

LIECHTENSTEIN 2016 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 Roman Catholicism 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 funded Catholic and Protestant groups and integration projects by smaller religious groups. The government granted the Muslim community a residency permit for one imam and a short-term residency permit for an additional imam during Ramadan. The government participated in a public service to remember the victims of the Holocaust.

The group European Action continued to advocate for freedom to question and deny the Holocaust. Several churches continued to open their chapels to other denominations and faiths, such as Orthodox and Islamic groups, to worship upon request. There were no mosques in the country and one Islamic prayer room run by the Turkish Association.

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 prohibition on ritual animal slaughter and the extent of societal discrimination, with civil society organizations, including Amnesty International, the Islamic Community of Liechtenstein, and the Liechtenstein Friends of Yad Vashem.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 38,000 (July 2016 estimate). According to the 2010 census, religious group membership is as follows: 76 percent Roman Catholic, 6.5 percent Protestant Reformed, 5.4 percent Muslim, 1.3 percent Lutheran, 1.1 percent Christian Orthodox, 1.8 percent other religious groups, 5.4 percent no religious affiliation, and 2.5 percent unspecified.

The great majority of Muslims are Sunni, predominantly from Turkey, Kosovo, and Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Jewish community consists of approximately 30 individuals. Immigrants come mainly from Switzerland and Austria and predominantly belong to the same religious groups as native-born citizens.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution states all people shall have the freedom to choose their faith and the state shall 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.”

There is no law requiring the registration of religious groups. Religious groups may organize themselves as private associations, which enables public registration in the commercial registry, and must do so to receive government funding for such activities as providing religious education in schools. To publicly 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 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. Islamic education is not compulsory but offered in primary school and funded partly by the respective Muslim community, which provides the teachers, and partly from the government's integration budget. The Catholic Church determines the Catholic curriculum, with minimal supervision from municipalities. Religious groups provide teachers who are partially supported by the government.

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, belong to a nationally known religious group, and be sponsored by a resident clergy member of the religious group.

The country is 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 churches annual contributions in proportion to membership; smaller religious groups were eligible to apply only for grants for projects, such as language courses aimed at facilitating the societal integration of foreigners. The government spent 82,000 Swiss francs (\$80,470) on integration projects in 2015, the last year for which data were available. Within these projects, Islamic education in primary schools received 22,800 Swiss francs (\$22,370) in funding. All religious groups were exempt from certain taxes, but not from fees.

Liechtenstein's state prosecutor said police suspended a criminal investigation for lack of evidence in a case of reported Holocaust denial and pro-Nazi rhetoric by a Liechtenstein member of European Action during a presentation in the Swiss canton of St. Gallen in 2015.

The government's Immigration and Passport Office did not issue visas for religious workers, granting them residency permits, valid for five years, instead. The government continued to grant one short-term residency permit each year during Ramadan to an imam of either the Turkish Association or the Islamic Community of Liechtenstein, who agreed not to allow or preach sermons that incited violence or advocated intolerance. An imam from the Turkish Association received the short-term permit for 2016. Clergy from other religious groups were required to abide by the same rules and regulations.

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

According to the foreign ministry, the country's integration commission continued to function as the main body responsible for the integration of Muslims due to the inability of the two main representative bodies of the Muslim community, the Islamic Community and the Turkish Association, to reach an agreement on the founding of an Islamic umbrella organization. The Islamic Community and Turkish Association each continued to maintain regular contact with the government.

On January 27, Foreign Minister Aurelia Frick held a service together with the Liechtenstein Friends of Yad Vashem to remember the victims of the Holocaust, during which she stressed the importance of civil courage in fighting racism and anti-Semitism. Approximately 100 people attended the service, including school students and the head of parliament.

Nine public primary schools offered Islamic education twice each month, with a total of 68 students between the ages of six and 12 attending classes.

Schools continued to include Holocaust education as part of their curriculum and held discussion forums on the Holocaust to mark the Day of Remembrance on January 27. In March a primary school invited the honorary president of the Liechtenstein Friends of Yad Vashem to hold a photo exhibition on the Holocaust. In April the Liechtenstein Grammar School held the same photo exhibition as part of a special course on the Holocaust. In June members of Austria's Ministry of Education met with the country's education authority to exchange views on Holocaust education and remembrance.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

Several churches continued to open their chapels to other denominations and faiths upon request, including to Orthodox and Islamic groups.

The European Action organization continued to advocate for freedom to question and deny the Holocaust on its Facebook page, voicing criticism of prosecutions against persons who deny the Holocaust.

There were no mosques in the country and one Islamic prayer room run by the Turkish Association. An additional prayer room run by the Islamic Community of Liechtenstein existed in the canton of St. Gallen in neighboring Switzerland.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

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 existing laws on religious practices, such as the prohibition of ritual animal slaughter, with civil society organizations, including Amnesty International, the Islamic Community of Liechtenstein, and the Liechtenstein Friends of Yad Vashem.