

SLOVENIA

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

There were minor reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 7,827 square miles and a population of 1,960,000. According to the 2002 census, 58 percent of the population is Roman Catholic (1,135,626), 2 percent Muslim (47,488), 2 percent Orthodox (45,908), and 1 percent Evangelical (14,736). Groups that constitute less than 1 percent of the population include "other Christians" (1,877), "other Protestants" (1,399), "Oriental" religions (1,026), "other religions" (558), agnostics (271), and Jews (99). Three percent of the population classified themselves as "believer, but belonging to no religion" (68,714). Ten percent classified themselves as "unbeliever/atheist" (199,264); 16 percent gave no reply (307,973), and 7 percent are "unknown" (139,097).

The Orthodox and Muslim populations appear to correspond to the immigrant Serb and Bosniak populations, respectively. These groups tended to have a lower socioeconomic status.

Foreign missionaries operated without hindrance.

Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice. The Government at all levels sought to protect this right in full and did not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors. The Constitution prohibits discrimination on the basis of religion. People are prohibited from inciting religious discrimination and inflaming religious hatred and intolerance.

A new Religious Freedoms Act entered into force on March 3, 2007, replacing the 1976 law on religious communities. The law codifies the Government's respect for religious freedom, the legal status and rights of churches and other religious communities, the rights of church members, the process of registration with the Government, the rights of registered churches and religious communities, and the responsibilities of the Government's Office for Religious Communities. At the request of the National Council, the Religious Freedoms Act is currently under review by the Constitutional Court.

There were no formal requirements for recognition by the Government, and activities of religious communities were unrestricted regardless of whether they register with the Government. Religious communities must register with the Office for Religious Communities if they wish to be legal entities; registration entitles such groups to rebates on value-added taxes. According to the new Religious Freedoms Act, religious communities must have at least 100 members and must have operated in the country for at least 10 years to register. To register, religious communities must submit a basic application to the Office for Religious Communities detailing proof these two requirements are met as well as the names of the community's representatives in the country, a description of the foundations of the community's religious beliefs, and the organizational act of the church or community. Religious communities registered under the previous law were automatically registered under the new law. During the reporting period, there were 43 religious communities officially registered, up from 40 in 2005 and 42 in 2006. Two applications were rejected during the reporting period on the basis that the organizations did not meet the qualifications of a religious group. There were no cases pending at the end of the period covered by this report.

Registered religious groups, including foreign missionaries, may receive value-added tax rebates on a quarterly basis from the Ministry of Finance. All groups reported equal access to registration and tax rebate status.

According to the Office for Religious Communities, it has been government policy since 1991 to pay the social insurance contribution for clergy and other full-time

religious workers that is normally paid by an employer. The new Religious Freedoms Act directs the Government to pay social insurance contributions for 1 religious employee per 1,000 members of a religious community. In 2006 the Government paid approximately \$2 million for the insurance contributions of over 1,000 religious workers.

Six Christian holy days--Easter Sunday and Monday, Pentecost, the Assumption, Christmas, and Reformation Day are work-free national holidays. Members of religious communities whose important religious festivities do not coincide with those work-free days have the right to use their regular annual leave on their holy days.

At state-licensed schools, lessons with the goal of educating children in a particular religion are forbidden, as are prayer meetings. Licensed schools may not display religious symbols. Students are permitted to wear religious symbols. At unlicensed private religious schools, religious lessons generally are mandatory. The Government partially finances teacher salaries at religiously affiliated schools. Currently there are four Catholic high schools which receive funding.

The Government also finances small grants for religious organizations. In 2006 the program funded 29 projects totaling approximately \$38,000.

Individuals can file informal complaints of human rights violations by the national or local authorities with the Human Rights Ombudsman.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

There are no governmental restrictions on the Muslim community's freedom to worship. Services were generally held in private homes due to lack of a larger venue. Plans are underway to build a mosque in Ljubljana.

After independence in 1991, Parliament passed legislation calling for denationalization and restitution of, or compensation for, church properties--church buildings and support buildings, residences, businesses, and forests--that were nationalized after World War II. By March 31, 2007, the Government had adjudicated 35,241 (92 percent) of the 38,306 denationalization claims.

The Roman Catholic Church had been a major property holder in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia before World War II. The total value of all property and compensation claimed by the Roman Catholic Church was \$293 million (233.2 million euros). Despite the Catholic Church's dominance, restitution of its property remained a politically unpopular issue.

To date, there has been no restitution of Jewish communal and heirless properties that were confiscated or nationalized during and after World War II. In 2006, the Ministry of Justice's Department for Restitution and National Reconciliation awarded a tender for a project to compile an inventory of such property. The tender was awarded to the Institute of Contemporary History and research is ongoing. In October 2006 the Ministry of Justice produced a separate report. A third report, funded by the World Jewish Restitution Organization and researched by two experts affiliated with the Institute for Ethnic Studies, had not been completed. The Ministry of Justice, the World Jewish Restitution Organization, and the Jewish Community of Slovenia had plans to discuss this issue.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or of the refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

Anti-Semitism

The Jewish community is very small. Of an estimated 300 Jews, about half are enrolled members of the Jewish community. Reportedly, negative statements about Jews were common in private conversations, and citizens generally did not consider Jews to be a native population. Jewish community representatives reported some prejudice, ignorance, false stereotypes, and negative images of Jews within society.

There were no reports of anti-Semitic violence or major discrimination.

The Government promoted tolerance and anti-bias education through its programs in primary and secondary schools and made the Holocaust a mandatory topic in the contemporary history curriculum.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

The Government's Office for Religious Communities continued to promote religious tolerance and interfaith dialogue through regular consultations with representatives of all religious communities and a variety of programs. Most notably, this included a small grants program that funded 29 projects totaling approximately USD 38,000 in 2006 and regular interfaith meetings to discuss issues of interest to the interfaith community.

On September 3, 2006, the country celebrated the European Day of Jewish Culture with programs and events organized by the Jewish community with the support of local government officials.

Section III. Societal Abuses and Discrimination

There were minor reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious belief or practice.

Societal attitudes toward religion were complex. Historical events dating from long before the country's independence colored perceptions regarding the dominant Catholic Church. Much of the gulf between the (at least nominally) Catholic center-right and the largely agnostic or atheistic center-left stemmed from the killing of large numbers of alleged Nazi and Fascist collaborators in the years 1946-48. Many of the accused collaborators were successful businessmen whose assets were confiscated after they were killed or driven from the country, and many were also prominent Catholics. After independence, right-of-center political groups demanded a purge of communist government and business officials, but this call was quickly replaced by calls for reconciliation.

Interfaith relations were generally amicable in the period covered by this report, although there was little warmth between the Catholic Church and foreign missionary groups that were viewed as aggressive proselytizers. Societal attitudes toward the minority Jewish, Muslim, and Serb Orthodox communities generally were tolerant; however, some persons feared the possible emergence of Muslim fundamentalism. While there were no governmental restrictions on the Muslim community's freedom to worship, services were commonly held in private homes or rental spaces under cramped conditions because of the lack of mosques.

The Muslim community had long been planning to build a mosque in Ljubljana. The absence of a mosque was due, in part, to a lack of organization in the

community and to complex legislation and bureaucracy reflected in construction and land regulations impacting all new building projects. In June 2007 city officials and representatives of the Muslim Community in Slovenia signed a letter of intent for the sale of municipal land for the construction of a mosque and Islamic cultural center. The sale was expected to take place in September. The site, on city-owned land close to the center, was approved by city and Muslim community officials. Previously, another city-owned site had been identified for the mosque, but it turned out that the Catholic Church already had a denationalization claim pending for that land, and in September 2006 the city council determined that it did not have sufficient financial resources to settle the Church's claim. Since settlement of all claims was a prerequisite for clear title to the land, the search for a mosque site continued. The Muslim community welcomed the new proposed site as its location is preferable to the previous one. Several city councilors received death threats before the meeting when they publicly supported the project to build a mosque in Ljubljana. In 2004 citizens organized a referendum campaign to prevent the Muslim community from building the mosque, but the Constitutional Court struck down the plans to hold the referendum before it could be held.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. Embassy held extensive discussions with the Government on the topic of property denationalization and restitution of heirless and communal Jewish properties confiscated or nationalized after World War II. In addition, the Embassy made informal inquiries into the status of the mosque construction project. The Embassy met with members of all major religious communities and concerned government officials.