

LIECHTENSTEIN 2019 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 the People” and establishes Roman Catholicism as the state religion. It stipulates other religions may practice their faith within the bounds of morality and public order. There are criminal penalties for public incitement to hatred towards a religious group, religious discrimination, or “debasement” of any religion. The state-subsidized, nonprofit Liechtenstein Institute said Muslims remained unable to obtain local authorities’ permission to establish their own cemetery or build a mosque, and the Islamic Community of Liechtenstein was unable to establish a prayer room. On January 27, government officials held public film screenings and discussions on the Holocaust, and Minister for Home Affairs, Education, and Environment Dominique Hasler spoke on the importance of remembering and raising awareness of the Holocaust.

There was one Muslim prayer room in the country belonging to the Turkish Association. Religious groups in every municipality continued to open their chapels to other denominations and faiths upon request.

The U.S. Embassy in Bern, Switzerland, which is responsible for diplomatic relations with the country, continued to encourage the promotion of religious freedom in discussions with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), focusing primarily on access to religious education, particularly by Muslims, and the establishment of religious infrastructure, such as a mosque or Muslim burial sites. Embassy staff discussed religious freedom issues, such as the extent of societal discrimination and the difficulties Muslims encountered in establishing religious infrastructure, with the Liechtenstein Friends of Yad Vashem, Liechtenstein Institute, and the Liechtenstein Human Rights Association.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 39,000 (midyear 2019 estimate). According to the 2015 census, religious group membership is as follows: 73.4 percent Roman Catholic, 6.3 percent Protestant Reformed, 5.9 percent Muslim, 1.2 percent Lutheran, 1.3 percent Christian Orthodox, 1.8 percent

other religious groups, 7 percent no religious affiliation, and 3.3 percent unspecified.

According to the Liechtenstein Institute, the majority of Muslims are Sunni, predominantly immigrants and descendants of immigrants from Turkey, Kosovo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Macedonia. The Jewish community consists of approximately 30 individuals. Immigrants, who comprise approximately one-third of the country's population, come mainly from Switzerland and Austria and belong predominantly to the same religious groups as native-born citizens.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution states that all persons shall have the freedom to choose their faith and the state shall be responsible for “protecting the religious...interests of the People.” The constitution specifies Roman Catholicism is the state religion, which “shall enjoy full protection from the state.” The constitution stipulates other religions may practice their beliefs and hold religious services “within the bounds of morality and public order.”

Municipalities provide the Catholic Church with certain unique benefits that vary by municipality, including financial support and state maintenance of buildings and grounds owned by the Church.

There is no law requiring the registration of religious groups. Religious groups other than the Catholic Church may organize themselves as private associations, which enables registration in the commercial registry, and must do so to receive government funding for such activities as providing religious education in schools or executing projects to promote social integration of religious minorities, such as offering language courses for foreigners. To register in the commercial registry, the association must submit an official letter of application to the Office for Justice, including the organization's name, purpose, board members, and head office location, as well as a memorandum of association based on local law, a trademark certification, and a copy of the organization's statutes.

All religious groups are exempt from certain taxes. The government has not indicated how it determines whether groups not registered in the commercial registry are religious groups entitled to the tax exemptions.

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

The criminal code prohibits any form of public incitement to hatred or discrimination against, or disparagement of, any religion or its adherents by spoken, written, visual, or electronic means. The criminal code also prohibits the denial, trivialization, and justification of genocide and other crimes against humanity by spoken, written, visual, or electronic means. Penalties may include a prison sentence of up to two years. The criminal code prohibits refusing service to a person or group of persons based on religious affiliation as well as membership in any association that aims to promote discrimination against a person or persons based on religious affiliation.

The law requires the inclusion of religious education in the primary and secondary public school curriculum. Catholic or Protestant Reformed religious education is compulsory in all primary schools. Parents may request exemptions for their children, without providing a reason, from the Office of Education. Children exempted from religious education or who are neither Catholic nor Protestant must attend a class called “Ethics and Religions.” The law also grants the Office of Education the right to organize and finance Islamic education as an elective in public primary schools. Catholic, Protestant Reformed, and Muslim groups provide the teachers for religious instruction, and the Office of Education pays for some or all of their salaries. The Catholic Church determines the Catholic curriculum, with minimal supervision from municipalities. Other religious groups registered as associations may provide teachers for optional religious classes if there is a demand for them and may apply for partial funding of the teachers’ salaries from the government’s integration budget.

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

To receive residency permits, foreign religious workers must have completed theological studies, command a basic level of German, belong to a “nationally known” religious group (the law does not define “nationally known”), and be sponsored by a resident clergy member of the same religious group.

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

Government Practices

In August the Liechtenstein Institute said Muslims had still not been able to obtain permission from local authorities to establish an Islamic cemetery or build a mosque in the country. All religious groups, including Muslims, were allowed to bury their dead in cemeteries owned by municipalities. According to the institute, municipalities did not categorically oppose mosques, but there was little political will among citizens to address the issue.

The institute also stated the Islamic Community of Liechtenstein remained unable to establish a prayer room in the country. The institute reiterated that Muslims faced difficulties in finding suitable rental space for use as prayer room spaces due to societal skepticism and wariness towards Islam, a wariness which it said was also reflected in the reluctance of municipalities to issue a permit for an Islamic cemetery.

During the 2018-19 school year ending in July, public primary schools in six municipalities offered Islamic education twice each month to a total of 66 students between the ages of six and 12.

Public schools continued to include Holocaust education as part of their curriculum and held Holocaust discussion forums to mark International Holocaust Remembrance Day on January 27. In February senior high school students at the Liechtenstein Grammar School traveled to Dachau, Germany to learn about the history of the Holocaust.

In January three high schools, including the secondary school in Eschen, and the University of Liechtenstein hosted the Liechtenstein Friends of Yad Vashem's exhibition "SHOAH. The Holocaust. How was it humanly possible?" Several schools also invited the honorary president of the Liechtenstein Friends of Yad Vashem, Evelyne Bermann, to speak with students about the Holocaust.

Funding for religious institutions continued to derive mainly from the municipalities. Municipalities provided Catholic and Protestant Reformed churches annual subsidies in proportion to membership. The MFA stated municipalities allocated funding for specific purposes, such as paying the rent for places of worship, and remained in regular contact with religious representatives regarding the funding.

According to the MFA, authorities in 2018 dropped criminal proceedings against persons suspected of violating the antidiscrimination law by spray-painting a swastika on an outdoor trash can. The MFA stated authorities concluded that, despite the implied support for Nazi ideology, painting the swastika did not amount to anti-Semitic activity.

The government immigration and passport office continued to issue residency permits to religious workers, valid for five years, instead of visas. Religious workers from Schengen member countries did not require permits or visas. The Turkish Association's imam was not replaced after his 2018 departure – neither the government nor the Turkish Association indicated whether authorities denied a permit for a replacement or the association failed to apply for one.

On January 27, in honor of International Holocaust Remembrance Day, Minister for Home Affairs, Education, and Environment Hasler hosted government officials and the public at the Takino cinema in Schaan for film screenings and discussions on moral guilt, radicalization, the maintenance of historical records, and ways of dealing with the truth about the Holocaust. Parliament President Albert Frick and Liechtenstein Police Chief Jules Hoch attended the opening, which screened the 1924 silent movie “The City Without Jews.” In her speech, Hasler stated the “darkest chapter of humanity’s history” cannot be forgotten and emphasized the need for the government to continue its efforts to raise awareness of the Holocaust.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were no mosques in the country; there was one Islamic prayer room, operated by the Turkish Association, in leased space in Triesen. The Islamic Community of Liechtenstein had a prayer room in the canton of St. Gallen in neighboring Switzerland.

According to the MFA, religious groups in every municipality continued to open their chapels to other denominations and faiths upon request, including to Orthodox and Islamic groups. For example, the Catholic Church of Schaan continued to make its church available to the Christian Orthodox community to hold an Orthodox Easter Sunday service.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy and Engagement

Embassy staff continued to discuss religious freedom issues, focusing primarily on access to religious education by different religious groups, particularly the Muslim

community, and the establishment of religious infrastructure, such as a mosque or Muslim burial sites, with the MFA's specialist for human rights and international law.

Embassy staff also continued to discuss the effects of laws on religious practices and the extent of societal discrimination with the Liechtenstein Friends of Yad Vashem, the Liechtenstein Institute, and the government-supported Liechtenstein Human Rights Association, a consortium of nongovernmental organizations.