

HUNGARY 2020 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The Fundamental Law (constitution) provides for freedom of religion, including freedom to choose, change, or manifest religion or belief, cites “the role of Christianity” in “preserving nationhood,” and values “various religious traditions.” It prohibits religious discrimination and speech violating the dignity of any religious community and stipulates the autonomy of religious communities. On December 15, parliament amended the constitution, adding language stating that children must be guaranteed an “upbringing based on values stemming from our country’s constitutional identity and Christian culture.” The amendment became effective on December 23. There are four tiers of religious groups, all of which may receive state funding and income-tax allocations from members. The Budapest-Capital Regional Court registered seven religious groups and rejected one, while four applications remained pending. The Constitutional Court rejected a challenge to the religion law, which some religious and civil society groups considered discriminatory. The Muslim community said authorities continued to refuse to issue permits for cemeteries. Jewish organizations condemned the appointment of a new director of a state-run radio station whom they said had a long record of making anti-Semitic statements; the government’s inclusion of anti-Semitic writers and removal of a Nobel laureate Holocaust survivor from a mandatory school reading list; and the bestowal of a high state award to a historian widely viewed as anti-Semitic. They also continued to criticize the proposed House of Fates Holocaust museum as an attempt to obscure the country’s role in the Holocaust. Senior government officials continued to make statements in defense of what they called a “Christian Europe.”

The Action and Protection Foundation, which monitored anti-Semitism, reported 16 anti-Semitic incidents in the first half of the year, one of discrimination, 11 of hate speech, and four of vandalism. Muslim leaders said that while physical assaults were rare, verbal insults were frequent, and there were cases of anti-Muslim discrimination. Members of radical right-wing and neo-Nazi groups again commemorated the attempted “breakout” by German and Hungarian troops in February 1945 during the siege of Budapest by the Soviet Red Army. They laid wreaths to honor Nazis and their collaborators, and some wore historical uniforms and insignias. The commemoration received favorable coverage from some government-aligned media. A European Union (EU)-funded survey of residents in the country found 41 percent did not sympathize with Muslims and 15 percent did not sympathize with Jews; 49 percent agreed that Jews had substantial influence on

world developments and the economy, and 34 percent believed the Holocaust received too much attention. Ten and nine percent, respectively, thought Jews and Muslims were frequent targets of hate speech.

The U.S. Ambassador, other embassy officials and visiting U.S. Department of State representatives held meetings with officials from the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) and other government agencies, as well as with local Jewish groups and the World Jewish Restitution Organization, to discuss restitution of heirless Jewish property seized during the Holocaust, historical commemoration of the Holocaust, and the House of Fates Museum concept. In other meetings with the government and with religious leaders, embassy representatives advocated religious freedom and tolerance and discussed provisions of the religion law, anti-Semitism, and anti-Muslim rhetoric. In January, the embassy highlighted on its website and on social media the anniversaries of the liberation of Auschwitz and the Budapest Ghetto, International Holocaust Remembrance Day, and the attendance by the Charge d'Affaires at three commemoration events hosted by the Holocaust Memorial Center and Jewish groups.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 9.8 million (midyear 2020 estimate). According to the 2011 national census, which included an optional question on religious affiliation, of the 73 percent of the population that responded, 51 percent identified as Roman Catholic, 16 percent as Hungarian Reformed Church (Calvinist), 3 percent as Lutheran, 2 percent as Greek Catholic, and less than 1 percent as Jewish; 23 percent reported no religious affiliation, and 2 percent said they were atheists. Other religious groups together constituting less than 5 percent of the population include Greek Orthodox, the Faith Congregation (a Pentecostal group), the Church of Scientology (COS), Russian and other Orthodox Christian groups, other Christian denominations, Buddhists, Muslims, and the Hungarian Society for Krishna Consciousness. The Hungarian Evangelical Brotherhood (MET) has approximately 8,500 members, according to a 2013 news report, and the Hungarian Pentecostal Church approximately 9,300 members, according to the 2011 census. The World Jewish Congress estimates the Jewish population to be between 35,000 and 120,000 persons. Local Jewish organizations estimate approximately 100,000 citizens with Jewish heritage live in the country, primarily in Budapest. Other religious groups are distributed throughout the country.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The Fundamental Law, the country's constitution, provides for freedom of conscience and religion, including freedom to choose or change religion or belief, and freedom – alone or in community with others and in public or in private – to manifest religion or belief through religious acts or ceremonies, or in any other way, in worship, practice, and observance. It prohibits religious discrimination, as well as speech “aimed at violating the dignity” of any religious community. On December 15, parliament approved a constitutional amendment, which became effective on December 23, stating that children must be guaranteed an “upbringing based on values stemming from our country's constitutional identity and Christian culture.”

The constitution's preamble states, “We recognize the role of Christianity” in preserving the nation and “value the various religious traditions” in the country. The constitution stipulates separation between religious communities and the state, as well as the autonomy of religious communities. According to the constitution, the state may, at the request of religious communities, cooperate with them on community goals.

A 2018 parliamentary amendment to the 2011 religion law entered into force in 2019. The purpose of the amendment was to implement judgments of the country's Constitutional Court and the European Court on Human Rights. The law establishes a four-tier system of, in descending order, “established (or incorporated) churches,” “registered churches” (also called “registered II”), “listed churches” (also called “registered I”), and “religious associations.” The term “church” in the law refers to any religious community, not just Christian ones, and religious groups in any category may use “church” in their official names. All previously incorporated religious groups retained their status in the first tier of the new system as established churches. To become an established church requires approval by parliament; the Budapest-Capital Regional Court has jurisdiction to rule on applications for registration within the other three categories. Religious groups in all four tiers have “legal personality,” which grants them legal rights, such as the right to own property.

Religious entities that do not apply for legal status in one of the four categories are still able to function and conduct worship. The law states constitutional protection of freedom of religion also applies to unregistered groups.

To qualify for established church status, a religious group must first have registered status and then conclude a comprehensive cooperation agreement with the state for the purpose of accomplishing community goals. The government submits the comprehensive agreement to parliament, which must approve it by a two-thirds majority vote. A registered church becomes an established church from the day parliament approves the comprehensive agreement. Established churches are eligible to benefit from significant state subsidies for the performance of public service activities.

To qualify for registered church status, a religious group must have received tax allocations from an average of 4,000 persons per year in the five-year period prior to the application. This status also requires that the group either have operated as a religious association for at least 20 years in the country or at least 100 years internationally, or have operated as a listed church for at least 15 years in the country or at least 100 years internationally.

To qualify for listed church status, a religious group must receive tax allocations from an average of 1,000 persons per year in the three-year period prior to the application for status and have operated as a religious association for at least five years in the country or for at least 100 years internationally.

To qualify for religious association status, a religious group must have at least 10 members.

The law allows the government to negotiate individual cooperation agreements with all four tiers of religious groups for the performance of public service activities and support of faith-based activities. The agreements' duration depends on the status of the religious community, ranging from a five-year maximum for religious associations to 10 and 15 years for listed and registered churches, respectively, and unlimited duration for established churches. These agreements may be prolonged.

Religious groups that agree not to seek state or EU funding (including personal income tax allocations) for their religious activities may qualify as registered or listed churches without fulfilling the requirement regarding the number of personal income tax allocations. The applicant religious community must perform primarily religious activities and may not be a criminal defendant or have been convicted of a crime during the previous five years, under sanction for "repeated violation of accounting and management rules," or considered a national security threat. The court decides whether to grant status as a registered or listed church based on an

examination of the criteria above. In reviewing these applications, the court may consult church law, church history, or ecclesiastical or academic experts, and may also seek the opinion of the national security services.

Religious groups that agree not to seek government or EU funding but accept financial support at a later stage must report it to the court within 15 days of the disbursement of the aid. To avoid losing its status or a reclassification to the lower association tier, the religious group has eight days to declare to the court that it has returned the funds, requested cancellation of its religious registration status, or complied with the individual tax allocation requirement to become a registered or listed organization. The religious group or prosecutor's office may appeal the court's decision on the status of the group to the Budapest-Capital Court of Appeal.

The law stipulates the minister responsible for church issues, based on information received from the court, shall manage an electronic database of religious groups with legal status, accessible to the public free of charge. The database is publicly accessible at the government's central webpage, kormany.hu.

The law allows taxpayers to allocate 1 percent of their income taxes to any religious community in any of the four categories, starting with the 2020 tax year. Religious groups may use these funds as they wish. Only established and registered churches (the two highest tiers) are eligible to receive a state subsidy supplementing the 1 percent tax allocations.

According to the law, the Budapest-Capital Regional Court may dissolve a religious community with legal status – with the exception of established churches – if its activities conflict with the constitution or law or if the court rules its registration should have been denied. Parliament may dissolve an incorporated church if the Constitutional Court finds it is operating in violation of the constitution. If a religious community is dissolved without a legal successor, its assets, after satisfying creditors, become the property of the state and shall be used for public interest activities.

Thirty-two churches have established (previously known as “incorporated”) status. These include the Roman Catholic Church; a range of Protestant denominations; a range of Orthodox Christian groups; other Christian denominations, such as The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Seventh-day Adventists, and the Salvation Army; three Jewish groups (Federation of Hungarian Jewish Communities, Unified Hungarian Jewish Congregation, Hungarian Autonomous

Orthodox Jewish Community); and the Hungarian Society for Krishna Consciousness, the sole Hindu group registered as a church. The list also includes Buddhist and Muslim umbrella organizations, each encompassing a few individual groups.

By law, the state may neither operate nor establish any body for controlling or monitoring religious groups. Their doctrines, internal regulations, and statutes are not subject to state review, modification, or enforcement. Copyright law protects their names, symbols, and rites, while criminal law protects buildings and cemeteries.

The constitution establishes a unified system for the Office of the Commissioner for Fundamental Rights (ombudsperson). The ombudsperson investigates cases related to violations of fundamental rights – including religious freedom – and initiates general or specific measures for their remedy. These measures do not have the force of law.

Treaties with the Holy See regulate relations between the state and the Catholic Church, including financing of public services and religious activities and settling claims for property seized by the state during the Communist era. These treaties serve as a model for regulating state relations with other religious groups, although there are some differences in the rights and privileges the state accords to each of the religious groups with which it has agreements. The state has also concluded formal agreements with the Hungarian Reformed Church, Hungarian Lutheran Church, Federation of Hungarian Jewish Communities (Mazsihisz), and four Orthodox churches.

According to the law, established, registered, and listed churches may perform pastoral services in prisons and hospitals. Other laws indicate religious associations may also have the right to provide services at these facilities.

Military and law enforcement personnel may freely practice their religion in private and also at their workplaces if their religious practice does not violate their mandatory service duties. The Roman Catholic, Reformed, and Lutheran Churches, and Jewish congregations (which the government generally calls “historical churches”) may provide chaplain services to the military without seeking permission. Other religious groups must seek permission to offer such services.

Penitentiaries generally allow inmates free practice of religion and provide them with special diets, such as kosher, vegetarian, and pork-free meals. Historical churches may provide pastoral services in prisons without special permission, but other religious groups may do so only within official visiting hours as outlined in individual agreements and with permission from the penitentiary. Similarly, historical churches receive automatic access to patients in hospitals to provide pastoral services, while other groups may do so only under certain conditions, such as providing services only during visiting hours.

One hour per week of education in faith and ethics or general ethics is mandatory through the first eight grades of public school. Parents and students choose between the faith and ethics class offered by an established church of their choosing or a secular ethics course taught by public school teachers. Other religious groups are not entitled to provide religious education as part of the mandatory curricula in public schools but may offer extracurricular, optional religious education in public schools at the request of parents or students. Private schools are not required to offer faith and ethics or general ethics classes.

All religious groups registered in one of the four categories have the right to open their own schools. The state provides a subsidy, based on the number of students enrolled, for employee salaries at all such schools. Only established churches automatically receive a supplementary subsidy for the schools' operating expenses. Other religious groups may apply for a supplementary operational subsidy, and the Ministry of Human Capacities (MHC) may sign an individualized contract with them to cover these costs.

The law also affords all religious groups with legal status the right to assume operation of public schools if more than 50 percent of the parents and adult students enrolled at the school sign a petition to do so and the MHC approves the change. In these cases, the state may continue to fund the schools. Whether newly established or converted from public status, religious schools are free to conduct their own religious teaching without government input and to make faith education mandatory and not substitutable with an ethics class. The state inspects both religious and public schools every two years to ensure they conform to legal standards.

The constitution prohibits speech that violates the dignity of any religious community. The law prohibits "calling for violence" – or inciting hatred – against a religious community or its members, punishable by up to three years' imprisonment. The law provides a maximum punishment of three years in prison

for impeding someone else through violence or threats from freely exercising his or her religion or abusing an individual because of his or her religious affiliation.

Assault motivated by the victim's actual or presumed religious affiliation is a felony punishable by one to five years in prison. Violence against a member of the clergy is classified as violence against an "individual providing public service" and is also punishable with a prison sentence of one to five years. Any person who engages in preparation for the use of force against any member of a religious community is guilty of a misdemeanor punishable by imprisonment not exceeding two years.

The law prohibits public denial, expression of doubt, or minimization of the Holocaust, genocide, and other crimes against humanity committed by the National Socialist or Communist regimes, punishing such offenses with a maximum sentence of three years in prison. The criminal code makes wearing, exhibiting, or promoting in public the swastika, the logo of the Nazi SS, or the symbol of the Arrow Cross – a fascist, anti-Semitic party that allied with Nazi Germany – in a way that harms the human dignity or the memory of victims a misdemeanor, punishable by five to 90 days' detention.

The law provides for the lifting of official immunity of a member of parliament (MP) who incites hatred against religious groups or publicly denies crimes of the Communist or National Socialist regimes. No MP has been the subject of such a proceeding.

The country is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Government Practices

Religious groups with pending applications for incorporated (changed to "established") church status prior to the entry into force of a 2019 amendment to the religion law had the possibility to apply under a simplified registration process until January 6. According to the PMO, there were 16 such groups with pending applications, of which 11 reapplied under the simplified process. Of these 11 groups, the Budapest-Capital Regional Court rejected the application of the Church of the Nazarene and registered six groups as listed churches: the Hungarian Baha'i Community, Sim Shalom Progressive Jewish Association, Bet Orim Reform Jewish Community Association, Shalom Church of Biblical Congregations, Church of Evangelical Friendship, and the Hungarian Drukpa Kagyu Buddhist Community. Four other applications remained pending at year's end. The court

also registered the Hungarian Daoist Church as a listed church in a regular procedure based on the number of its members.

Some religious groups stated that while the new registration process constituted progress, it did not restore their full status from before the adoption of the 2011 religion law and the new framework for church recognition by the state. Court decisions regarding the registration process for registered churches, listed churches, and religious associations were available at the central website of the courts, birosag.hu. According to the PMO, no religious groups qualified under registered church status; in order to become a registered church, a group must comply with the requirement of receiving income tax allocations from an average of at least 4,000 persons per year in the previous five years, a period which could only begin in 2019 (the year the current law came into force) or later. The number of established churches remained unchanged.

The tax authority expanded the list of religious groups (including all four tiers) eligible to receive a 1 percent personal income tax allocation from members and stated that those wishing to become eligible in 2021 should request a technical tax identification number by December 31.

The HCLU, an NGO representing some religious groups deregistered in 2011, reported that their clients did not apply for registration because they believed the amended version of the law was still discriminatory. In May, the Constitutional Court rejected HCLU's petition, filed in 2019, challenging the amended law. The HCLU argued the amended law did not guarantee equal treatment of churches by the state and was therefore unconstitutional. According to the Constitutional Court, state cooperation to achieve community goals and state support for religious activity, although related to the exercise of the freedom of religion, was not a fundamental right under the constitution, and constitutional protection of religious communities was equal, regardless of the legal evaluation of the religious community, the number of its members, or its participation in community activities. The HCLU, which already had a legal case ongoing regarding the previous law at the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR), argued there that the amended law did not remedy the violations of the prior law. The ECHR case continued at year's end.

The MHC halved operational state subsidies for the Hungarian Evangelical Brotherhood's (MET) educational institutions. MET's leader Pastor Gabor Ivanyi said the MHC also informed him it would not extend its educational agreement for the next academic year, which endangered the sustainability of MET's schools,

attended by approximately 2,200 mostly Roma children. MHC attributed the funding cuts to budgetary restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic and what it said was the lack of concrete results achieved by these schools. In December 2019, Ivanyi published an open letter in which he rejected Prime Minister Viktor Orban's statements that his was a Christian government.

The COS reported that appeals procedures against the Data Protection Authority's (DPA) seizure of its documents in Budapest and Nyiregyhaza remained pending at various stages at different courts. The DPA investigated the COS for alleged criminal abuse of personal data and fined it and its central organization a total of 40 million forints (\$135,000) in 2017. The Church also reported state authorities revoked a Russian-Ukrainian missionary couple's residence permit in 2019 and expelled a Kazakh missionary from the country in January. The COS appealed both decisions, in which the authorities justified the expulsion of missionaries they deemed a "real, direct, and serious threat to national security."

The COS stated that the certificate of occupancy for its headquarters in Budapest remained pending at the Csongrad County Government Office, while a court order allowed the COS to continue using the building.

The Organization of Muslims in Hungary (OMH) said the problem of insufficient cemetery space for Muslims remained unresolved. OMH also reported the government had not completed its restoration of the state-owned Yakovali Hasan Mosque in Pecs, ongoing since 2018, which prevented the local Muslim community from using the mosque as a place of worship.

In September, MET said the state-owned utility company attempted to disconnect MET's institutions from the gas network due to nonpayment, endangering the operation of its nursery, college, homeless shelter, and hospital. Pastor Ivanyi stated MET would be able to pay its outstanding bills if the state would compensate it for damages sustained in 2016-2019 stemming from the group's loss of church status.

According to the PMO, during the 2019-2020 school year, churches or church-run higher educational institutions operated 17.1 percent of elementary and secondary schools (compared with 16.7 percent in 2018-19), and religious associations operated 0.2 percent. Churches or church-run higher educational institutions operated 10 percent of preschools (with students aged three to seven), compared with 9.7 percent run by incorporated churches in the previous year, and religious associations operated 0.2 percent. There were 222,944 students – 49.3 percent of

whom were in Catholic schools – studying at preschools and elementary and secondary schools operated by churches and religious organizations, compared with 217,204 in the previous year.

At a school opening ceremony on August 31, Deputy Prime Minister Zsolt Semjen stated that church-run schools were instrumental in preserving a Christian identity through raising “professionals whose skills are in harmony with faith.” Semjen cited Eurostat figures showing that Hungary’s GDP-to-church-support ratio was the highest in the EU, adding that the number of church-run schools in the country had doubled since 2010. The PMO State Secretary in charge of church issues, Miklos Soltész, stated on September 4 that the government had allocated 106 billion forints (\$357.2 million) to three main churches for kindergarten development projects, with the Catholic Church receiving 67 billion forints (\$225.8 million), the Reformed Church 30 billion forints (\$101.1 million), and the Evangelical Church 9 billion forints (\$30.3 million).

A cartoon by Gabor Papai published by the daily independent *Nepszava* on April 28 showed the chief medical officer who oversaw the government’s COVID-19 pandemic response looking at Jesus on the cross and saying, “his underlying conditions caused” his death. According to media commenters, the cartoon was intended to criticize the government’s response to the pandemic and, in the critics’ view, the chief medical officer’s attempt to minimize the number of deaths in the country attributable to COVID-19. The cartoon sparked outcry from the Christian Democratic People’s Party and State Secretary for the Aid of Persecuted Christians Tristan Azbej, who accused Papai of blasphemy and sued the outlet. Government-aligned media launched what was characterized as a campaign of intimidation against Papai; for example, Szent Korona (Holy Crown) Radio station asked its followers to share his home address, because “there are many who would pay him a visit.”

According to OMH, Muslims serving prison sentences regularly received meals with pork meat or pork fat, despite complaints.

On January 6, state-run Kossuth Radio announced the appointment of Beatrix Siklosi as its new director. Citing what they described as Siklosi’s long record of making and sharing anti-Semitic and racist statements – including posting racist jokes and linking to the anti-Semitic website *kuruc.info* on social media as well as hosting Holocaust denier David Irving on one of her previous shows – 21 Jewish organizations published a joint open letter on January 27 to the public media organization MTVA’s Chief Executive Officer, Daniel Papp, asking him to

terminate Siklosi's appointment. Papp rejected the accusations of anti-Semitism against Siklosi as unfounded. Chief Rabbi of the Unified Hungarian Jewish Congregation (EMIH) Slomo Koves stated that Siklosi's appointment was "unacceptable," and Mazsihisz referred to its statement from 2014 condemning Siklosi's appointment to another position, adding that it maintained its concerns regarding her.

On August 20, the government awarded the Hungarian Order of Merit to historian Erno Raffay, whom media and other historians have criticized for disseminating anti-Semitic views. At a public forum in 2015, Raffay complained about the number of Jews in the country before the Holocaust, stating, they "pushed us out from our positions in science, schools, academy, university, banking, estates, and professions." European Commission Coordinator on Combatting Anti-Semitism Katharina von Schnurbein criticized Raffay in a tweet on August 25 for openly spreading "anti-Semitic speech and conspiracy myths."

Jewish groups Mazsihisz and EMIH expressed concern about the government's decision to include writers widely viewed as anti-Semitic, including member of the Arrow Cross Party Jozsef Nyiro and convicted war criminal Albert Wass, while removing Nobel laureate for literature and Hungarian Holocaust survivor Imre Kertesz as mandatory reading material in the new national curriculum, which became effective on September 1 in elementary and secondary public schools.

Several Jewish leaders criticized Laszlo Biro, a Jobbik Party member and the opposition parties' unsuccessful joint candidate in the October 11 by-election in Borsod County, for anti-Semitic and racist statements. Biro's previous social media comments included referring to Budapest as "Judapest" and complaining about the number of foreign Jews staying at hotels in his district. EMIH Chief Rabbi Koves said that it was worrying that "the parties that support him [Biro] indirectly legitimize anti-Semitism." Earlier in August, referring to Biro's comments, Mazsihisz president Andras Heisler said his organization condemned "acts of incitement against any ethnic, religious, or sexual minority."

During a local council meeting on June 25, Imre Lazlo, mayor of a Budapest district and member of the opposition Democratic Coalition Party, said that "The work [Hitler] had accomplished" prior to becoming *Time* magazine's Man of the Year in 1938 "practically brought advancement for Germany, in a spectacular way, after the global recession. What happened afterwards does not really fit into this picture." On June 26, Laszlo issued a statement to apologize for his remarks,

highlighting his Jewish roots and that many of his family members were killed in Nazi death camps.

The opening of the House of Fates, a proposed new Holocaust museum and education center in Budapest, remained pending. The museum concept, which leading Jewish groups and Holocaust scholars criticized as an attempt to obscure the role of the World War II-era Hungarian state and its leader, Miklos Horthy, in the Holocaust, continued to generate criticism. Horthy allied the country with Nazi Germany and deported more than 400,000 Jews to Nazi death camps. Chief Rabbi Koves of EMIH, which owned the museum, stated in November that he was working with design firms and historians and predicted the potential opening on or before the 80th anniversary of the 1944 deportation of Hungarian Jews in 2024.

At year's end, the government had not shared its final research assessment into heirless and unclaimed property, nor had it yet agreed to requests by the World Jewish Restitution Organization (WJRO) for further discussions on a roadmap to begin negotiations. In April 2019, the WJRO presented the government with its assessment of the government's second set of research on heirless property.

When speaking about a proposal from a Jewish, Hungarian-born, U.S. citizen investor on how the EU should finance the COVID-19 recovery fund, Prime Minister Orban said in an interview in April that "they really love interest," which some observers described as a veiled anti-Semitic message. In April, some government-aligned media said that the same investor was "probably" betting against the nation's currency and responsible for its weakening in the spring.

In a November opinion piece published by progovernment media outlet *Origo.hu*, Ministerial Commissioner and director of the Petofi Literary Museum Szilard Demeter called the same American financier the "liberal Fuhrer" and wrote that Europe was his "gas chamber," with "poisonous gas" flowing from the capsule of a "multicultural open society." Referring to the debate over the EU's proposed mechanism that conditioned payments from the EU budget on respect for the rule of law, Demeter described Poles and Hungarians as "the new Jews" targeted by "liber-Aryans" who are told they "have a big nose (sic)...stink...and are full of lice." Mazsihisz, EMIH, the American Jewish Committee Central Europe office, and the International Auschwitz Committee, among others, condemned Demeter's comments, and all major opposition parties called for his resignation. On November 29, Demeter stated he would retract his article and delete his Facebook page "independently of what I think." He added, "Those criticizing me are correct in saying that to call someone a Nazi is to relativize, and that making parallels with

Nazis can inadvertently cause harm to the memory of the victims.” As of December, government officials continued to defend Demeter’s continued tenure as a ministerial commissioner, stating that he had retracted the piece and apologized.

Government officials continued to make statements in defense of a “Christian Europe.” In an essay published on the occasion of the start of the fall parliamentary session, Prime Minister Orbán wrote in the daily *Magyar Nemzet* on September 21 that while Central European countries were choosing a migration-free future, the majority population in large Western European cities and 20 percent of the European population would be Muslim by 2050. On August 31, Deputy Prime Minister Semjen stated the government had built or refurbished approximately 3,000 churches in the Carpathian basin since 2010, and he pledged that “none of those churches will be turned into mosques or shopping malls.”

In January, Prime Minister Orbán and his wife attended the International Holocaust Remembrance Day commemoration at the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camps to mark the 75th anniversary of the camp’s liberation. Orbán posted a photo on Facebook of a guard’s tower with the barbed wire fence in the background and a quote from the Old Testament, “Tell it to your children,” and media published a photo of Orbán lighting a candle at the Hungarian memorial to the victims of the Birkenau camp. In a speech at the European Jewish Organization Symposium commemorating the same anniversary, Justice Minister Judit Varga stated that the country had “zero tolerance for anti-Semitism,” adding, “Manifestations of anti-Semitism are met with a determined response by the state leadership,” and that Hungary was “the most secure country for Jews in Europe.”

At year’s end, the government had provided 216.4 billion forints (\$729.2 million) to established churches (compared with 64.8 billion forints – \$218.4 million – during 2019), of which 96 percent – 209 billion (\$704.3 million) – went to the four historical churches. The Roman Catholic Church received 161.7 billion forints (\$554.9 million), the Reformed Church 37.7 billion forints (\$127 million), the Evangelical Church 6.8 billion forints (\$22.9 million), Mazsihisz two billion forints (\$6.7 million), EMIH 534 million forints (\$1.8 million), and the Jewish Orthodox community 281 million forints (\$947,000). The religious groups that received the bulk of the government’s financial support used the funds for such activities as building maintenance; public educational and social services; religious instruction and cultural activities; community programs and investments; employee wages, and faith-based activities for citizens living abroad. The government provided an additional 211.3 million forints (\$712,000) to other religious groups.

Jewish groups inaugurated synagogues that had been renovated with state funding. In September, the Lakitelek People's College, established by Deputy Speaker of Parliament Sandor Lezsak, transferred the ownership of a wellness resort called "Hungarikum Liget," consisting among other things of a hotel, winery, a riding house, and a footgolf course, to the Szeged-Csanad Catholic archdiocese. The government provided 30 billion forints (\$101.1 million) in state support for the project, according to press reports.

In November, the Hungarian Reformed Church elected former Minister of Human Capacities Zoltan Balog as Bishop of the Dunamellek Diocese.

According to statistics the tax authority published on September 9, 114 churches and religious groups received 1 percent personal income tax allocations. In 2019, only the 32 established – or in the previous terminology "incorporated" – churches were eligible for this tax allocation. As in previous years, the churches receiving the most allocations were the Catholic Church, with 708,237 persons contributing 3.9 billion forints (\$13.1 million); Hungarian Reformed Church, with 292,768 persons contributing 1.6 billion forints (\$5.4 million); and Lutheran Church, with 80,237 persons contributing 478 million forints (\$1.6 million). The Hungarian Society for Krishna Consciousness ranked fourth, with 71,470 persons contributing 448 million forints (\$1.5 million). Both reform Jewish groups (Sim Shalom and Bet Orim) became eligible to receive 1 percent personal income tax allocations, in addition to the other three established Jewish groups of Mazsihisz, EMIH, and Orthodox. Among the Jewish groups, Mazsihisz received the largest allocation.

According to the PMO, religious organizations provided government-funded social services to 220,446 persons and child protection services to 16,048 persons during the year. The Catholic Church received 28.6 percent of government funding provided to churches for these purposes, the Reformed Church 26 percent, and the Hungarian Pentecostal Church 14.7 percent.

In March, the Lutheran Church signed a cooperation agreement with the government to carry out social and educational activities. In July, the Faith Church (a Christian church that belongs to the Pentecostal movement) concluded a comprehensive cooperation agreement with the government. Building on a previous agreement from 2006, Deputy Prime Minister Zsolt Semjen and church leader Reverend Sandor Nemeth stated at the signing ceremony that the agreement provided legal and financial guarantees for the operation of the church's institutions.

The country is a member of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

The NGO Action and Protection Foundation, which monitors anti-Semitism, reported 16 anti-Semitic incidents in the first half of the year, including one case of discrimination, 11 of hate speech, and four of vandalism. Muslim organizations did not collect statistical data; however, OMH reported that while physical assaults were rare, verbal insults were frequent, in particular against persons wearing headscarves or who had darker skin and spoke a foreign language. According to OMH, the majority of the population regarded Muslims with suspicion.

An estimated 500 to 600 members of what were widely described as radical right-wing and neo-Nazi groups from Hungary and other European countries gathered on February 8 for the “Day of Honor” in Budapest that commemorated the attempted “breakout” of German and Hungarian troops in February 1945 during the siege of the city by the Soviet Red Army. Dressed in black and carrying flags of their respective far-right movements, they laid wreaths to honor Nazis and their collaborators. While police initially banned the event, the Budapest-Capital Regional Court subsequently overturned the ban. Separated by a line of police, some 300 to 500 counterdemonstrators chanted and drummed during the event. According to media, “There were no major conflicts – while there were smaller hassles.” The commemoration was followed by a march along the route of the attempted siege-breakers in which some participants wore historical uniforms and insignias. The commemoration received favorable coverage in some government-aligned media. No government officials condemned the event and no charges were brought against the participants.

On March 1, approximately 1,000 people took part in a march in Budapest, organized by the far-right party Mi Hazánk and the Betyarsereg and 64 Counties extremist groups, honoring the centennial of World War II-era Hungarian leader Miklos Horthy’s coming to power.

According to OMH, a job interviewer, commenting on a Muslim interviewee whose mother tongue was Hungarian, said he wanted a “Hungarian person,” but instead an “Ali” showed up. The Muslim applicant did not receive a job offer and did not take legal action.

According to an EU-funded survey of Hungarian residents, *Combating Anti-Semitism in Central Europe*, conducted in December 2019 in local partnership with the Republikon research institute, 10 percent of respondents believed Jews were frequent victims of hate speech, followed by Muslims (9 percent); 41 percent said they did “not sympathize” with Muslims, while 15 percent did not sympathize with Jews. Regarding attitudes and types of hate speech towards Jews, 45 percent of respondents had encountered anti-Semitic stereotypes, 41 percent insults, 35 percent grotesque depictions of Jews, and 27 percent had not encountered any type of hate speech. Forty-nine percent agreed with the statement that Jews had substantial influence on world developments and the economy, while 38 percent agreed that, for Jews in the country, Israel was more important than Hungary; 34 percent believed the Holocaust received too much attention in public debates.

An analysis by online research group SentiOne of Hungarian comments on social media between January 1 and April 15 found the second highest share of negative comments (24 percent) were directed against Jews, and 43 percent of those who commented on Jews blamed them for the COVID-19 pandemic.

In February, the Pew Research Center published a survey on attitudes towards democratic principles, such as regular elections, free speech, and free civil society, as well as religious freedom, in 34 countries, based on interviews it conducted in its *Spring 2019 Global Attitudes Survey*. According to the findings, 70 percent of Hungarian respondents considered religious freedom to be “very important,” ranking it among their lowest priorities for democratic principles among the nine tested.

In March, Mazsihisz reported that vandals severely damaged gravestones in the Jewish cemetery of Kiskunfelegyhaza, southeast of Budapest. Repair costs were estimated at between 300,000 and 2.5 million forints (\$1,000-\$8,400). Mazsihisz filed a criminal complaint with the police.

Mazsihisz reported that on November 1, vandals smashed three headstones and left human feces on another at a Jewish graveyard in Kecel, south of Budapest.

In June, there were two vandalism cases, one of which concerned a swastika drawn on a poster of a Jewish high school in Budapest, and the other a swastika painted on a public wall in Debrecen, in eastern Hungary.

In October, NGOs reported authorities closed the investigation, without filing charges, into an October 2019 attack in Budapest on the Aurora NGO center – run

by a Jewish youth organization – by approximately 50 members from Legio Hungaria, a group widely described as neo-Nazi.

On February 2, the general assembly of Mazsihisz adopted a proposal to include Sim Shalom and Bet Orim, the country's two reform Jewish groups, as associate members.

The Christian-Jewish Council, an informal platform for discussion for Catholic, Lutheran, Reformed, and Baptist Churches and Jewish groups, held events such as joint prayers on International Holocaust Remembrance Day. Because of COVID-19 restrictions, the council organized fewer events than in previous years.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy and Engagement

In meetings and discussions with the government, including officials from the PMO in charge of church and Jewish issues, the Ambassador and embassy representatives advocated restitution of heirless Jewish property seized during the Holocaust, historical commemoration of the Holocaust, and religious freedom, and discussed provisions of the religion law.

The Ambassador and embassy officials also discussed heirless property restitution with the WJRO.

Embassy and Department of State officials, including the Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Anti-Semitism and the Special Envoy for Holocaust Issues, held discussions with representatives of the Jewish community on anti-Semitism; challenges in promoting tolerance and historical truth in education; the community's relationship with the government; the House of Fates museum concept; restitution issues; activities of the Budapest-based Holocaust Memorial Center; and Holocaust commemoration. The embassy issued a statement in August that said, "Neo-Nazi or other hate groups should not be tolerated in any society," which also referenced Legio Hungaria's October 2019 vandalizing of the Aurora NGO center. In November, the embassy issued a statement condemning an opinion piece that equated debate over EU policy to the Holocaust, noting that there should be no tolerance for Holocaust relativization or minimization.

In January, in remembrance of the 75th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz and the Budapest Ghetto as well as Holocaust Remembrance Day, the Charge d'Affaires participated in three commemoration events hosted by the Holocaust Memorial Center and Jewish groups. On each occasion, the Charge emphasized

the importance of religious freedom with a diverse group of religious leaders, and the embassy amplified that message for a broader audience through its website and social media accounts. Embassy officials also visited the Holocaust Memorial Center to remember those who lost their lives and demonstrate the United States' commitment to "never again," and posted about the visit on social media. The embassy maintained regular contact with leaders of various religious communities, including the four historical groups, as well as Baptists, Muslims, the COS, and religious groups that lost incorporated church status in 2011, such as MET, Bet Orim, and Sim Shalom, to understand their concerns, encourage religious freedom and tolerance, and discuss the effects of the religion law, anti-Semitism, and anti-Muslim rhetoric.

On October 13, the Ambassador gave remarks at an event commemorating Cardinal Jozsef Mindszenty – who was imprisoned for opposing both fascism and communism in the country and took refuge in the embassy for 15 years – in which he emphasized U.S. support for religious freedom for all.

The Ambassador and embassy officials participated in events organized by various Jewish organizations, such as visits to newly inaugurated synagogues in Budapest, to highlight support for the Jewish community and to promote religious tolerance. At all these events, embassy representatives reiterated U.S. support for religious freedom and discussed issues of concern to the Jewish community.