a healthy democracy that this has been happening for so long. Surely it is a symptom of a disease that should be excised before the body is riddled with its cancer. The surgeons of the State, here the courts, and thanks to them, have kept the illness at bay – but for how long must this go on?

And let not us Europeans attempt to sweep this dirty laundry under the carpet (to mix metaphors). After all, if we as a proclaimed seat of democracy, allow such illness to perpetuate we are in a weakened moral position to make pronouncements on others.

In the interests of transparency, I must declare a self-interest here. I am a Scientologist. I openly declare it! I am also the Director of an interfaith group in the UK which has members from many religions. This group is the national member body of the UK’s Interfaith Network which is supported by the UK government and is an umbrella grouping of interfaith activity around the UK. I also have direct experience of the extent of discrimination in Germany and so I know what I am talking about.

Of course, my religion should not matter, or Christians writing about discrimination of Christians around the world or Jews opposing Jewish hate crimes would not be able to speak out either. But if I were living in Germany, I would likely be dismissed and pilloried for stating the above.

It is surely time that the entrenched political influence and the completely unconscionable actions of the State Security Services were far more intensely placed under a microscope by the international community – certainly by other European countries and the European Union in particular where pronouncements on religious freedom violations around the world are quite rightly made by a range of Freedom of Religion or Belief Special Envoys and appointees but for various reasons refrain from speaking about discrimination issues closer to home.

State of Baden-Württemberg loses in court against a Scientologist

Scientology membership does not forward anti-constitutional endeavours – scientologists follow the law.

EUtoday (16.04.2021)- <https://bit.ly/3ts9k2g> - The State Administrative Court of Appeal for Baden-Württemberg dismissed the State's appeal against a positive judgement won by a Scientologist before the Stuttgart Administrative Court.

The statements in the above headline follow from two court decisions in Baden-Württemberg: a judgement by the Administrative Court Stuttgart of 02.06.2020 (file no. 3 K 6690/19) and a recent decision of the State Administrative Court of Appeal for Baden-Württemberg of 04.03.2021 (file no. VGH 8 S 1886/20) which had dismissed the application of the state to grant their motion for leave to appeal.

The state, represented by the State Air Traffic Security Agency, had been tipped off by the State Office for Protection of the Constitution about the Scientology membership of the plaintiff. The agency subsequently adjudicated the Scientologist "unreliable" basing this solely on his long-term religious membership, insinuating that he would thereby pursue illegitimate purposes. Consequently, despite his impeccable conduct, the Scientologist was prohibited from entering the security areas of any German airport. The exercise of his profession in his specialist airport related activities as an electrical engineer had factually become impossible, even though because of his professional skills, he had contributed to the security of airports across Germany and Europe in a very responsible fashion for decades.

Pointing to the Supreme Administrative Court case law on the security of air traffic, the first instance Administrative Court in Stuttgart had already confirmed the following to be factual with regards to the Scientologist: ***"That the individual conduct of the plaintiff was directed in any way towards the use of violence or that the result of his conduct was directed ... to materially damage the protection of the free and democratic basic order, the existence and the security of the Federation and the States, is not evident."***

The plaintiff had credibly demonstrated to the Court, that – just like for any other Scientologist - his membership in Scientology is solely about his spiritual development as a human being. The Stuttgart Administrative Court therefore concluded, that from his

Scientology membership, ***“no factual indicators are evident that the plaintiff pursues or supports or has pursued or supported any anti-constitutional endeavours in the meaning of ... the Federal Law on the Office for Protection of the Constitution during the last ten years.”***

That the Church of Scientology and their members respect the fundamental principles of the liberal-democracy as protected in the above law, not only follows from the legal obligations in the corporate statutes of the Church but also, *inter alia*, from the Church’s and its members’ worldwide commitment to human rights as has been evident throughout the past decades.

The State Administrative Court of Appeal has now confirmed the above judgement as final. The blanket insinuation in the agency’s appeal that the plaintiff, by reason of his Scientology membership, would ***“not constantly be willing to respect the legal order”*** was rightfully rejected by the Appeal Court with the words: ***“That this can generally be presumed for members of Scientology, is not evident.”*** As required by the Church of Scientology from all its members, the plaintiff had always respected the law as evident from his impeccable conduct. The Appeal Court also came to the same conclusion as the first instance court with regards to the agency’s second absurd insinuation against the plaintiff and the Church alleging there was “willingness to use violence”. The Appeal Court also set the record straight on this point stating there is ***“nothing evident”*** to that effect, ***“neither for the plaintiff himself nor for the Scientology Organisation.”***

Eric Roux, Vice President of the European Office of the Church of Scientology for Public Affairs and Human Rights, commented: *“The above court findings have rightfully confirmed that the Church and its members are law abiding. They show that the past discriminatory pillorying against the Church and its membership in Germany by certain state security agencies are nothing but blatant human rights violations. The time is well past that such agencies must be subject to international human rights law standards as provided for in guarantees of international treaties of the UN, the OSCE and the EU Human Rights Convention so that they act to protect what they were established for and not to make a Swiss cheese out of the human rights principles that they were meant to protect in the first place.”*

Download [Court Judgement](#).

Photo: Eutoday