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Ownership of Russian Orthodox Church transferred to Hungary to avoid sanctions

New government in Belgium will continue to finance the Russian Orthodox Church despite the war

Radio Prague International (06.02.2025) - The Russian Orthodox Church has transferred the ownership of its assets in Karlovy Vary to its Hungarian branch so as to prevent the Czech state freezing them. This includes ownership of the Church of Sts Peter and Paul which now falls under the Metropolitan Emeritus of Budapest and Hungary.

For years, Russia has had a strong presence in the West Bohemian spa town of Karlovy Vary, where Russians owned homes, hotels and restaurants. That presence has diminished in recent decades, particularly after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine and Czechia's decision to approve its own version of the US Magnitsky Act enabling it to impose sanctions against individuals and legal entities for serious violations of Czech and international law.

Under the Czech version of the Magnitsky law, Czechia can impose sanctions against individuals in the interest of national security, protection of human rights and combatting terrorism.

The first name placed on the national sanctions list by the Czech government was that of Patriarch Kirill, head of the Russian Orthodox Church, for supporting Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Kirill's inclusion on the list means that he is barred from entering Czechia, any assets he has in the country have been frozen and he cannot undertake any financial transactions here.

In 2023 the Czech government also moved to freeze Russian state-owned property on Czech territory by placing the company that manages these assets on its national sanctions list. The move was to guarantee that income generated by the company in this country will not be used to finance the war in Ukraine.

Last year Nikolai Lishchenyuk, an Orthodox priest at the Church of Sts Peter and Paul in Karlovy Vary was expelled from Czechia, and later stripped of the city's honorary citizenship, over suspicions of hostile activities and espionage, including supporting separatist movements within the EU.

Fearing an asset freeze the Russian Orthodox Church, a sub-council of the Patriarch of Moscow and all Russia in the Czech Republic, swiftly transferred its ownership of the Church of Sts. Peter and Paul in Karlovy Vary to the Hungarian branch of the Russian Orthodox Church, a friendly offshoot of the same institution.

Experts who had warned that a transfer of assets was on the cards have expressed disappointment that it was not prevented and the assets were not frozen in time.

As of this year, the new head of the Russian Orthodox Church in the Czech Republic is Bishop Hilarion, whose lay name is Grigory Valeriyevich Alfeyev, Metropolitan Emeritus of Budapest and Hungary.

Belgium silently turns a blind eye and continues to finance the Russian Orthodox Church

[HRWF](#) - Despite the weaponizing of the Russian Orthodox Church/ Moscow Patriarchate by President Vladimir Putin in his war against Ukraine, [Belgium silently continues to finance the Russian Orthodox Church.](#)

Belgium finances a number of state-recognized religions and Orthodoxy has been one of them since 1985. A wide range of Orthodox Churches are present on the Belgian territory and the Russian Orthodox Church is one of them.

The Russian Orthodox Church in Belgium (ROC/ Belgium) is fully associated with the Moscow Patriarchate which has endorsed Putin's decision to invade Ukraine and has called his "special operation" a "holy war."

While Patriarch Kirill in Moscow was blessing the war and encouraging Russian citizens to express their patriotism by joining the army, the ROC in Belgium kept silent about Russia's invasion of Ukraine, about the crimes against humanity perpetrated in Bucha and other places, about the deportation of Ukrainian children in Russia and many other war crimes.

However, in June 2024, high-level clerics of the ROC in Belgium were invited to and participated in the celebration of [Russia's Day at the Embassy of the Russian Federation in Brussels](#): the rector of the Church of the Intercession of the Most Holy Theotokos in Brussels, priest Adrian Alaoui and his wife; the rector of the Sainte-Juste-Anne church in Laeken (Brussels), the priest Andrei Popa and his wife; the cleric of Saint-Nicolas Cathedral in Brussels, priest Alexandre Motorny; priest Andrey Krayushkin, cleric of the Holy Trinity Church in Brussels, and his wife; The secretary of the Belgian diocese, Archpriest Pavel Nedosekin, with his wife. One can imagine the content of the official speeches in Russia's embassy.

On this occasion, an article and [photos](#) were posted on the website of the ROC in Belgium.

The new government in Belgium appointed in early February prefers to turn a blind eye to Russia's war on Ukraine and to silently go on financing the ROC in Belgium.

14 scholars in religious studies from over 10 European countries say “Do not liquidate Jehovah’s Witnesses”

Letter to the authorities of the Czech Republic about the announced liquidation of Jehovah’s Witnesses

[Version in Czech](#)

This letter was sent (in Czech) to

**the President of the Czech Republic
the Prime Minister of the Czech Republic ,
the Minister of Culture and the Department of Churches and Religious Associations
the Minister of Justice
the Minister of Foreign Affairs**

HRWF (28.01.2025) - We, the undersigned, are scholars in religious studies who have been monitoring the teachings and the practices of Jehovah’s Witnesses for many years

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Dr Richard SINGELENBERG (Netherlands), Independent scholar

Dr Rik TORFS (Belgium), Former Senator, Honorary Rector Catholic University of Leuven

we want to express our deep concerns about the intention of the [Head of the department for religious affairs under the Ministry of Culture](#) to deregister the religious association of Jehovah's Witness on the following grounds

- refusing blood transfusion for minors
- damaging the social ties of individuals and their family members

We wonder if you have consulted the Venice Commission, the OSCE/ ODIHR and the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief before starting such a serious procedure.

We also want to bring the following points to your attention:

Blood transfusion and minors

There is not a single court decision in the Czech Republic against Jehovah's Witnesses on the question of blood transfusion and minors.

Jehovah's Witnesses' right to request alternatives to blood transfusion have been upheld by the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) ([PINDO MULLA v. SPAIN](#), 17 September 2024).

This practice based on their religious beliefs was also addressed in *Jehovah's Witnesses of Moscow and Others v. Russia*, no. 302/02, 10 June 2010: "132 ... [by refusing blood transfusion] Jehovah's Witnesses – just make a choice of medical procedures but still wish to get well and do not exclude treatment altogether".

The alternatives to blood transfusions have proved to be efficient, also when treating minors¹. In the rare event a hospital or a surgeon would deem it necessary to ignore the rejection of blood transfusion to a minor patient, the matter can be decided by a court. The Jehovah's Witnesses parents will not object to such a court decision.

Social ties of individuals and their family members

¹ See for example: Lo BD, Pippa A, Sherd I, Scott AV, Thomas AJ, Hendricks EA, Ness PM, Chaturvedi S, Resar LMS, Frank SM. Clinical outcomes, blood utilization, and ethical considerations for pediatric patients in a bloodless medicine and surgery program. *Anesth Analg* 2024;138(2):465-74 at p. 473. [[PMID: 38175737](#)]

A number of final high court decisions have ruled in favor of Jehovah's Witnesses on their religious practice of limiting contact with former congregants in a number of Western countries, including Belgium², England³, Germany⁴, Ireland⁵, Italy⁶ and Poland⁷. The removal of members for religious reasons is a common practice among most religions that are registered in the Czech Republic with, at times, more severe consequences. Stigmatizing Jehovah's Witnesses on that basis would not only be illegitimate but also discriminatory.

For these reasons, we urge you NOT to liquidate the association of Jehovah's Witnesses.

14 vědci v oblasti religionistiky z více než 10 Evropských zemí říkají "Ne likvidaci Svědků Jehovových"

Dopis úřadům v České republice ohledně oznámeného zrušení registrace svědků Jehovových

[HRWF](#) (27.01.2025) - My, níže podepsaní odborníci v oblasti religionistiky, kteří již mnoho let sledujeme učení a postupy svědků Jehovových,

We, the undersigned, are scholars in religious studies

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² Court of Appeal of Gent (case no. 2021/N17625, judgment of 7 June 2022)

³ Queen's Bench Division of the High Court of Justice of England and Wales ([2019] EWHC 1349 (Q.B.D.), judgment of 7 June 2019)

⁴ The Administrative Court of Berlin case no. VG 27 K 79.10, decision of 11 December 2012

⁵ The Supreme Court (case no. 95/2006, judgment of 19 October 2007)

⁶ Supreme Court of Cassation case no. 9561, section no. 1 n 13 April 2017

⁷ The Torun Regional Court case no. IC 1093/18, judgment of 14 March 2019

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Dr. Richard SINGELENBERG (Nizozemsko), Nezávislý vědec

Dr. Rik TORFS (Belgie), bývalý senátor, emeritní rektor Katolické univerzity v Leuvenu

chceme vyjádřit své hluboké znepokojení nad záměrem [vedoucího samostatného oddělení církví a náboženských společností Ministerstva kultury](#) zrušit registraci Náboženské společnosti Svědkové Jehovovi z následujících důvodů:

- odmítání krevní transfuze u nezletilých
- narušování společenských vazeb jednotlivců a jejich rodinných příslušníků

Klademe si otázku, zda jste před zahájením takto závažných kroků konzultovali Benátskou komisi, OBSE/ODIHR a zvláštního zpravodaje OSN pro svobodu náboženského vyznání.

Rádi bychom také upozornili na následující body:

Krevní transfuze a nezletilí

V České republice neexistuje jediné soudní rozhodnutí proti svědkům Jehovovým v otázce krevní transfuze a nezletilých.

Právo svědků Jehovových požadovat alternativy ke krevní transfuzi bylo potvrzeno Evropským soudem pro lidská práva ([PINDO MULLAOVÁ proti ŠPANĚLSKU](#), 17. září 2024).

Tato praxe založená na jejich náboženském přesvědčení se řešila také v případě *Moskevští svědkové Jehovovi a ostatní proti Rusku*, č. 302/02, z 10. června 2010: „132 ... [odmítnutím krevní transfuze] svědkové Jehovovi – pouze volí mezi lékařskými postupy, ale stále si přejí uzdravit se a nevylučují léčbu jako takovou“.

Alternativy ke krevním transfuzím se prokázaly jako účinné i při léčbě nezletilých^[1]. Ve vzácných případech, kdy by nemocnice nebo chirurg považovali za nezbytné ignorovat nesouhlas s podáním krevní transfuze nezletilému pacientovi, může o věci rozhodnout soud. Rodiče z řad svědků Jehovových takovému soudnímu rozhodnutí nebudou odporovat.

Společenské vazby jednotlivců a jejich rodinných příslušníků

Pokud jde o náboženskou praxi omezování kontaktu s bývalými svědky, řada nejvyšších soudů v západních zemích, včetně *Belgie*^[2], *Velké Británie*^[3], *Německa*^[4], *Irska*^[5], *Itálie*^[6] a *Polska*^[7], pravomocně rozhodla ve prospěch svědků Jehovových. Vyloučení z náboženských důvodů je běžnou praxí mezi většinou náboženství registrovaných v České republice, a to někdy s ještě závažnějšími důsledky. Stigmatizovat svědky Jehovovy na tomto základě by bylo nejen neoprávněné, ale také diskriminační.

Z těchto důvodů vás naléhavě žádáme, abyste registraci svědků Jehovových **NERUŠILI**.

S pozdravem.

Willy Fautré,
Ředitel Human Rights Without Frontiers (Brusel)
<https://hrwf.eu>

Poznámka pod čarou

[1] Viz například: Lo BD, Pippa A, Sherd I, Scott AV, Thomas AJ, Hendricks EA, Ness PM, Chaturvedi S, Resar LMS, Frank SM. Clinical outcomes, blood utilization, and ethical considerations for pediatric patients in a bloodless medicine and surgery program. *Anesth Analg* 2024;138(2):465–74 na str. 473. [[PMID: 38175737](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/38175737/)]

[2] Odvolací soud v Gentu (případ č. 2021/N17625, rozsudek ze 7. června 2022)

[3] Queen's Bench Division of the High Court of Justice of England and Wales ([2019] EWHC 1349 (Q.B.D.)), rozsudek ze 7. června 2019

[4] Správní soud v Berlíně, případ č. VG 27 K 79.10, rozhodnutí z 11. prosince 2012

[5] Nejvyšší soud (případ č. 95/2006, rozsudek z 19. října 2007)

[6] Nejvyšší kasační soud, případ č. 9561, oddělení č. 1, ze 13. dubna 2017

[7] Okresní soud v Toruni, případ č. IC 1093/18, rozsudek ze 14. března 2019

Czech Republic in the footsteps of Russia? Jehovah's Witnesses threatened with liquidation

The Ministry of Culture is about to start proceedings whose consequences would be draconian.

by Massimo Introvigne

[Bitter Winter](#) (02.01.2024) When Petr Pavel was inaugurated as the new President of the Czech Republic in March 2023, he vowed to align the country with European Union human rights standards. He also emerged as a staunch critic of the human rights violations in Russia. Some developments with respect to small minority religions were in fact regarded by local human rights activists as hopeful.

However, these hopes have now been shattered by an unprecedented move by the Czech Ministry of Culture. It appears that the Czech Republic still maintains among its laws a [statute on "religious freedom"](#) dated January 7, 2002, which includes some draconian Russian-style, or perhaps Soviet-style, provisions on the "liquidation" of religious organizations. According to this law, "a church is formed as a legal entity by registration" (article 6.1). Registration can be denied and, once obtained, can be lost, including if the church's activity are deemed to be "in violation of the law" (article 22.1.c).

This is a vague provision, but the consequences are not vague at all. If it believes that a "violation of the law" has occurred, "the Ministry shall, prior to initiating de-registration proceedings, instruct the registered church or association of churches to cease and desist from engaging in such unauthorized activities. Should the registered church or association of churches continue to engage in said activities, the Ministry [of Culture] shall initiate its procedure for de-registration" (article 22.2).

"The registration of a church or an association of churches is terminated when the Ministry's decision to de-register becomes effective" (article 24.1). "Upon the de-registration of a church, the church and all of its recorded church legal entities shall be liquidated" (article 24.2). Liquidators will be appointed and they "shall notify the Ministry of the conclusion of liquidation proceedings within five business days of said conclusion" (article 24.5). Unless the liquidated church had previously indicated another church to which the proceeds of the liquidation should be transferred, "the net proceeds shall accrue to the State, which shall use the net proceeds for the benefit of other registered churches" (article 24.6).

Happily, these draconian provisions are rarely applied. However, on September 5, 2024, the Ministry of Culture sent to the Czech Religious Association of the Jehovah's Witnesses (RAJW) the cease and desist letter mentioned in article 22.2. The Ministry gave to the RAJW three months for ceasing and desisting from certain "activities," warning them that if they do not comply within the term the de-registration proceedings will be initiated. Various meetings between representatives of the Jehovah's Witnesses and the Ministry failed to resolve the issue. On November 26, the Jehovah's Witnesses received confirmation that the cease and desist letter stands. Since on December 5, the three-month period ended, they are currently waiting for an official communication from the Ministry about the initiation of the deregistration proceedings.

The "activities" the Ministry regards as illegal are all features of the Jehovah's Witnesses' teachings and lifestyles that have been examined by courts of law throughout the world and regarded as lawful and protected by domestic and international principles of freedom of religion or belief, with the exception of Russia and partially of Norway. In the latter country, however, a [court decision](#) is under appeal and does not threaten the Jehovah's Witnesses with liquidation but "only" (between brackets, because these are serious limitations of their religious liberty) with the loss of state subsidies and certain other faculties, including the possibly of celebrating legally valid marriages.

The first and second objections of the Czech Ministry deal with the same matter being litigated in Norway. It is alleged that by teaching the practice of counseling members not

to associate with ex-members (except cohabiting relatives) who have been expelled as guilty and unrepentant of serious sins or have publicly disassociated themselves from the organization, the Jehovah's Witnesses violate the right of their members to change their religious beliefs. The fear, it is argued, compels members who would like to leave to remain in the organization.

The second objection adds that this is even more dangerous when "children" (meaning minors) are expelled, or they remain within the Jehovah's Witnesses but are prevented from associating with friends and relatives who have been expelled or have publicly left the organization. The Czech Ministry's letter does not clarify whether any minor was expelled in the Czech Republic. Cases of expulsion of minors are indeed extremely rare.

This matter has been litigated in a good dozen of countries, resulting in decisions **unanimously favorable to the Jehovah's Witnesses**, except (as mentioned earlier) in Russia and in a non-final decision in Norway. Courts have observed that in fact nobody can be compelled to associate with persons, including relatives, they no longer want to associate with, and that suspending relationships is a common fact in our societies as a consequence of all sorts of quarrels. Former spouses and other relatives often cease relationships with divorced ex-spouses. In fact, opponents do not ask courts to compel Jehovah's Witnesses to associate with expelled or apostate ex-members, which would be practically impossible, but to prohibit the Jehovah's Witnesses from teaching that relationships should be suspended.

However, in some form, that relationships should cease is clearly taught in the Bible in 1 Corinthians 5:13 ("Expel the wicked person from among you") and 5:11 ("Do not even eat with such people"), and 2 John:10-11 ("Do not take them into your house or welcome them. Anyone who welcomes them shares in their wicked work": all quotes from the New International Version). How to read these passages is a matter of Biblical interpretation that cannot be adjudicated by secular courts without a gross violation of freedom of religion.

The third charge is that the Jehovah's Witnesses use "psychological coercion to create dependency, which leads to psychological harm to individuals or their family members or damage to their social relationships." By reading the explanatory part of the cease and desist letter, it seems that "psychological coercion" is allegedly practiced by avoiding relationships with expelled or apostate ex-members, which would make the third charge a duplicate of the first. On the other hand, the charge itself uses the language of the **discredited theory of "brainwashing"** or "psychological subjection" allegedly used by religious movements, **debunked since the past century** by mainline academic scholars of religion and rejected by courts of law in most democratic countries (with the exception of France, whose campaigns against "cults" have received widespread international criticism).

The fourth charge relates to the question of blood transfusions to minors, including in cases when they are "necessary to save the child's life." Again, the letter does not mention whether specific incidents happened in the Czech Republic.

The Czech Ministry failed to consider that in most democratic and medically advanced countries the issue is becoming moot as hospitals can provide appropriate care that does not involve a blood transfusion. On their **official website**, Jehovah's Witnesses refer to various medical studies showing that "patients, including children, who do not receive transfusions usually fare as well as or better than those who do accept transfusions." When Jehovah's Witnesses wish to receive assistance in finding doctors who can provide

bloodless treatment, they can seek the help of Hospital Liaison Committees, which have been established for this purpose.

In most democratic countries, courts—including the European Court of Human Rights in 2010 (“[Jehovah’s Witnesses of Moscow and Others v. Russia](#),” June 10) and 2022 (“[Taganrog LRO and Others v. Russia](#),” November 22), and the Italian Supreme Court of Cassation in 2020 (3rd Civil Session, decision of 4–23 December 2020, no. 29469)—have ruled that adult patients have a right to refuse any medical treatment and protected the right of the Jehovah’s Witnesses to refuse blood transfusions. In several jurisdictions, this also applies to “mature minors.”

As for minors who are not “mature,” in the rare cases when doctors believe a blood transfusion is absolutely necessary, and parents or guardians would not authorize it, that dispute can be resolved by a court. In such a case, a parent who is one of Jehovah’s Witnesses will respect the decision made by the court. Courts in democratic countries have also recommended that such measures are adopted only exceptionally. As stated in the Canadian appeal court decision of “*M. (J.) v. Alberta (Director of Child Welfare)*” (2004 ABQB 512, para. 43), the State “must be careful not to presume that the doctor has always recommended the only acceptable treatment and that Jehovah’s Witness parents are always wrong in denying their consent for treatment by way of blood products. Such a paternalistic attitude impairs the parents’ [constitutional] rights...” In Italy, one of the countries with the largest per capita population of Jehovah’s Witnesses, courts have held that by choosing medical alternatives to blood transfusions, parents who are Jehovah’s Witnesses are not displaying “parental inadequacy,” but are instead conscientiously exercising constitutional rights afforded to all parents (Minors Court of Genoa, no. 1109/19, 6 May 2019; Minors Court of Milan, no. 1110/2014, 15 January 2014).

The Jehovah’s Witnesses are asked to cease and desist from certain “activities.” However, they cannot cease and desist from their teachings about avoiding relationships with expelled members and blood transfusions, because they believe that these are mandated by the Bible, that the Bible is the word of God, and that Christians “must obey God rather than human beings” (Acts 5:29, New International Version). They are not alone in this attitude. When Australia (and other countries) passed laws compelling priests to breach the secret of confession and report to the police penitents who confessed sins of child sexual abuse, the Vatican **promptly instructed** Australian bishops and priests that they should refuse to do so and if necessary go to jail rather than breaching the confessional seal that for Catholics comes from God.

The attitude of the Czech authorities is also discriminatory, since **several other religious organizations** have similar or harsher provisions about relationships with expelled or “apostate” ex-members.

In the Czech Republic the Jehovah’s Witnesses are offered the alternative of renouncing beliefs that are part of their interpretation of the Bible, thus “disobeying God,” or being de-registered, having their assets liquidated, and being put in the impossibility to operate as a religious organization. That this happens in Russia is unfortunately normal. It is a scandal when it is proposed in a democratic country and a member state of the European Union. It should not be allowed to happen.