

LIECHTENSTEIN 2015 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution stipulates everyone is free to choose his or her faith. It makes the state responsible for “protecting” the religious interests of its people and Roman Catholicism the state religion. The law prescribes criminal penalties for religious discrimination or “debasement” of any religion. The government granted the Muslim community a residency permit for one imam and a short-term residency permit for an additional imam during Ramadan. The government participated in a public commemoration of the Holocaust in Auschwitz on the occasion of the 70th anniversary of its liberation.

The group European Action advocated freedom to question and deny the Holocaust. In March a Liechtenstein member of European Action referred to the Holocaust as “the lie of the century” during a presentation in Switzerland. The independent Liechtenstein Institute, a nongovernmental organization, noted the same level of online right-wing extremism, including anti-Semitism, in 2014, the last year for which data were available, as in 2013.

The U.S. embassy in Bern, Switzerland, which is responsible for diplomatic relations with the country, encouraged the promotion of religious freedom in discussions with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, focusing primarily on access to religious education and religious services. Embassy staff discussed religious freedom issues, such as the prohibition on ritual animal slaughter and the extent of societal discrimination, with civil society organizations, including Amnesty International, the Islamic Community of Liechtenstein, and the Liechtenstein Friends of Yad Vashem.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 38,000 (July 2015 estimate). According to the 2010 census, religious group membership is as follows: 76 percent Roman Catholic, 6.5 percent Protestant Reformed, 5.4 percent Muslim, 1.3 percent Lutheran, 1.1 percent Christian Orthodox, 1.8 percent other religious groups, 5.4 percent no religious affiliation, and 2.5 percent unspecified.

The great majority of Muslims are Sunni, predominantly from Turkey, Kosovo, and Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Jewish community consists of approximately 30

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individuals. Immigrants come mainly from Switzerland and Austria and predominantly belong to the same religious groups as native-born citizens.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution states all people shall have the freedom to choose their faith and the state shall provide protection of the religious “interests” of its people. The constitution specifies Roman Catholicism is the state religion “with full protection from the state.”

There is no law requiring the registration of religious groups. Religious groups may organize themselves as private associations, which enables public registration in the commercial registry, and must do so to receive government funding for such activities as providing religious education in schools.

The law prohibits the slaughter of animals without anesthetization, making the ritual slaughter of animals for kosher and halal meat illegal. Importation of such meat is legal.

The criminal code prohibits any form of discrimination against or disparagement of any religion or its adherents by spoken, written, or visual means. The criminal code also prohibits the denial, trivialization, and justification of genocide and other crimes against humanity, including the Holocaust. Penalties can include a prison sentence of up to two years.

The law requires religious education be included in the curriculum in public schools, both at the primary and secondary school levels. Catholic or Protestant religious education is compulsory in all primary schools; exemptions are available for children whose parents request them from the Office of Education. Parents are not required to give a reason for exemptions. The Catholic Church determines the Catholic curriculum, with minimal supervision from municipalities. Religious groups provide teachers, and they are partially supported by the government.

At the secondary school level, parents and students choose between traditional religious education, which their religious community organizes, and a general course in religion and culture taught from a sociological perspective.

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Government Practices

The government granted the Muslim community a residency permit for one imam and a short-term residency permit for an additional imam during Ramadan. The government granted the one short-term residency permit each year to an imam of either the Turkish Association or the Islamic Community of Liechtenstein, who agreed not to allow or preach sermons that incited violence or advocated intolerance. An imam from the Turkish Association received the short-term permit for 2015. Clergy from other religious groups were required to abide by the same rules and regulations.

Municipalities owned cemeteries and allowed all religious groups, including Muslims, to bury their dead in them.

Funding for religious institutions derived mainly from the municipalities, according to parliamentary or municipal decisions. The government provided Catholic and Protestant churches annual contributions in proportion to membership; smaller religious groups were eligible to apply only for grants for projects, such as language courses, aimed at facilitating the societal integration of foreigners. All religious groups were exempt from certain taxes, but not from fees.

According to the Foreign Ministry, the working group for the integration of Muslims discontinued efforts to establish a government-supported Islamic umbrella organization due to the inability of the two main representative bodies of the Muslim community, the Islamic Community and the Turkish Association, to reach an agreement on the founding of such an association. The Islamic Community and Turkish Association each continued to maintain regular contact with the government.

The government did not issue visas for religious workers, granting them short-term residency permits instead. To receive such a permit, applicants needed to complete theological studies, belong to a nationally known religious group, and be sponsored by a registered clergy member of the religious group. The Immigration and Passport Office normally processed immigration requests for clergy.

On January 27, Foreign Minister Aurelia Frick traveled to Auschwitz with two secondary school students to commemorate the 70th anniversary of its liberation and to raise awareness of the Holocaust among youth at home. Several

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parliamentarians attended a Holocaust remembrance service organized by the Liechtenstein Friends of Yad Vashem in Vaduz.

Three public primary schools offered Islamic education on a biweekly basis, with a total of 60 students between the ages of six and 12 attending classes.

Schools continued to include Holocaust education as part of their curriculum and held discussion forums on the Holocaust to mark the Day of Remembrance on January 27. The Liechtenstein Secondary School invited a local Jewish artist, whose parents survived the Holocaust, to the school on January 27 to discuss and remember the victims of National Socialism in the context of the government's public Holocaust commemoration. The secondary school of the municipality of Eschen dedicated its remembrance service to a young Polish girl who died in the Auschwitz concentration camp.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

Several churches opened their chapels to other denominations and faiths, when needed, including to Orthodox and Islamic groups.

The European Action organization continued to advocate for freedom to question and deny the Holocaust on its website. The Liechtenstein Institute's yearly monitoring report on right-wing extremism noted groups such as European Action maintained the same level of online activity in 2014, the last year for which data were available, as in 2013. The online activity monitored by the institute was generally directed at foreigners but included anti-Semitic language, such as criticism of "American-Jewish hegemony" and the "power machine of the Zionists." The report stated these groups had formulated their extremist views in ways that rendered them nonpunishable in the framework of criminal law.

In March a Liechtenstein member of European Action referred to the Holocaust as "the lie of the century" during a presentation in the Swiss canton of St. Gallen. The member appealed for the re-establishment of the German Reich and praised the volunteers of the Nazi SS. European Action published the presentation on its website. Police opened an inquiry into a suspected violation of the penal code for "denying, trivializing, or justifying" genocide and other crimes against humanity.

According to the foreign ministry, Muslims occasionally encountered problems finding spaces to rent because some landlords were unwilling to rent out property

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for use for Muslim prayers. There were no mosques in the country and only one Islamic prayer room.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

U.S. embassy staff discussed religious freedom issues, such as access to religious education and services, with the foreign ministry. Embassy staff discussed the effects of existing laws on religious practices, such as the prohibition of ritual animal slaughter, with civil society organizations, including Amnesty International, the Islamic Community of Liechtenstein, and the Liechtenstein Friends of Yad Vashem.