

AUSTRIA 2019 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

Historical and modern constitutional documents provide for freedom of religious belief and affiliation and prohibit religious discrimination. The law bans public incitement to hostile acts against religious groups and classifies registered religious groups into one of three categories: religious societies, religious confessional communities, and associations. The 16 groups recognized as religious societies receive the most benefits. Unrecognized groups may practice their religion privately if the practice is lawful and does not offend “common decency.” In May parliament banned head coverings for children in elementary schools. Authorities arrested a Christian couple for murder after they refused, for religious reasons, medical treatment for their sick child, who subsequently died. Scientologists and the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification (Unification Church) said government-funded organizations continued to advise the public against associating with them. Muslim and Jewish groups and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) expressed concerns over what they said were the frequent and growing number of anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim acts by members of the Freedom Party (FPÖ), the junior partner in the coalition government until May.

According to the interior ministry, there were 49 anti-Semitic and 22 anti-Muslim incidents reported to police in 2018, the most recent year for which data were available, compared with 39 and 36 incidents, respectively, in 2017. Most incidents involved hate speech. The Islamic Faith Community (IGGIO) and the Jewish Community (IKG) have in the past reported a much higher number of incidents against their members than the interior ministry, but neither group had updated figures beyond the 540 anti-Muslim incidents the IGGIO cited in 2018 and the 503 anti-Semitic incidents the IKG reported in 2017. In October a man insulted and assaulted a Jewish family, breaking the father’s nose. In April a woman insulted and spit on a Muslim woman wearing a veil. A University of Salzburg poll found 70 percent of respondents felt Islam did not fit into Western societies, and 79 percent supported more surveillance of Muslims. A Eurobarometer poll of residents reported 47 percent considered anti-Semitism to be a problem in the country. Another poll of Austrians by the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany found two-thirds of respondents believed there was anti-Semitism in the country; 56 percent did not know six million Jews were killed in the Holocaust.

U.S. embassy representatives met with officials from the Federal Chancellery and the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Interior on religious freedom, the protection of religious minorities, and measures to combat anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim sentiment. The Ambassador met with leaders from the IGGIO, IKG, Roman Catholic Church, Lutheran Church, and various Orthodox churches to discuss their relations with the government, instances of discrimination, and interreligious dialogue. The Ambassador also met regularly with youth branches of religious organizations, including the Muslim Youth Organization of Austria (MJO). Embassy officials served on the advisory board of the Mauthausen Memorial Agency, an NGO that promotes Holocaust remembrance. Embassy representatives spoke on religious freedom at public ceremonies, and supported programs to combat anti-Semitism, promote religious dialogue, including hosting a speaker series in Vienna and sponsoring visits of Muslim civil society leaders to the United States on exchange programs focused on religious freedom.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 8.8 million (midyear 2019 estimate). According to religious groups and December 2018 figures from the government Austrian Integration Fund, Roman Catholics constitute 57 percent of the population and Muslims – predominantly Sunni – 8 percent, while approximately 25 percent is unaffiliated with any religion. Other religious groups include Protestant churches (Augsburg and Helvetic confessions); Eastern Orthodox churches (Russian, Greek, Serbian, Romanian, Antiochian, and Bulgarian); Jehovah’s Witnesses; other Christian churches; and Jews and other non-Christian religious groups.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

A combination of historical and modern constitutional documents guarantees freedom of “conscience and creed.” The law provides for freedom of religious belief and the rights of all residents to join, participate in, leave, or abstain from association with any religious community. It stipulates, “Duties incumbent on nationals may not be impeded by religious affiliation.”

Several constitutional provisions protect religious freedom. The main pillars are historical laws on fundamental rights and freedoms, including religious freedom, and treaties and conventions such as the European Convention on Human Rights,

which form part of the constitution. Antidiscrimination legislation prohibits discrimination on religious grounds. Citizens have the right to sue the government for constitutional violations of religious freedom.

The law prohibits public incitement to hostile acts against a church group, religious society, or other religious group if the incitement is perceivable by “many people,” which an official government commentary on the law and the courts interpret as 30 or more individuals. The prohibition also applies specifically in the case of incitement in print, electronic, or other media available to a broad public. The law also prohibits incitement, insult, or contempt against religious groups, if such action violates human dignity.

The law divides registered religious groups into three officially recognized legal categories (listed in descending order of rights and privileges): religious societies, religious confessional communities, and associations. Each category possesses specific rights, privileges, and legal responsibilities. Members of religious groups not legally recognized may practice their religion at home “insofar as this practice is neither unlawful nor offends common decency.”

There are 16 recognized religious societies: the Roman Catholic Church; Protestant churches (Augsburg and Helvetic confessions); the IGGIO; Old Catholic Church; IKG; Eastern Orthodox Church (Bulgarian, Greek, Romanian, Russian, Serbian, and, since January, Antiochian); The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints; New Apostolic Church; Syrian Orthodox Church; Coptic Orthodox Church; Armenian Apostolic Church; Methodist Church of Austria; the Buddhist Community; Jehovah’s Witnesses; Alevi Community in Austria; and Free Christian Churches.

The law grants registered religious societies the right to public practice and independent administration of their internal affairs, to participate in the program requiring mandatory church contributions by church members, to bring religious workers into the country to act as ministers, missionaries, or teachers, and to provide pastoral services in prisons and hospitals. Under the law, religious societies have “public corporation” status, permitting them to engage in a number of public or quasi-public activities such as government-funded religious instruction in both public and private schools, which the government denies to confessional communities and associations. The government grants all recognized religious societies tax relief in two main ways: donations are not taxable, and the societies receive exemption from property tax for all buildings dedicated to the active practice of religion or administration of such. Additionally, religious societies are

exempt from the surveillance charge, payable when state security is required, and the administrative fee levied at the municipal level. Responsibilities of religious societies include a commitment to sponsor social and cultural activities that serve the common good and – like all religious groups – to ensure their teachings do not violate the law or ethical standards.

Religious groups seeking to achieve religious society status for the first time must apply for recognition with the Office for Religious Affairs in the Federal Chancellery. Religious groups recognized as societies prior to 1998 retained their status. The government grandfathered in 14 of the 16 recognized religious societies under this provision of the law. To gain recognition as a religious society, religious groups not recognized prior to 1998 must have membership equaling 0.2 percent of the country's population (approximately 17,400 persons) and have existed for 20 years, at least 10 of which must have been as an association and five as a confessional community. The government recognizes Jehovah's Witnesses and Alevi Muslims as religious societies under these post-1998 criteria. Groups that do not meet these criteria may still apply for religious society status under an exception for groups that have been active internationally for at least 100 years and active as an association in the country for 10 years. Groups sharing a broad faith with an existing society or confessional community, for example Christianity, may register separately as long as they can demonstrate that they have a different theology.

The law allows religious groups not recognized as societies to seek official status as confessional communities with the Office for Religious Affairs in the Federal Chancellery. The government recognizes nine confessional communities: the Baha'i Faith; Movement for Religious Renewal-Community of Christians; Pentecostal Community of God; Seventh-day Adventists; Hindu Community; Islamic-Shiite Community; Old-Alevi Community in Austria; Unification Church; and United Pentecostal Community of Austria.

A recognized confessional community has the juridical standing needed to engage in such activities as purchasing real estate in its own name and contracting for goods and services, but it is not eligible for the financial and educational benefits available to recognized religious societies. Contributions to confessional communities' charitable activities are tax deductible for those who make them, but the communities are not exempt from property taxes. Confessional communities may provide pastoral care in prisons and hospitals.

To gain government recognition as a confessional community, a group must have at least 300 members and submit to the Office for Religious Affairs its statutes describing the goals, rights, and obligations of members, as well as membership regulations, a list of officials, and financing information. A group must also submit a written description of its religious doctrine, which must differ from that of any previously recognized religious society or religious confessional community. The Office for Religious Affairs determines whether the group's basic beliefs are consistent with public security, order, health, and morals, and with the rights and freedoms of citizens. A religious group seeking to obtain confessional community status is subject to a six-month waiting period from the time of application to the chancellery. After this period, groups that have applied automatically receive the status unless the government issues a decree rejecting the application.

Religious groups not qualifying for either religious society or confessional community status may apply to become legal associations, a status applicable to a broad range of civil groups. Some groups organize as associations while waiting for the government to recognize them as confessional communities.

The Church of Scientology and a number of smaller religious groups, such as Sahaja Yoga and the International Society for Krishna Consciousness, have association status.

According to the law, any group of more than two persons pursuing a nonprofit goal qualifies to organize as an association. Groups may apply to the Ministry of Interior to gain such status. To become an association, a group must submit a written statement citing its common, nonprofit goal and commitment to function as a nonprofit organization. Associations have juridical standing, the right to function in public, and many of the same rights as confessional communities, including the right to own real estate and to contract for goods and services. Associations may not offer pastoral care in hospitals or prisons or receive tax-deductible contributions.

Pursuant to the law governing relations between the government and the Roman Catholic Church, the Church is the only religious group to receive government funding for pastoral care it provides in prisons. The law also makes various Catholic holidays official national holidays.

The law governing relations between the government and the IGGIO and Alevi Muslim groups stipulates that funding for the day-to-day operations of mosques must be derived from domestic sources, Islamic teachings and practices must not

violate federal law (the Office for Religious Affairs in the Federal Chancellery makes this determination), and Islamic institutions should “take a positive stance” toward the state and society. According to the Office for Religious Affairs, there are similar restrictions on foreign funding for other religious groups, and religious groups generally are obliged to finance themselves from domestic sources. The law provides an explicit legal definition of, and legal protection for, Islamic practices, such as circumcision and preparation of food in conformity with religious rules, and states Muslims may raise children and youth in accordance with Islamic traditions. Muslim groups with at least 300 members and a theology not distinct from a pre-existing Islamic religious society or confessional community are considered cultural communities and fall under the umbrella of the pre-existing, legally recognized Islamic religious society or confessional community. This includes the IGGIO and the Alevi Community in Austria, which are both religious societies, or the Islamic-Shiite Community and the Old-Alevi Faith Community in Austria, both of which have confessional community status. The law allows for Islamic theological university studies, which the University of Vienna offers.

Separate laws govern relations between the government and each of the other 14 state-recognized religious societies. The laws have similar intent but vary in some details, given they were enacted at different times over a span of approximately 140 years.

The law bans full-face coverings in public places as a “violation of Austrian values,” with exceptions made only for artistic, cultural, or traditional events, in sports, or for health or professional reasons. Failure to comply with the law is an administrative violation. The law prescribes a 150-euro (\$170) fine but does not entitle police to remove the face covering.

In May parliament enacted a ban on headscarves and other head coverings for children in elementary schools. The ban exempts kippas and Sikh patkas. According to annexes explaining the law, some federal states impose fines of up to 440 euros (\$490) on the parents of those that violate the ban.

The government funds, on a proportional basis, religious instruction for any of the 16 officially recognized religious societies by clergy or instructors provided by those groups for children in public schools and government-accredited private schools. The government does not offer such funding to other religious groups. A minimum of three children is required to form a class. Attendance in religion classes is mandatory for all students unless they formally withdraw at the

beginning of the school year; students under the age of 14 require parental permission to withdraw from religion classes. Religious instruction takes place either in the school or at sites organized by religious groups. Some schools offer ethics classes for students not attending religious instruction. Religious education and ethics classes include the tenets of different religious groups as comparative religious education.

The curriculum for both public and private schools includes compulsory antibias and tolerance education, including religious tolerance, as part of civics education across various subjects, including history and German-language instruction.

Holocaust education is part of history instruction and appears in other subjects such as civics.

The Equal Rights Agency, an independent agency falling under the jurisdiction of the women's ministry, oversees discrimination cases, including those based on religion. The agency provides legal counseling and mediation services, and it assists with bringing cases before the Equal Treatment Commission, another independent government agency. In cases where it finds discrimination, the commission makes a recommendation for corrective action. In a case of noncompliance with the recommendation, the case goes to court. The commission may issue expert reports for plaintiffs to present before the court. Only a court may order corrective action and compensation.

The law bans neo-Nazi activity and prohibits public denial, belittlement, approval, or justification "of the National Socialist genocide" or other Nazi crimes against humanity in print, broadcast, or other media.

In March an amendment expanding a ban on certain symbols the government considered extremist entered into force. Among the newly banned symbols are those pertaining to the Muslim Brotherhood and the PKK.

Foreign religious workers of groups recognized as confessional communities or associations must apply for a general immigrant visa that is not employment or family based and is subject to a quota. The government requires a visa for visitors from non-visa waiver countries or individuals who would stay beyond 90 days, including religious workers of confessional communities or associations. Foreign religious workers belonging to religious societies also require immigrant visas but are exempt from the quota system. Religious workers from Schengen or European Union member countries are exempt from all visa requirements.

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

Government Practices

Members of the then-ruling People's Party (OeVP)-FPOe government coalition defended the ban on religious headscarves in elementary schools. OeVP Member of Parliament (MP) Rudolf Taschner stated the measure was needed to protect girls from subjugation. FPOe education spokesperson Wendelin Moelzer said the law "was a signal against political Islam." NGOs criticized the ban, which exempts kippas and Sikh patkas, as singling out the Islamic community. The IGGIO, calling the law "shameless" and a "direct assault on the religious freedom of Austrian Muslims," announced in May it would file a complaint with the Constitutional Court. By year's end, it had not done so. In September during the campaign for parliamentary elections, the OeVP called for expanding the ban to middle school students and teachers. At year's end, parliament had not taken up the proposal to expand the ban.

Scientologists and representatives of the Unification Church continued to state the Federal Office of Sect Issues and other government-associated entities fostered discrimination against religious groups not registered as religious societies or confessional communities. The office offered advice to persons with questions about groups that it considered "sects" and "cults," including the Scientologists and members of the Unification Church. The office was nominally independent but government-funded, and the minister for women, family, and youth appointed and oversaw its head.

A counseling center in Vienna managed by the Society Against Sect and Cult Dangers, an NGO that described itself as an organization working against harm caused by "destructive cults" such as Scientology, continued to distribute information to schools and the general public and provide counseling for former members of such groups. According to the website of the society's founder, Friedrich Griess, the society received funding from the government of Lower Austria. The city of Vienna government ceased to provide funding to the society. All provinces funded family and youth counseling offices that provided information on "sects and cults," which members of some minority religious groups, such as Scientologists or the Unification Church, stated were biased against them.

Prior to its collapse in May, the OeVP-FPOe government did not draft a law making “political Islam” an illegal activity as FPOe Deputy Leader Johan Gudenus announced in 2018 that it would do.

In September parliament passed a nonbinding resolution calling for review and, if necessary, dissolution of “Islamist” organizations that violated criminal law.

The interior ministry did not release statistics on violations of the face covering ban. In response to a parliamentary inquiry, the ministry stated there were 96 cases in 2018. Authorities only filed charges when persons failed to pay fines immediately, making the total number of cases more than the 96 reported. According to press reports, police issued fines for violations of the ban in 364 cases in the town of Zell am See between January and September 2019, almost all of which involved tourists. Vienna police said they considered violations of the ban a minor offense and had not kept statistics on the number of fines it issued since 2017.

According to the press, at year’s end, school boards had reported eight cases of girls violating the headscarf ban. In all eight cases, authorities waived the penalties after parents agreed to remove the headscarf while their child was in school. The Ministry of Education said the number of cases may have exceeded eight as it had received additional reports of cases reported to the ministry’s ombudsman for values and cultural conflict.

The government continued to allow headwear for religious purposes in official identification documents, provided the face remained sufficiently visible to allow for identification of the wearer.

In December a former intern of the Linz Regional Court filed a lawsuit with the Federal Administrative Court because the Linz court barred her from wearing a headscarf during official proceedings at the court during her internship there in 2018. The president of the Linz Regional Court issued an instruction prohibiting the intern from sitting at the judge’s bench while wearing a headscarf, stating the clothing did not meet the requirements of a representative of the state and the judicial system. The intern refused to remove her headscarf and the court mandated that she remain in the public gallery during proceedings. The Federal Administrative Court dismissed the lawsuit without ruling on whether the Linz court’s instruction was discriminatory, as the plaintiff had already completed her internship when she filed her suit.

In June parliament approved a nonbinding resolution calling for the government to close the Saudi-Arabian-funded King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz International Center for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue after frequent criticism of Saudi Arabia's human rights record. According to the Austrian edition of the online English-language newspaper *The Local*, the foreign ministry said it would implement parliament's decision to close the center, but at year's end the center remained open.

In September the Vienna Administrative Court ruled the Iranian embassy could not operate a mosque in an area in Vienna's 21st district which, according to zoning laws, is an industrial zone. The Iranian embassy did not appeal the ruling.

In October police arrested a German couple in Lower Austria on murder charges after their 13-year-old daughter died in September of a pancreatic inflammation. The parents, members of the Church of God, had rejected, for religious reasons, any medical treatment that would have kept their daughter alive. There was no further information on the case at year's end.

According to media, the Federal Office for Foreigner Affairs and Asylum (BFA) continued to refuse to issue or renew residence permits for foreign imams financed by foreign sources. The BFA rejected the permits or the renewals on the grounds that since the law forbids foreign funding of religious groups, it considered that imams receiving foreign funding had no income and were therefore ineligible for a residence permit. According to the Turkish Islamic Union for Cultural and Social Cooperation (ATIB), an association of mosques under the authority of the Turkish Ministry of Religious Affairs, as of late 2018, there were 38 cases of foreign imams whose immigration status was pending with the BFA.

In March the Constitutional Court dismissed a suit by two Turkish imams employed by ATIB, whom the government expelled in April 2018, under the 2015 Islam law that bars Muslim religious groups from receiving foreign funding. The Administrative Court had already dismissed the imams' complaint against the initial deportation ruling in 2018. The Constitutional Court suit was filed with the assistance of ATIB and alleged the ban infringed on religious freedom and was discriminatory, stating the government only applied it to Islam. The court ruled that protecting the independence of religious groups from foreign states was a matter of public interest. The court also ruled, however, that the ban applied to funding from foreign states, not to foreign private donors. The Constitutional Court referred the case back to the Administrative Court to determine if any other rights of the imams were infringed and a decision remained pending. Then-

chancellor Sebastian Kurz said he felt “vindicated” by the court’s decision and called the law a model for other European countries.

In February parliament voted to eliminate Good Friday as a public holiday. The change followed a ruling by the European Court of Justice that granting employees belonging to certain religious groups paid leave for religious holidays constituted religious discrimination and the country should amend the law. According to press reports, parliament’s revocation of the holiday generated protests among Protestant groups in the country. Then-bishop Michael Buenker of the Protestant Churches (Augsburg and Helvetic Confessions) reportedly called the change an “intervention in Protestants’ freedom of religious practice.”

The IGGIO protested against a January change in the title of courses on Islam in school report cards to “IGGIO” instead of “Islam.” In June the education ministry changed the title back to “Islam,” with an addition referring to the IGGIO, Shia, or Alevi orientation.

The international NGO Anti-Defamation League (ADL) continued to conduct teacher-training seminars on Holocaust awareness with schools in the country, reaching approximately 100 teachers. In addition, provincial school councils and the education ministry invited Holocaust survivors to talk to school classes about National Socialism and the Holocaust.

In October the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) ruled the government failed to protect Holocaust survivor Aba Lewit against defamation. Lewit had appealed to the ECHR after national courts failed to convict the magazine *Aula* for publishing an article in 2015 stating that prisoners at the Nazi Mauthausen concentration camp had been a plague for the region around the camp after its liberation in 1945. In December 2018, according to the Mauthausen Committee, the NGO SOS Mitmensch filed a complaint of 300 pages against Martin Pfeiffer, FPOe Deputy District Chairman in Graz-St. Leonhard, for his role as editor-in-chief of *Aula*, which the complaint said “had been systematically used for National Socialist reactivation” for 10 years. The magazine had already ceased publication in June 2018, and FPOe Chair Norbert Hofer stated party members involved in the magazine risked expulsion from the party. Pfeiffer left the FPOe and relaunched the magazine under a new name, *Neue Aula*, in October, but discontinued publication after one issue because of what he said were financial reasons.

Following the collapse of the OeVP-FPOe government in May, Jewish community members advocated against participation of the FPOe in another coalition

government. Vice President of the European Jewish Congress and former IKG Vienna President Ariel Muzicant continued to state – for example, during a television interview in May and in a newspaper opinion piece in September – the FPOe was involved in anti-Semitic incidents. IKG President Oskar Deutsch also criticized what he called the FPOe’s failure to deal with anti-Semitism in the party in a television interview in November.

Prior to the collapse of the OeVP-FPOe government, Jewish community leaders stated there had been 51 anti-Semitic incidents attributable to FPOe members or at FPOe-affiliated events since the FPOe had entered the government and said they would not have any contacts with FPOe ministers until those incidents ceased.

In August the Mauthausen Committee published another report citing what it classified as rightwing incidents involving FPOe politicians, many of which it said were religiously motivated, primarily anti-Semitic. According to the report, these activities had increased significantly; it cited 63 incidents in the 13 months ending in July, compared with 106 between the start of 2013 and May 2018. It said the incidents involved persons at all levels of the FPOe and that anti-Semitism by its members, which the party had denied, manifested itself regularly. It stated, “... The FPO[e] shows a close proximity to Nazi ideology” and the worst offenders were party officials in Upper Austria, who accounted for one-third of the 63 most recent incidents.

The committee reported that in February SOS Mitmensch stated FPOe Secretary General Harald Vilimsky had used taxpayers’ money to pay for five full-page advertisements in *Info-Direkt*, a magazine that it said published anti-Semitic content and that The Documentation Center of Austrian Resistance, a government-supported foundation that documents Nazi crimes, described as “extreme rightwing with a neo-Nazi background.”

The committee also cited a report in May by the news magazine *Profil* that FPOe ministers in the previous government and party politicians from Upper Austria, led by then-transport minister and later national FPOe Chair Norbert Hofer, had channeled 116,000 euros (\$130,000) of taxpayer money for advertisements that included anti-Semitic content in extremist rightwing media such as *Info-Direkt* and *Zur Zeit*. *Profil* said the total payments could be higher, since the FPOe-led city government of Wels had refused to provide any information on the issue.

The committee reported that in April FPOe then-vice chancellor Heinz-Christian Strache and FPOe MP Peter Gerstner had separately reposted on Facebook an anti-

Muslim message (it did not describe the message) by neo-Nazi website “ZaroneWS.” According to the committee, “ZaroneWS” has called Hitler a “savior” and described the Holocaust as the “biggest lie in the world.”

In March the IGGIO filed incitement charges against then-FPOe vice chancellor Strache. At a book presentation in March, Strache had warned, “In Viennese kindergartens, children are raised to be martyrs with hate sermons.” The Vienna prosecutor’s office dismissed the charges.

Authorities were investigating links between the Identitarian movement, widely described by NGOs as far-right and white nationalist, and the FPOe. The Mauthausen Committee reported the connections between the two were significant, and the press published articles stating there were links between FPOe members and the movement. In August the OeVP said a ban of the movement was a condition for a future coalition, a condition the FPOe rejected. FPOe head Hofer denied any association with the Identitarians, and in August said that banning it would set a precedent of a “moral dictatorship.” Justice Minister Clemens Jabloner told the press in August, “One should not restrict fundamental rights even where it is about deeply unsympathetic groups as the Identitarians.”

The police continued to provide extra protection to the Vienna Jewish community’s offices and other Jewish community institutions such as schools and museums. Following an assault at a synagogue in Halle, Germany in October, IKG President Deutsch issued a statement in which he said that security forces protected synagogues in Austria, and he thanked the government for that protection. President Alexander Van der Bellen visited the Vienna synagogue in October after the Halle assault and said that a hard core of anti-Semites also existed in Austria. Deutsch, who received Van der Bellen in the synagogue, commented that rightwing, leftwing, and Islamist groups were causing anti-Semitism, not only in the country, but in Europe generally.

At year’s end, the government had not provided financial support for the restoration of the historic Waehring Jewish cemetery in Vienna. Then-chancellor Kurz had announced his government’s intention to provide the support during a visit to the cemetery in 2018.

In October FPOe Chairman Norbert Hofer announced the completion of a report prepared by a commission of historians the party commissioned in 2017 to examine the party’s past connection to National Socialism. In December the party released the final report, which included chapters on allegations of anti-Semitism,

the party's relationship with Israel and Islam, and efforts to overcome its Nazi past, among others. A chapter authored by a history professor from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem concluded that, despite the party's deep historical association with National Socialism, it had made efforts to distance itself from that past. The summary at the end of the report noted active supporters and sympathizers of national socialism "could be found in great numbers in the other parties," and, "The history of the FPÖ should be remembered as a democratic party and important contributor to the success" of the postwar republic. The report drew criticism from independent historians such as Oliver Rathkolb, who challenged its academic substance and denied that the party's true aim had been a substantive self-critical analysis.

In May Vienna Mayor Michael Ludwig and other political representatives, as well as the papal nuncio, attended an IGGIO-hosted iftar. Ludwig also hosted a separate iftar. Ludwig condemned racism and discrimination and said such acts against persons because of their religion worried him. He called on citizens and the Muslim community to make mutual efforts to live together peacefully. IGGIO President Umit Vural thanked the mayor for hosting the iftar and said Muslims were experiencing difficult times in the country and thus needed political support when the number of incidents against them was increasing. Speaking about the parliamentary debate then taking place on banning headscarves for primary school students, Vural said politics should not decide people's apparel.

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

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

According to the interior ministry, there were 49 anti-Semitic and 22 anti-Muslim incidents reported to police in 2018, the most recent year for which statistics were available, compared with 39 and 36 incidents, respectively, in 2017. Although the ministry did not provide details of the incidents, it stated the majority of cases involved hate speech on the internet by neo-Nazis, as well as instances of persons giving the "Hitler salute" or shouting Nazi slogans.

The IGGIO's Documentation Center on Islamophobia and Anti-Muslim Racism had not yet issued statistics on anti-Muslim incidents occurring in 2019. The center reported receiving reports of 540 anti-Muslim incidents in 2018.

The IKG had no updated figures on the number of anti-Semitic incidents beyond the 503 it reported as occurring in 2017. As was the case with the IGGIO, in past years the IKG reported many more religiously motivated incidents than the interior ministry. For example, in 2017, the ministry said there 39 anti-Semitic incidents reported to police.

The IKG expressed concern over what it described as anti-Semitism on the part of Muslims in the country and entered into dialogue on the issue with the IGGIO.

In October following a dispute with a Jewish family of pedestrians on Yom Kippur, a car driver insulted and assaulted the family, breaking the father's nose. The IKG said it raised the matter with the interior ministry, but there was no further information on the case by year's end.

In April an elderly female assaulted a Muslim woman wearing a headscarf at a Vienna tram stop. The aggressor spit on the Muslim woman and called her a "dog" and a "pig." Then-chancellor Kurz shared a video of the incident and condemned the "sickening attack" on Twitter, saying, "In Austria we stand for a respectful and peaceful coexistence of all religions."

A report from the NGO Initiative for Discrimination-Free Education listed a total of 260 cases of discrimination in schools in 2018 and, as in previous years, attributed approximately 50 percent of these cases to religion, with 122 of 126 (97 percent) of those cases connected to what the NGO termed as Islamophobia. According to the report, many incidents involved disparaging comments or other unfair treatment from educators against female students for their use of a headscarf. For example, the report cited one case in which a teacher told a girl wearing a headscarf she had herself to blame if she could not find a job and was excluded from society. In another case, according to the report, an accounting teacher repeatedly called one of her students a "jihadist" and "ISIS terrorist" and pulled at the student's headscarf. The school director promised the parents and student that the insults would stop, and the parents reported that the situation improved, according to the report.

In 2018, the government recorded 1,003 cases of incitement to hatred based on national origin, race, or religion, and 72 convictions, compared to 867 cases and 108 convictions in 2017. The government did not provide any information on how many of the cases involved religion.

In May Croats and Bosniaks gathered in Bleiburg for an annual commemoration of Nazi-allied Croatian troops and civilians killed in 1945. Some 10,000 participants attended the event. Unlike in previous years, there were no reports of displays of Ustasha (a World War II-era fascist organization) symbols, which the government banned effective in March. As in 2018, authorities arrested a man for performing the “Hitler salute,” charging him with neo-Nazi activity. In August the Klagenfurt State Court sentenced him to an 18-month prison sentence. The Worker’s Front Party of Croatia and a former parliamentarian from the Austrian Green Party organized a small counterdemonstration against the Bleiburg commemoration.

In September the University of Salzburg issued the results of a survey of 1,200 residents it conducted in 2018. The survey found 70 percent of respondents felt Islam did not fit into Western societies; 45 percent said Muslims should not have the same rights as other citizens, and 48 percent believed the construction of mosques should be banned. Fifty-nine percent feared there were terrorists among Muslims, and 79 percent supported more surveillance of Muslim communities. In response, IGGIO President Vural warned politicians not to exploit fears and resentments, but rather pursue solutions and visions for the future.

In November the ADL released the results of a survey on anti-Semitic views of the country’s residents. The survey cited stereotypical statements about Jews and asked respondents whether they believed such statements were “probably true” or “probably false.” The proportion agreeing that various statements were “probably true” was: 49 percent that Jews are more loyal to Israel than to Austria; 33 percent that Jews have too much power in the business world; and 44 percent that Jews talk too much about the Holocaust.

In January the European Commission (EC) issued a Special Eurobarometer survey of perceptions of anti-Semitism based on interviews it conducted in December 2018 in each EU-member state. According to the survey, 47 percent of residents believed anti-Semitism was a problem in the country, while 46 percent did not; 33 percent believed it had increased over the previous five years, while 44 percent thought it had stayed the same. The percentage who believed that anti-Semitism was a problem in nine different categories was as follows: Holocaust denial, 49 percent; on the internet, 51 percent; anti-Semitic graffiti or vandalism, 44 percent; expression of hostility or threats against Jews in public places, 43 percent; desecration of Jewish cemeteries, 46 percent; physical attacks against Jews, 38 percent; anti-Semitism in schools and universities, 38 percent; anti-Semitism in political life, 46 percent; and anti-Semitism in the media, 44 percent.

In May the EC carried out a study in each EU-member state on perceptions of discrimination and published the results in September. According to the findings, 47 percent of respondents believed discrimination on the basis of religion or belief was widespread in Austria, while 50 percent said it was rare; 75 percent would be comfortable with having a person of different religion than the majority of the population occupy the highest elected political position in the country. In addition, 87 percent said they would be comfortable working closely with a Christian, 76 percent said they would be with an atheist, 78 percent with a Jew, 76 percent with a Buddhist, and 69 percent with a Muslim. Asked how they would feel if a child were in a “love relationship” with an individual belonging to various groups, 83 percent said they would be comfortable if the partner were Christian, 72 percent if atheist, 70 percent if Jewish, 70 percent if Buddhist, and 52 percent if Muslim.

According to preliminary results of an anti-Semitism study commissioned by parliament, anti-Israeli positions were dominant among the Turkish and Arab communities in the country. Approximately 70 percent of the Arab community and 50 percent of the Turkish community surveyed agreed with the sentence, “If the state of Israel no longer exists, there will be peace in the Middle East,” compared with an average of 10 percent that agreed among other persons polled. The study also stated that 10 percent of the population had anti-Semitic views, a decrease from previous surveys. Parliamentary President Wolfgang Sobotka expressed concern over the results of the study and said they reflected a major challenge.

According to a survey of Austrians commissioned by the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany conducted February 22-March 1, 56 percent of respondents did not know six million Jews were killed in the Holocaust, and 12 percent believed 100,000 or fewer Jews had been killed. Nine percent – and 13 percent of those born since the early 1980s – believed the number of Jews killed in the Holocaust was exaggerated. Thirty-six percent agreed there were many neo-Nazis in the country, while 51 percent disagreed. Two-thirds believed there was anti-Semitism in the country.

In September the Linz State Court in Upper Austria handed down a 16-month sentence to a man after convicting him on charges of the glorification of Nazi ideology and disturbance of religious practices. He gave a Nazi salute at an ecumenical service during a Linz fair in October 2018.

In May in the space of fewer than three weeks, unknown perpetrators defaced larger-than-life portraits of Holocaust survivors that were part of an exhibition at a

downtown boulevard in Vienna on three separate occasions. Perpetrators cut across the faces of the portraits or defaced them with swastikas and other graffiti. In reaction, several groups, including the Muslim Youth organization and a youth group of the Catholic charity Caritas, organized around-the-clock vigils to protect the portraits. President Van der Bellen and then-chancellor Kurz expressed concern over the vandalism.

In April unknown perpetrators defaced the construction site of a Buddhist stupa in Lower Austria with swastikas.

In February a Vorarlberg court handed down a 20-month prison sentence to a man and a 10-month suspended prison sentence to his wife for playing rightwing songs at parties between 2014 and 2016, and for encouraging their daughters to perform a Nazi salute in front of a swastika flag for a photo.

In January a Vorarlberg court convicted a man to a two-year prison sentence on charges of yelling Nazi phrases, including “Heil Hitler!” and “Work sets you free,” the slogan over the entrance of the Auschwitz concentration camp, – and physically assaulting a young man. He was ordered to pay 2,000 euros (\$2,200) in compensation to the victim and was admitted to a drug treatment program.

Authorities investigated links between the terrorist attacker of a mosque in Christchurch, New Zealand in March and the Austrian Identitarian movement. Identitarian leader Martin Sellner received a donation from the terrorist attacker in the spring of 2018. Sellner stressed he had had no knowledge of the terrorist’s plans and denied speculation the two men had met in Austria during the attacker’s trip to Europe later in 2018.

Fourteen Christian groups, among them the Roman Catholic Church, various Protestant denominations, and eight Orthodox and Old Oriental Churches, continued to meet within the Ecumenical Council of Churches in Austria. Baptists and the Salvation Army had observer status on the council. The council met twice a year. There were two permanent working groups on “Religion and Society” and “Media.” Activities included joint religious services, for example on the “Day of Jewry” in January, and joint charitable activities.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy and Engagement

The Ambassador and other embassy representatives met regularly with government officials, including from the Federal Chancellery’s Office of Religious Affairs, the

Department for Integration and Division of Dialogue of Cultures at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Ministry of Interior, to discuss religious freedom and the protection of religious minorities. Topics discussed included the concerns of religious groups, integration of Muslim refugees, cooperation with religious groups in combating terrorism, and measures to combat anti-Semitism and anti-Muslim sentiment.

The Ambassador met with religious group representatives, such as the leadership of the IGGIO, IKG, Roman Catholic Church, Protestant churches (Augsburg and Helvetic Confessions) , and various Orthodox churches, to discuss their relations with the government, instances of discrimination, and interreligious dialogue. Embassy officers also met with youth groups of religious organizations to discuss issues such as anti-Semitism and anti-Muslim sentiment.

The embassy continued to engage with and support the Jewish community to discuss ways of promoting religious tolerance and combating anti-Semitism. Embassy representatives continued to serve on the International Advisory Board of the Mauthausen Memorial Agency to promote remembrance of the Holocaust and Holocaust education. The embassy advocated increased agency outreach to combat anti-Semitism among youth, such as by encouraging more school groups to visit the Mauthausen site.

The embassy provided a grant to the first ever Muslim-led initiative to counter anti-Semitism in the country. The MJO-led initiative was headed by three former participants of Department of State-sponsored exchange programs in the United States. It included a series of events, roundtables, and visits to Auschwitz for MJO members. The MJO worked closely with the Jewish community and the Jewish museum to foster dialogue and promote awareness among Muslim youth. The project received third place in the EU's Charlemagne Youth Prize and won the Austrian Youth Prize. The Ambassador and other prominent officials attended an event in May concluding the project, at which the Ambassador gave remarks condemning anti-Semitism and anti-Muslim sentiment and supporting religious freedom.

In August the embassy funded the travel of a Muslim educator to the United States to attend training and workshops on religious freedom.

In August the embassy sponsored the participation of three young Muslim women at the Women2Women leadership program in Boston, Massachusetts, where they

engaged with young women leaders from around the world on issues including religious freedom.

In February a Muslim-American disabilities rights activist engaged with members of the Muslim Youth on the topic of religion in the United States and advocacy for religious freedom. The visit was an opportunity to share experiences on advocacy for religious freedom and provide a U.S. perspective to local activists. In December the embassy sponsored the visit of a former white supremacist who, in workshops with authorities and NGOs, highlighted the threat of extremism to religious freedom and the role of faith communities in creating resilient societies.

The Ambassador and the Charge of the U.S. Mission to the United Nations in Vienna attended the commemoration of the liberation of the Mauthausen concentration camp in May. In his remarks, the Ambassador stressed the importance of religious freedom, and the fact that the liberators of Mauthausen helped end the notion that one person is better than another because of his or her religion.