

# HUNGARY 2015 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

## Executive Summary

The Fundamental Law (constitution) provides for freedom of religion, including freedom to change religion or belief and freedom to manifest religion or belief through religious acts or ceremonies; it voices respect for all religious traditions existing in the country. The constitution separates church and state and stipulates “religious communities” (which encompass “incorporated churches” and “religious organizations”) are independent legal entities, but the state may cooperate with them on community goals. Parliament must approve by a two-thirds majority the application of a religious organization to function as an incorporated church, a status which provides for tax benefits and government support. The previous deregistration of more than 350 incorporated churches remained in effect despite Constitutional Court rulings during the year that certain provisions of the religion law were unconstitutional or in breach of the European Convention on Human Rights, and a 2014 ruling of the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) declaring the underlying law violated the right to freedom of association read in light of the freedom of religion. Some minority religious groups reached agreement with the government on their compensation claims based on the ECHR ruling, but others returned to the ECHR for final settlement. The access of minority religious groups to state funding and religious activities at public institutions remained limited. Government officials reiterated “zero tolerance for anti-Semitism” and assumed the chairmanship of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA). During the year, officials made statements seemingly equating national policy with Christian policy.

There were reports of anti-Muslim sentiment as the migrant crisis in Europe intensified. The Muslim community reported physical and verbal attacks and threats, including 10 to 15 physical assaults against Muslim women wearing headscarves. Manifestation of anti-Semitism included assaults and verbal attacks, Holocaust denial and revisionism, and cemetery desecration and other vandalism.

In public and private statements, U.S. embassy and visiting U.S. officials emphasized the government’s responsibility to address the Holocaust accurately, avoid paying tribute to wartime figures who played a role in the Holocaust, and consult with the Jewish community. They also continued to raise strong concerns about the law on religion and the deregistration of, and restrictions on, certain minority religious groups.

## HUNGARY

### Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 9.9 million (July 2015 estimate). The Hungarian government does not collect official data on religious affiliation; however, the 2011 national census included an optional question on religious affiliation. Responses indicated 37.1 percent of the population self-identifies as Roman Catholic, 11.6 percent as Hungarian Reformed Church (Calvinist), 2.2 percent as Lutheran, 1.8 percent as Greek Catholic, and less than 1 percent as Jewish. In the same census, 16.7 percent indicated no religious affiliation and 1.5 percent indicated they were atheists; 27.2 percent offered no response. Religious groups together constituting less than 5 percent of the population include Greek Orthodox, the Faith Congregation (a Pentecostal group), other Orthodox Christian groups, other Christian denominations, Buddhists, and Muslims.

### Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

#### Legal Framework

The Fundamental Law (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, and to manifest, abstain from manifesting, practice, or teach religion or belief, through religious acts or ceremonies, or in any other way. It prohibits religious discrimination as well as speech “violating the dignity” of any religious community.

The constitution’s preamble recognizes the role of Christianity in preserving the nation and voices value for all religious traditions existing in the country. The constitution stipulates individuals sharing a faith may establish religious communities that are independent legal entities, separate from the state. According to the constitution, the state may, at the request of religious communities, cooperate with them on community goals, subject to the approval of the national assembly (parliament). A cooperating religious community shall function as an “incorporated church.” According to the constitution, the state shall grant special licenses to incorporated churches upon request to support their participation in tasks in the public interest, for example, education.

The law prescribes a dual system of religious communities, consisting of “incorporated churches” (which are not limited to Christian groups) and “religious

## HUNGARY

organizations.” The law authorizes the Budapest Metropolitan Court to register a group as a religious organization if it has at least 10 founding individual members whose primary objective is to conduct religious activities that do not violate the constitution, other laws, or the rights and freedom of other communities. The organization’s membership may consist only of individuals; no “legal persons” such as corporations or other associations may be members. Applications meeting these criteria must be approved. If the court rejects an organization’s application, the decision is subject to appeal to the Budapest Metropolitan Court of Appeals. Unregistered groups are allowed to function and to worship but lack the rights and privileges granted exclusively to registered religious communities.

The law stipulates the registration of a religious organization as an incorporated church requires the approval of parliament by a two-thirds majority. The requirement extends to the more than 350 previously recognized religious groups and organizations deregistered as a result of the 2011 law on religion. Those organizations must reapply if they wish to regain their status.

To obtain incorporated church status from parliament, religious organizations must submit applications to the Ministry of Human Capacities (MHC). The MHC has 60 days to assess whether the group fulfills all the administrative criteria, which include a variety of documentation and qualifications. To qualify for incorporated church status, a religious organization must have existed in the country for 20 years (in which case it must have a membership of 0.1 percent of the total population, approximately 10,000 people) or have existed at least 100 years internationally (in which case its foreign affiliation needs to be certified by at least two other churches of “similar doctrine” that are recognized in foreign countries). Its activities may not conflict with the constitution or other laws or violate the rights and freedom of other communities. A group must also prove that its primary purpose is to conduct religious activity; have a formal statement of faith and rites, bylaws and internal rules, and elected or appointed administrative and representative bodies; and officially declare that its activities are not in violation of the laws or the freedom of others. The MHC is obligated to consult with a lawyer, religious historian, religious scientist, or sociologist prior to issuing its decision, which is subject to judicial review.

Following an MHC decision on the applicant’s eligibility, parliament’s Judiciary Committee has 60 days to invite the applicant to a public hearing and to submit an assessment to parliament on the group’s compliance with additional criteria. These criteria include an assessment that the group poses no threat to national security

## HUNGARY

(provided by parliament's National Security Committee); that it does not violate the right to physical and mental health or the protection of life and human dignity; and that the group is suitable for long-term cooperation with the state in promoting community goals based on its founding documents, number of members, network of institutions providing public services, and access by larger societal groups to such services.

Approval of a request for incorporated church status requires a vote in favor of the application by a two-thirds parliamentary majority within 60 days of the MHC's recommendation. The law does not prescribe any consequences if parliament does not act within the 60-day period. If parliament rejects the application, a detailed explanation is required and the applicant can challenge parliament's decision in the Constitutional Court within 15 days.

The annex to the religion law lists 27 incorporated churches, including the Catholic Church, a variety of Protestant denominations, a range of Orthodox Christian groups, other Christian denominations such as The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Seventh-day Adventists, and the Salvation Army, several Jewish groups, and the Hungarian Society for Krishna Consciousness, the sole registered Hindu organization. This figure also includes Buddhist and Muslim umbrella organizations, each encompassing a number of individual groups, bringing the total number on the registered list of incorporated churches to 32 individual religious groups. Including dioceses and monastic orders, 200 entities are associated with the 32 incorporated churches.

On May 29, in a case involving a complaint by the Independent Historic Protestant Church, the Constitutional Court declared parts of the 2011 religion law (parts which had been in effect from March 1, 2012 until August 31, 2013) unconstitutional and generally inapplicable in individual cases. The Church had appealed a 2013 court ruling rejecting its application for religious association status after losing its previous church status under the 2011 law. The Constitutional Court established that the short (four months) and peremptory legal deadline to fulfill requirements for the change of legal status in this particular legal framework violated religious freedom and thus was unconstitutional. In its ruling the Constitutional Court stated, "Guaranteeing religious freedom cannot be dissociated from the operability of religious communities." The case of the Independent Historic Protestant Church remained pending at the Budapest Metropolitan Court at the end of the year.

## HUNGARY

On July 7, in a case involving the Budapest Autonomous Congregation, the Constitutional Court cited the 2014 ECHR ruling concluding that the religion law's criteria for parliamentary recognition as an incorporated church constituted a violation of the European Convention on Human Rights (Convention) because noncompliance with these criteria resulted in the congregation being ineligible for certain privileges, most importantly the 1 percent personal income tax donation for churches and associated state subsidies. The Constitutional Court declared the criteria related to the minimum membership of the religious organization (0.1 percent of the population) and length of operation (either 20 years domestically or 100 years internationally) violated the obligation of neutrality and impartiality of the Convention. The Constitutional Court ordered parliament and the government to bring the religion law into compliance with international obligations by October 15.

On July 24, the Constitutional Court again ruled that other parts of the religion law (parts which had been in effect from March 1, 2012 until July 31, 2013) were unconstitutional and inapplicable in the pending court cases of five religious organizations whose legal status was terminated and assets liquidated because they failed to announce their intentions to continue operation by a legal deadline (two months). As in its May 29 decision, the Constitutional Court concluded the short and preemptory deadline set by the law violated religious freedom.

On December 14, the Constitutional Court issued a ruling similar to the May 29 case in response to a request by the Budapest Metropolitan Public Administration and Labor Court that the Constitutional Court review the religion law's constitutionality. The Constitutional Court reiterated its earlier conclusion that the religion law provisions stipulating the criteria for incorporated church status violated international treaty obligations. The Constitutional Court prohibited the application of these contested religion law provisions in the case of the Association of Shalom Biblical Congregation adjudicated by the Budapest court. Following the Constitutional Court ruling, the case of the Association of Shalom Biblical Congregation remained pending at the Budapest Metropolitan Public Administration and Labor Court at the end of the year.

Every religious community may use the word "church" in its official name regardless of whether it is officially recognized by parliament as an "incorporated church." Officials from both incorporated churches and registered religious organizations not recognized by parliament are not obligated to disclose

## HUNGARY

information shared with them in the course of their faith-related service (e.g., during rites of confession).

No state office may determine or supervise a registered religious community's faith-based activities. Their doctrines, internal regulations, and statutes are not subject to state review, modification, or enforcement. Their names, symbols and rites are protected by copyright law, while buildings and cemeteries are protected by criminal law.

Incorporated churches have certain privileges not available to religious organizations, such as greater access to state funding and exemption from control of their financial operations connected to religious activities. Incorporated churches and their associated institutions (classified as "internal religious legal entities") that provide public services, such as health care, education, or other social services, are automatically eligible for full state subsidies (a subsidy based on the number of people receiving services coupled with a supplementary subsidy) for all their public service activities. Religious organizations may also take over or establish public service institutions and are entitled to receive a per capita state subsidy to cover the wages of the staff employed by these institutions. Social welfare services institutes such as hospitals and homes for the elderly run by religious organizations, however, are ineligible for supplementary state support.

Incorporated churches and religious organizations receive a per capita subsidy, based on the number of students enrolled, from the state for employee wages at their schools, but only incorporated churches automatically receive a supplementary subsidy for operational expenses. According to the law, religious organizations may apply to the MHC for a supplementary operational subsidy covering approximately 30 percent of their total costs for schools, and the MHC decides whether to grant it on a case-by-case basis.

Taxpayers may allocate 1 percent of their personal income taxes to an incorporated church, which then receives additional funds from the government. Religious organizations compete with thousands of other nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) for a similar 1 percent personal income tax allocation designated for civil society organizations. Both incorporated churches and religious organizations are free to use taxpayer donations as they wish. Only officials of incorporated churches are exempt from personal income tax under certain conditions. Land owned by a religious group that was deregistered in 2011 may be retained by the religious organization that is the deregistered group's legal successor. Both

## HUNGARY

religious organizations and incorporated churches are prohibited from purchasing agricultural land. Incorporated churches, but not religious organizations, may acquire new agricultural land as a gift or as inheritance.

If incorporated churches or religious organizations cease to exist (e.g., by dissolving themselves) and have no legal successor, their assets become state property that must be used to finance public services. This may also occur if, upon the initiative of the government, the Constitutional Court issues an opinion that the activity of the incorporated church violates the constitution, which requires confirmation by a two-thirds parliamentary majority. The Constitutional Court also issues opinions upon the request of the Budapest Metropolitan Court on whether a religious organization is in violation of the constitution, but the decision on its dissolution depends on the Budapest Metropolitan Court.

Treaties with the Holy See regulate relations between the state and the Roman Catholic Church, including financing of public services and religious activities and the settlement of claims for property seized by the state during the Communist era. These agreements also serve as a model for regulating state relations with other religious groups.

One-hour-per-week faith and ethics or ethics-only education is mandatory in the first, second, fifth, and sixth grades of public elementary schools and the first and second years of public secondary schools. Since September the third and seventh grades of public schools also joined the program. Students and their parents choose between the faith and ethics class provided by an incorporated church of their choice and a generic ethics course taught by public school teachers. Churches are entitled to prepare their own textbooks and determine curricula for their faith and ethics classes. Private schools are not obligated to introduce mandatory faith and ethics or ethics classes. Nonincorporated religious organizations are not entitled to provide religious education as part of the mandatory curricula in public schools, but they may offer extracurricular religious education in public schools if requested by students or parents.

Incorporated churches and religious organizations have the right to open their own schools. The law affords incorporated churches and religious organizations the right to assume operation of public schools through a formal agreement with the MHC. Religious communities, school teachers, the affected parents, or the operator of the school can initiate such transfers, but they can only be executed if the designated religious community is able to collect the signatures of more than

## HUNGARY

50 percent of the parents and adult students enrolled at the school. The government inspects religious schools every two years to ensure standards conform to those of government-run schools.

Incorporated churches receive automatic authorization to provide pastoral services in hospitals, while religious organizations must seek permission.

Military personnel may freely access their religion in private and public. The Catholic Church, the Reformed Church, the Lutheran Church, and Jewish congregations receive automatic authorization to provide chaplain services to the military; other incorporated churches and religious associations must seek permission.

Penitentiaries generally allow inmates free practice of religion, including access to special food such as kosher. All incorporated churches and religious organizations must seek permission to offer pastoral services in prisons. Rejection of access requests may be appealed to the Ministry of Interior. According to the government, 13 incorporated churches and six religious organizations had access to prison facilities and carried out regular religious activities in penitentiaries for inmates during the year. Detainees have the right to contact without supervision representatives of incorporated churches or religious organizations having permission to access the facility. Detainees in special security regimes may only receive individual spiritual care and are excluded from community spiritual programs. A public prosecutor or judge may restrict the practice of religion during criminal proceedings.

The Fundamental Law includes prohibitions on “hate speech” designed to “protect the dignity of the Hungarian nation” and that of any religious or other social community. The law provides a maximum punishment of three years in prison for impeding someone else from freely exercising his or her religion through violence or threats. Abusing an individual because of his or her religious affiliation is punishable by up to three years in prison.

Physical assault motivated by the victim’s real or suspected 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 similarly punished with a prison sentence of one to five years. If an assault is committed by a group or is armed, it is punishable by imprisonment of two to eight years; and any person who engages in preparation for the use of force against any

## HUNGARY

member of a religious or social community is guilty of a misdemeanor punishable by imprisonment not exceeding two years. The law automatically suspends the immunity of a member of parliament (MP) who incites hatred against religious communities or publicly denies crimes of the Communist or National Socialist regimes. No MP has been the subject of such a proceeding.

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 the 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 arrow cross in a way that harms the human dignity or the memory of victims a misdemeanor, punishable by detention for a period ranging from five to 90 days.

### Government Practices

The parliament failed to amend the religion law, including those specific provisions the Constitutional Court found unconstitutional and the parts resulting in mass deregistration of religious groups that the 2014 ECHR ruling declared in violation of the European Convention of Human Rights. The government reached full agreement on the settlement of restitution claims of six out of the 16 ECHR applicant religious groups. Nonincorporated religious organizations continued to have limited access to public funding and to religious activities in public institutions. Jewish community representatives and other civil groups heavily criticized the plan to erect a statue honoring World War II politician Balint Homan in Szekesfehervar, a plan which the prime minister subsequently also criticized. The statue was not erected by the end of the year. The government said it maintained a policy of “zero tolerance for anti-Semitism” and assumed the IHRA chairmanship in March. In connection with the migration crisis in Europe, the prime minister repeatedly emphasized the importance of defending the “Christian values of Europe” against the flow of Muslim migrants. On April 14, Foreign Minister Peter Szijjarto said at an international conference that the government pursued “a Christian foreign policy based on a Christian Europe and a Christian Hungary.”

Parliament did not meet the Constitutional Court-ordered deadline to amend the unconstitutional provisions of the law on religion by October 15. Although governing parties submitted to parliament an amendment to the religion law on November 10 following widespread intragovernmental consultations, it failed to

## HUNGARY

garner the required two-thirds majority. The contested provisions of the religion law remained in effect at the end of the year.

At the end of the year, four constitutional compliance cases involving the religion law were pending at the Constitutional Court.

The government did not reach agreement on damages with all 16 deregistered churches which were plaintiffs in the case in which the ECHR ruled that parts of the religion law violated the plaintiffs' freedom of association with respect to the freedom of religion. The ECHR had urged the government to reach an agreement by May 15 with the plaintiffs, including the Hungarian Evangelical Fellowship (MET), Mennonite, Jewish, and Buddhist groups, and a variety of other minority religious groups. The government settled on damages with six applicant groups, and partially settled with three groups (including the MET), but had not reached agreement with seven other organizations by year's end. Dissatisfied groups returned to the ECHR to seek final settlement, which remained pending at the end of the year.

At year's end, despite the legal deadline, parliament had not voted on any of the 12 applications for incorporated church status that religious organizations had submitted to the MHC in 2013. The MHC had found all 12 of the groups eligible for incorporation and had moved their applications forward for parliamentary action.

During the year, courts terminated 18 deregistered churches. Only one had assets in its name, valued at approximately 26,000 forints (\$90), which the government liquidated. Thirty-five cases of termination of deregistered churches remained pending.

The Curia, the highest judicial authority in the country, ruled on seven appeals involving deregistered religious groups (including six cases concerning the MET), and three cases remained pending. In these rulings the Curia concluded that the 2013 annulment of parts of the religion law by the Constitutional Court did not mean religious groups would automatically regain their lost church status. Consequently, religious organizations needed to complete the registration process for incorporated church status and obtain parliamentary approval of that status before they could be listed in the official state registry of incorporated churches.

## HUNGARY

On June 26, MET reached a partial agreement with the government on its compensation claim of 3.7 billion forints (\$13 million) based on the 2014 ECHR ruling. Pursuant to the agreement, the government transferred 1.2 billion forints (\$4 million) to MET on July 13, covering the unpaid 1 percent personal income tax allocation for churches, the supplementary state subsidies for its social welfare and educational institutions, and the wage supplement for its staff working in its institutes from 2012 to 2014. Based on the partial agreement reached with the government, MET considered its 2012-14 financial compensation claims closed. MET continued its legal effort to regain its lost incorporated church status and access to financial subsidies for 2015 at the Constitutional Court and the Curia.

The Constantinople Patriarchy Hungarian Exarchy, which directs the national branch of the Greek Orthodox Church, reported it would continue to contest the restitution of a church in Budapest the government awarded to the Russian Orthodox Church.

As of November 15, a total of 16,532 schoolchildren had visited the Hungarian Holocaust Memorial Center (HDKE), compared with 16,014 the previous year. The government reimbursed the travel expenses of school groups arriving by train to visit the center. Approximately 10,000 more school children had visited the traveling exhibits of HDKE around the country.

The Jewish Community Roundtable Educational Expert Group (ZSKK – an ad hoc alliance of 17 Jewish organizations) continued its cooperation with the government aimed at adjusting the portrayal of the Jewish community in educational materials to more prominently feature the role of Jews in the country’s history and cultural life, as well as information about Israel. The ZSKK reviewed government-commissioned history, literature and ethics textbooks in public elementary and secondary schools for Jewish-related content and criticized some “anti-Judaic” phrases it found in history books. According to the ZSKK, the government incorporated 70-80 percent of their recommendations for the textbooks but several issues remained open for further discussions.

The MHC continued to provide supplementary operational funding to three religious organizations maintaining schools (MET, the Dzsaj Bhim Buddhist community, and the Christian Family Church Religious Association), effective from 2013 until the end of August 2017. During the year, the three groups received a total of 563.5 million forints (\$1.94 million). No other religious association requested a supplementary subsidy from the MHC during the year.

## HUNGARY

The government provided 52 billion forints (\$179 million) to incorporated churches for a range of activities, including maintenance of buildings; support for religious instruction, education, and culture; support for community programs and investments; and wages of church employees. The government also provided a total of 109 million forints (\$376,000) to religious organizations for operational costs of religious activities.

The government continued to provide approximately 90 percent of its total financial support to the Roman Catholic Church, the Hungarian Reformed Church, the Lutheran Church, and the Jewish community, which it considered to be the country's four "historical" religious groups, an unofficial designation by which the media also referred to these four groups.

On May 18, Prime Minister Viktor Orban signed an agreement with Archbishop-Metropolitan Fulop Kocsis to allocate 2.3 billion forints (\$7.8 million) for the newly created Metropolia of the Hungarian Greek Catholic Church to finance the restoration of properties received from the city of Debrecen.

The government provided 4.8 billion forints (\$17 million) supplemental funding in fiscal year 2014 to contribute to the 3.9 billion forints (\$14 million) allocated by taxpayers as 1 percent of personal income tax to 31 incorporated churches that requested listing on tax declaration forms. On the 2014 personal income tax return forms, 62 formerly recognized churches that became religious organizations received the allowed 1 percent tax contribution for their work as NGOs, with total contributions reaching 17 million forints (\$60,500). The Column of Truth Full Evangelical Christian Association completed the administrative process of registration as a religious organization during the year and became eligible to receive from the tax authority the 178,000 forints (\$635) allocated to it in 2011 and 2012 (the last two years it was eligible to collect taxpayers' donations allocated for churches). Payments worth a total of 85 million forints (\$300,000) to the 59 other formerly incorporated churches that remained unregistered remained in suspense at the end of the year, pending registration of the groups.

The Unified Hungarian Jewish Congregation (EMIH) criticized the system of 1 percent tax allocations on the basis of the lack of transparency and inability to verify the counting of individual taxpayers' donation slips.

## HUNGARY

On January 30, a member of the European Parliament asked the European Commission (EC) to investigate the “excessive conditions” imposed by the government on uses of the European Social Fund, which narrowed the pool of potential applicants to only the Roman Catholic Church. The issue referred to the government’s distribution of two billion forints’ (\$6.8 million) worth of EC funding for Roman Catholic religious education. On April 23, the European commissioner for education said the EC had launched a review of the case.

On December 18, the Szekesfehervar city council withdrew its June 12 decree, which had approved the plan of The Homan Balint Cultural Foundation, an NGO, to erect a life-size bronze statue of Balint Homan in Szekesfehervar and allocated 1.9 million forints (\$6,500) to the foundation for related costs. Earlier the Ministry of Public Administration and Justice had also transferred 15 million forints (\$51,000) to the project. Homan was minister of religion and education between 1932 and 1942, a member of parliament during the Nazi Arrow Cross party’s rule in 1944, a cosponsor of legislation that stripped Hungarian Jews of their citizenship rights, and an advocate for the deportation of Hungarian Jewry in 1944. In the spring and summer of 1944, 430,000 Hungarian Jews were deported to Auschwitz. Homan was convicted of war crimes in 1946 for having voted to declare war on the Soviet Union, a conviction that the Budapest Metropolitan Court revoked on March 6.

Domestic and international Jewish organizations, as well as foreign governments, three cabinet members, and several NGOs criticized the Homan statue project. In response to the criticism, on December 11, the mayor of Szekesfehervar announced he had asked the foundation to reconsider the construction of the statue and to return the funds received from the central government and the municipality. On December 15, Prime Minister Orban declared “the government could not support the erection of a statue in honor of a politician who collaborated with occupying powers and collaborated with oppressors of Hungary – whatever merits that politician may otherwise have had.” On December 17, the NGO informed the city mayor it no longer wished to erect a statue of Homan and returned the public funds.

The Federation of Jewish Communities in Hungary (MAZSIHISZ) registered six incidents of public expression of anti-Semitism by political party representatives and national or local government officials during the first six months of the year.

## HUNGARY

On May 22, the governing Fidesz Party issued a statement in which it characterized the Hungarian Helsinki Committee, an NGO which has criticized the government's policies towards the migration crisis, as "a fake civil society organization that responds to the political requests of international speculative capital... We call upon the Hungarian Helsinki Committee to stop lying and stuffing their pockets with [a wealthy Jewish American's] money at least in such an important and serious question."

On October 30, in a speech to Fidesz supporters, Prime Minister Orban said that "Europe has been betrayed" and claimed that "some well-organized unelected activist leadership presiding over huge flows of capital, thinking in terms over and beyond the framework of nation states; and if the Soros Foundation comes into your mind now, that is not entirely unjustified." Domestic experts on anti-Semitism stated that, while not overtly anti-Semitic, the terms "international speculative capital" and "beyond the framework of nation states" can have anti-Semitic connotations in national discourse.

MAZSIHISZ and the Brussels Institute, founded by the NGO Action and Protection Foundation (TEV), reported that members of the extreme ethnic nationalist Jobbik Party limited their previous practice of making public anti-Semitic statements. At a press briefing in parliament on April 13, party chair Gabor Vona stated that "those with anti-Semitic sentiment should look for a new party for themselves." Nevertheless, on February 12 and 16, Laszlo Benke and Elod Novak, respectively Jobbik representatives in Budapest's 13th district council and parliament, failed to stand up for a minute of silence in honor of the chief rabbi, who had died a few days before. The media also reported that Jozsef Pista, Jobbik representative of Komlo, shared an internet post on February 20 in which he noted the chief rabbi "was tolerated in our country, nobody slapped him in the face, or knocked him on his head (to come to his senses), but he definitely fulfilled his promise, he harmed us every way he could."

On March 14, the Democratic Coalition Party filed a report at the prosecutor's office in connection with a 2011 email sent by Jobbik MP Gergely Kulcsar to his fellow party members, in which he stated that he had spit on the Holocaust memorial next to the Danube River. The prosecutor's office launched an investigation in the case but terminated it on March 18 without pressing charges, due to the time lapse and a determination there had been no crime. Minister of the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) Janos Lazar condemned Kulcsar's action, as well as the Jobbik Party leadership, in April.

## HUNGARY

The government's National Education Authority suspended a teacher for posting a portrait of Hitler on her Facebook page with the caption, "EU Refugee High Commissioner, Lager [Nazi concentration camp] Commander." The State Secretariat for Public Education of the MHC issued a public statement condemning all racist, anti-Semitic hate-mongering and aggression against any ethnic or religious minority.

Law enforcement and judiciary agencies continued to prosecute anti-Semitic incidents. During the year, courts convicted one individual of incitement of religious hatred and a total of 59 individuals for violence against members of religious, ethnic, racial, or other societal groups. Details on the incidents and their motivation were unavailable.

On March 26, the Debrecen District Court imposed a fine of 750,000 forints (\$2,500) on Tibor Agoston, Jobbik representative on the Debrecen City Council, for Holocaust denial. Agoston called the Holocaust a "*holokamu*" ("Holoscam") in 2014. Agoston appealed the verdict, as did prosecutors who sought a more severe penalty, and the case remained pending at year's end.

On February 10, Csaba Latorcai, the Deputy State Secretary for Priority Social Affairs of the PMO, stated the government had declared "zero tolerance for anti-Semitism." He stressed that preserving Jewish cultural heritage was a "shared responsibility" of the nation and noted that, within the framework of the 70th Anniversary of the Holocaust in the country, the government had allocated in the previous two years 3.3 billion forints (\$11 million) to renovate 19 synagogues and 200 million forints (\$680,000) to renovate five abandoned Jewish cemeteries around the country. The renovation of two synagogues in Debrecen, started in 2013, concluded during the year. The government allocated an additional 1 billion forints (\$3.4 million) for further synagogue and cemetery renovation projects to begin in 2016.

On March 9, the government took over the chairmanship of the IHRA and said it was making combating anti-Semitism and Holocaust education central to its program. As part of its chairmanship, the government organized a conference on November 6 on the use of Holocaust related imagery and language in public discourse. On May 13, IHRA Chair Szabolcs Takacs stated in a speech in Jerusalem that the "Holocaust is one of the most shameful episodes of Hungarian

## HUNGARY

history. Hungarian authorities actively assisted in ... the killing of 600,000 Hungarians.”

In a statement marking Holocaust Memorial Day on April 16, Prime Minister Orban said that “The community of Hungarian Jews can rely on the respect, friendship and protection of the Hungarian government.” The president, prime minister, and cabinet members condemned anti-Semitic incidents, publicly accepted responsibility for the Holocaust on behalf of the state and its officials, and attended events commemorating the Holocaust.

On October 29, the Ministry of Interior and the Israeli embassy co-organized a Righteous Among the Nations Award ceremony to recognize 13 individuals who risked their lives to save Jews during World War II, attended by the president of the Curia, the president of the National Office for the Judiciary, and justices of the Constitutional Court, among other senior government officials.

The government’s 2013 plan to establish a new Holocaust museum, the House of Fates, remained pending. Despite international pressure for her removal and government promises, the project manager, widely criticized for failing to consult with the Jewish community and Holocaust experts on the content of the exhibits, officially remained in her position. On March 3, Minister of the PMO Janos Lazar repeated his earlier pledge that “in Hungary a Holocaust museum or a Holocaust memorial cannot be built without the representatives of Hungarian Jewry or without their support...If Hungarian Jewry, the Holocaust survivors, do not support it, the House of Fates will not be built.” The government had already spent 7.5 billion forints (\$25 million) on the project and completed the physical infrastructure of the future museum.

The government hosted two high level intergovernmental roundtable discussions with representatives of the Jewish community. At these events, the Jewish community discussed the renovation of Jewish cemeteries, the House of Fates project, anti-Semitism and physical security, and restitution for heirless Jewish properties with the relevant cabinet members and other senior government officials.

The country faced a historically high flow of migrants and asylum seekers, the vast majority Syrian, Afghan, and Iraqi Muslims transiting to Western Europe. In an interview in January after the terrorist attacks on the kosher supermarket and the satirical newspaper *Charlie Hebdo* in Paris, Prime Minister Orban said, “While I

## HUNGARY

am prime minister, Hungary will definitely not become an immigration destination. We don't want to see significantly-sized minorities with different cultural characteristics and backgrounds among us. We want to keep Hungary as Hungary.”

Interviewed on a talk show in January, Fidesz faction leader Antal Rogan stated the presence of Muslim communities in Western Europe “disrupts the domestic order of these Christian countries.” On February 11, the government launched a comprehensive public relations campaign against migrants and asylum seekers, including anti-immigration billboards across the country, the launch of the National Consultation on Immigration and Terrorism, a survey-style questionnaire mailed to the entire population. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees expressed concern that the questionnaire promoted hostility toward migrants.

The prime minister repeatedly voiced concerns regarding what he called the need to preserve European identity – rooted in Christianity – from massive immigration. On May 18, at a public ceremony, Prime Minister Orbán said “Hungary will either be Christian or will not be at all.” On October 16, German weekly news magazine *Focus* published an interview with Orbán in which he stated that Islam “has never been part of Europe but came into Europe.” Orbán also said “the Islamic religion and culture do not blend with Christian religion and culture; it is a different way of life.”

Hungarian and international Muslim groups repeatedly criticized the anti-Muslim statements of the government. On September 3, the imam of the Hungarian Islamic Community (HIC) announced that the governing Fidesz and Christian Democratic People’s Party (KDNP) were “*haram*” (forbidden) because of repeated anti-Muslim comments by their officials. The imam said the *haram* declaration meant that Muslim community members (the MIC has approximately 5-10,000 members) should not be members of those parties or support them with their votes. MHC State Secretary for Church Affairs Miklos Soltesz called the *haram* declaration “more than unfriendly,” especially since the community had received significant financial support from the government for its activities in past years. The imam withdrew the *haram* declaration on October 9. On August 10, the imam also announced that the nationalist Jobbik party was *haram* due to its support for anti-immigrant actions along the Serbian border, a declaration which remained in force at the end of the year.

## HUNGARY

On June 16-17, the MHC and the country's National Committee of the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization cohosted a conference entitled Common Path – The Situation of European Religions and the Coexistence of the Hungarian Religious Communities in Tihany. Several Christian and Jewish organizations and religious leaders participated in the panel discussions aimed at fostering interfaith dialogue on various challenges faced by contemporary societies. The conference concluded with the adoption of a joint statement promoting interfaith dialogue and combating anti-Christian and anti-Semitic sentiments.

### **Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom**

As of October 31, the police had registered four cases of incitement of hatred and 29 cases of violence against members of religious, ethnic, racial, or other societal groups; the police did not break these figures down further. During the first nine months of the year, the police registered 251 cases of vandalism of cemeteries or religious buildings.

Muslim communities reported anti-Muslim public sentiment. Muslim leaders said the public hostility toward the community stemmed from anti-Muslim rhetoric of senior government officials coupled with similar comments from Christian church officials and some media outlets. According to the Hungarian Islamic Community, 10 to 15 women wearing headscarves were attacked during the year. Attacks included a threat with a knife, a face slap, and the tearing off of a headscarf. The Hungarian Islamic Community said none of the attacks were reported to police, as the women were afraid to do so.

Anti-Semitic incidents continued to raise concerns in the Jewish community. The TEV registered 49 acts of anti-Semitism for the first 10 months of the year, including two cases of assault, compared to 37 anti-Semitic incidents in all of 2014, including one case of physical abuse. The first incident of assault occurred in July when a ticket controller on a Budapest public bus pulled the hair of a woman who was travelling without a valid ticket and directed verbal insults at her, including calling her a “homeless Jewish bitch.” The media reported the second physical incident on September 18, when a security guard at the Budapest 8th District municipality office twice hit a sociologist while calling him “Jew” after a dispute over whether the office was still open.

## HUNGARY

TEV continued to provide legal counseling and representation for victims of anti-Semitic incidents. Through the end of October, TEV had filed 10 complaints about anti-Semitic incidents, including one for advocating genocide, one for assault, and seven for Holocaust denial. Of the 10 cases, authorities closed two cases and temporarily suspended one; the other seven cases remained pending with investigators. Of the 19 cases TEV filed in 2014, 18 remained pending with investigators, and one was pending in court.

Including the six incidents of public expression of anti-Semitic sentiment by political party and government representatives, MAZSIHISZ registered 26 incidents of anti-Semitism (of the other 20 incidents, two involved threats, eight hate speech, and 10 vandalism), but no physical assaults, during the first six months of the year, compared with 36 cases over the same period the previous year. The number of anti-Semitic incidents for all of 2014 was 73. MAZSIHISZ classified the 26 registered anti-Semitic incidents as hate crimes.

Of the country's elementary and secondary schools, 15.4 percent were operated by incorporated churches (12.4 percent in 2014) and 0.2 percent by religious organizations (0.1 percent in 2014). Of preschools (for ages 3-7), 8.9 percent were operated by incorporated churches (8 percent in 2014), and one by a religious organization. Approximately 204,000 students studied at preschools and elementary and secondary schools operated by registered religious communities (incorporated churches and religious organizations).

In September Pazmany Peter Catholic University introduced a mandatory course on the history of the Holocaust.

On March 31, TEV released a survey conducted by Median Polling that showed in 2014, 32 percent of respondents had anti-Semitic views (21 percent had "extremely anti-Semitic" views and 11 percent "moderately anti-Semitic" views), compared to 38 percent of respondents expressing anti-Semitic sentiments in 2013 (20 percent extremely anti-Semitic views and 18 percent moderately anti-Semitic). In the same poll, the number of citizens who "emotionally rejected" Jews increased from 9 percent in 2003, when data were first collected, to 10 percent in 2009, 21 percent in 2013, and 23 percent in 2014. Median's director attributed the increase to Jobbik's emergence on the political scene.

On November 23, the Pest Central District Court convicted a 63-year old man who shouted anti-Semitic insults on April 25 in Budapest at the Consul of the Israeli

## HUNGARY

Embassy, who was talking to his son in Hebrew and wearing a traditional Jewish yarmulke. The court decreed a one-year suspended prison sentence.

On April 22, the Pest Central District Court issued a ruling in the case of three men who held up the flag of the country's wartime, Nazi-allied Arrow Cross party in a first division soccer game in 2013 in Budapest. One of the men produced and displayed the flag, then gave it to two friends, who raised the flag while making the Nazi salute. The court banned the three men from all Hungarian professional football matches for periods of two to four years.

On April 16, the Szeged Regional Court found a 61-year-old woman guilty of Holocaust denial, sentenced her to 18 months of probation, and ordered her to visit the HDKE in Budapest and report to her probation officer on the visit. According to the indictment, the woman posted comments on a community site in response to an internet portal's report on a visit to Budapest by the grandchild of a former Auschwitz concentration camp commander. In the comment she expressed doubt that the Holocaust had in fact taken place, adding that statements about it were lies. The case was reported by the TEV, to which the woman sent a letter of apology. On July 29, the woman visited the HDKE accompanied by a TEV staff member; in a subsequent press conference, she expressed remorse and regretted hurting others' feelings.

On October 20, the court of the Reformed (Calvinist) Church issued a formal reprimand to former MIEP (Hungarian Justice and Life Party) MP and Pastor Lorant Hegedus, Jr., who had unveiled a bust of Miklos Horthy, regent (de facto head of state) from 1920 to 1944, in the vestibule of his church in 2013. During the trial, the legal adviser for the Budapest-North Reformed Diocese said Hegedus' sermon before the unveiling of the statue was intended to incite hatred against the Jews. The Church court ruled the pastor had violated the laws of the Reformed Church with his speech delivered before the unveiling ceremony, subordinating the message of the Bible to his own political aims. The reprimand did not affect Hegedus' pastoral activities.

On April 18, news media reported the Children of Vertesalja, a nationalist organization, organized a hiking tour in the Vertes Mountains to commemorate Adolf Hitler's birthday.

During the first nine months of the year, the police registered 251 cases of vandalism in cemeteries and religious buildings (including Jewish property). On

## HUNGARY

March 22, the police registered a case in which unknown perpetrators desecrated approximately 20 graves in the Jewish cemetery in Gyongyos, including scattering of human remains. Police launched an investigation and identified three juvenile suspects. On March 22, the PMO condemned the “barbaric” act. The investigation remained pending.

On April 4, vandals defaced 14 photos at an open air Holocaust exhibit in central Budapest. The next day, the MHC issued a statement calling the vandalism “shocking and appalling. The perpetrators desecrated not only Holocaust survivors, but the entire Jewish community, the whole of the Hungarian nation, all decent Hungarians by their mindless act of vandalism.” The police launched an investigation but failed to identify the perpetrators and suspended the investigation on July 23.

In early August an engraved marble plate on the Holocaust memorial in Nyiregyhaza was removed and smashed. Local police were investigating. The government condemned the vandalism.

Christian churches and the Jewish community continued to organize events under the auspices of the Christian-Jewish Society, an NGO, bringing together religious scholars for discussions. The society organized approximately 40 lectures and cultural events on Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, promoting religious tolerance and mutual understanding.

### **Section IV. U.S. Government Policy**

In numerous meetings with government officials, including the deputy prime minister, cabinet ministers, state secretaries and deputy state secretaries in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, PMO, and MHC, U.S. embassy representatives continued to urge reconsideration of the religion law to amend those provisions that resulted in discrimination against minority religious groups. In February a visiting Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor met with the state secretary of the PMO and the deputy state secretary of the MHC to discuss the need to revise the law on religion. He also met leaders of the Jewish community to discuss their relations with the government.

On October 19, the Ambassador, joined by her German and Israeli counterparts, traveled to Szekesfehervar to talk to Mayor Andras Cser-Palkovics about the

## HUNGARY

planned Balint Homan statue, urging him to stop the project. In meetings with the head of the local Jewish congregation and a local Holocaust survivor, the Ambassador expressed strong support for their community and opposition to the Homan statue. The Ambassador and other embassy officials also addressed the issue with senior officials of the Foreign Ministry, PMO, and the MHC.

On October 28, in a speech at Corvinus University in Budapest, the Ambassador applauded those government leaders who objected publicly to the Homan statue, and said “his legacy as a proponent of some of the most venomous anti-Semitic legislation in the prewar era casts a long shadow over the memory of those Hungarians victimized and killed during the Holocaust. Szekesfehervar, already a magnet for U.S. investment as well as other international companies, and the proposed site for a new NATO Force Integration Unit headquarters, should do better than to raise tribute to this man.”

In September another Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor visited the HDKE and met with leaders of the Jewish community to discuss the government’s plans to commemorate its wartime history.

The Special Envoy for Holocaust Issues (SEHI) visited Hungary four times. In April he met with government officials to discuss the HDKE, revisions to the national curriculum and textbooks, and the House of Fates Museum. He also discussed these issues with representatives of the Jewish community. In July the SEHI attended the first IHRA plenary session and met with government officials and Jewish community leaders to discuss the Homan statue and the House of Fates project. In November the SEHI attended the second IHRA plenary session and issued a statement on behalf of the U.S. delegation, supported by the German, Austrian, Israeli and British delegations. The statement praised the government for its successful chairmanship, for the frank recognition of anti-Semitism and its “robust approach to tackling it,” and applauded government leaders for raising their voice against the proposed statue of Balint Homan. The statement also “called upon the IHRA Chair to remind relevant authorities of these [related to the Homan statue] deep concerns.” In December the SEHI joined the U.S. Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Anti-Semitism and a Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor to express U.S. concerns regarding the planned statue of Balint Homan. The delegation participated in the December 15 symposium about Homan’s wartime activities, cosponsored by the embassy and the Political Capital Policy Research and Consulting Institute, a local think tank. The delegation met with the Mayor of Szekesfehervar, the President of the

## HUNGARY

Hungarian Science Academy, government officials, and several Jewish and civil organizations to convey their concern.

Embassy officers continued to meet regularly with leaders of religious organizations to discuss the effects of the 2011 religion law, including MET, the Dzsaj Bhim Buddhist Community, the Hungarian Islamic Community, and the Faith Congregation. Embassy staff maintained close contact with the country's diverse Jewish community to discuss issues related to its legal status and relationship with the government, anti-Semitism, restitution issues, and commemoration of the Holocaust.

The embassy issued a grant to a theater director to present a play, *On Jewish Fields, About Jewish Fields*. The play, dealing with Jewish life in the country, was performed 10 times to high school students in various locations.

On February 3, the embassy organized two presentations by a Holocaust survivor in Debrecen to more than 100 students at a local high school and more than 200 people at the county library.

On April 19, on the 70th anniversary of the liberation of the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp by U.S. troops, the embassy organized a digital video teleconference between Hungarian Holocaust survivors and a member of the liberation troops.

The embassy selected six teachers to participate in the Holocaust Teacher Training Program at Columbia University in New York and Appalachian State University in North Carolina. On June 3, the Ambassador hosted a reception in honor of the 10th anniversary of the Holocaust Teacher Training Program, inviting the participants of previous years' programs and government officials. In her speech, the Ambassador emphasized the important role of educators in combating anti-Semitism and promoting societal tolerance toward different ethnic and religious groups. The Ambassador also participated in the March of the Living Holocaust commemoration in April, hosted delegations from the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in September, and briefed delegations of visiting Jewish Americans throughout the year.