

LIECHTENSTEIN 2017 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 with full protection from the state. It stipulates other religions may practice their faith within the bounds of morality and public order. The law prescribes criminal penalties for public incitement to hatred towards a religious group, religious discrimination, or “debasement” of any religion. Municipalities provided funding to Catholic and Protestant groups and financed social integration projects organized by smaller religious groups. In August a revised decree granted the Office of Education the right to organize and finance Islamic education as an elective in public primary schools. The government again granted the Muslim community a residency permit for one imam and a short-term residency permit for an additional imam during Ramadan. In late 2016, Vaduz city authorities rejected a proposal to establish a Muslim cemetery. On January 25, government officials and the Liechtenstein Friends of Yad Vashem again held a public service to remember the victims of the Holocaust, at which the minister for infrastructure, the environment, and sports spoke on the importance of respecting human rights and rejecting anti-Semitism.

The state-subsidized, non-profit Liechtenstein Institute’s yearly monitoring report on extremism stated right-wing extremist groups were less active in 2016, the most recent year for which data were available, than in previous years. There were no mosques in the country; there was one Islamic prayer room run by the Turkish Association. The Liechtenstein Institute stated Muslims faced difficulties in renting prayer facilities due to societal wariness about Islam. Religious groups in every municipality continued to open their chapels to other denominations and faiths, such as Orthodox and Islamic groups, to worship upon request. According to the institute’s report, in July 2016, unknown persons sprayed racist comments and a swastika on the facade of a house used for asylees.

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, focusing primarily on access to religious education. Embassy staff discussed religious freedom issues, such as the extent of societal discrimination, with the Liechtenstein Friends of Yad Vashem and the Liechtenstein Institute.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 38,000 (July 2017 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.

The great majority of Muslims are Sunni, predominantly from Turkey, Kosovo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Macedonia. The Jewish community consists of approximately 30 individuals. Immigrants, which make up approximately one third of the population, 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 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 state-sponsored 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 carrying out projects to promote social integration of religious minorities. To register an association in the commercial registry, the association must submit an official letter of application to the Office of 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.

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 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 religious education be included in the curriculum in public schools, both at the primary and secondary levels. Catholic or Protestant Reformed 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. In August a revised decree entered into force that grants the Office of Education the right to organize and finance Islamic education as an elective in public primary schools. The three religious 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 course on Catholic religious education, 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, and be sponsored by a resident clergy member of the religious group.

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

Government Practices

Funding for religious institutions continued to derive mainly from the municipalities, according to parliamentary or municipal decisions. The government provided Catholic and Protestant Reformed Churches annual contributions in proportion to membership. Smaller religious groups could apply for state funding if registered as private associations. They were eligible to apply only for grants for societal integration projects, such as language courses for foreigners or religious classes in schools. All religious groups were exempt from certain taxes but not from fees.

In August the UN Human Rights Committee issued its concluding observations after reviewing the country's second periodic report on the measures taken to implement the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. The committee welcomed efforts by the government to reorganize its relationship with religious groups to ensure equal treatment of all denominations. It expressed concern, however, at the government's inability to reach agreement with two remaining municipalities to amend the constitution to this end, and the effect this inability had on religious groups other than the Catholic Church. The committee recommended that the government: redouble efforts to reach agreement with municipalities so as to amend the constitution; provide funding on a basis of equality to religious organizations of all religious communities and not to limit the funding to efforts to integrate minority groups; and ensure that "the criteria for the recognition of religions guarantees the freedom of religion and belief and freedom to manifest a religion or belief either individually or in community with others, in public or in private, and in worship, observance, practice, or teaching."

The government immigration and passport office continued to issue religious workers residency permits, valid for five years, instead of visas. The government granted the Turkish Association a residency permit for one imam and a short-term residency permit during Ramadan for an additional imam, who agreed not to allow or preach sermons inciting violence or advocating intolerance. Clergy from other religious groups were required to abide by the same rules and regulations.

All religious groups, including Muslims, were allowed to bury their dead in cemeteries owned by municipalities. In November 2016, the city authorities of Vaduz rejected a proposal to establish a Muslim cemetery on a 2.5-acre plot of land. According to the Liechtenstein Institute, societal skepticism and

apprehension towards Islam were the likely reasons for rejecting the Muslim cemetery.

Public primary schools in six municipalities offered Islamic education twice each month to a total of 68 students between the ages of six and 12.

Public 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. In January the Liechtenstein Grammar School hosted a history scholar from the Liechtenstein Institute to talk about the plight of refugees to commemorate International Holocaust Remembrance Day. A high school in Eschen reflected on the lessons of the Holocaust while discussing the current European migration crisis.

According to the foreign ministry, the government's Office for Social Services and the government-supported Liechtenstein Human Rights Association, a consortium of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), functioned as the main bodies responsible for the integration of Muslims. The foreign ministry continued to invite Muslim representatives to its annual dialogue with NGOs to address issues of concern and interest to the Muslim community. The Islamic Community and Turkish Association each continued to maintain contact with the government.

On January 25, in honor of International Holocaust Remembrance Day, Minister for Infrastructure, the Environment, and Sport, Marlies Amann-Marxer held a service with the Liechtenstein Friends of Yad Vashem to remember the victims of the Holocaust. In her remarks, she stressed the importance of respecting human rights and rejecting fanaticism, racism, anti-Semitism, and hate speech. Participants included the head of parliament.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

The Liechtenstein Institute's yearly monitoring report on extremism stated right-wing extremist groups were less active in 2016 than in previous years. As in previous years, according to the report, groups such as European Action, which in the past had called for the right to deny the Holocaust, expressed views in ways that rendered them nonpunishable in the framework of criminal law.

There were no mosques in the country; there was one Islamic prayer room run by the Turkish Association in Triesen. The Islamic Community of Liechtenstein ran another prayer room in the canton of St. Gallen in neighboring Switzerland.

According to the Liechtenstein Institute, the Islamic Community was still unable to establish a prayer room in the country. The institute did not cite a reason for the Islamic Community's inability to open a prayer room but stated that Muslims continued to face difficulties finding prayer room spaces to rent, due to society's skepticism and wariness towards Islam.

According to a government-commissioned study on Muslim life published by the Liechtenstein Institute in October, Muslim women wearing headscarves faced discrimination in the labor market, and Muslim children experienced discrimination when applying for apprenticeships. The study also stated Muslims perceived that society regarded them with general suspicion.

According to the Liechtenstein Institute, in July 2016, unknown persons sprayed racist comments and a swastika on the facade of a house used to accommodate asylees.

According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, religious groups in every municipality continued to open their chapels to other denominations and faiths upon request, including to Orthodox and Islamic groups.

According to the Liechtenstein Institute, Muslim representatives called for an "active dialogue" with the Catholic and other Christian churches.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy and Engagement

U.S. embassy staff continued to discuss religious freedom issues, such as access to religious education by different religious groups, with the foreign ministry.

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 and the Liechtenstein Institute.