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Belgium bans halal and kosher animal slaughtering practices

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Belgium's Flanders region has banned Jewish and Muslim forms of ritual animal slaughter, sparking a firestorm of criticism from religious groups, who see the measure as thinly veiled xenophobia.

"Tolerance and acceptance of minorities go to a certain point - there are laws", argues independent journalist Luc Rivet, likening ritual slaughter to polygamy, child marriage, or wearing the hijab in public - all religious practices illegal in Belgium.

This is in contradiction with some European laws that state the animals should not feel pain when they are killed.

Shadjareh argues that what authorities call "*humane stunning*" involves an electric shock or a metal rod being fired into the animal's brain - hardly humane. According to Jewish and Muslim traditions, animals need to be in flawless health when they are slaughtered.

Belgium has joined Sweden, Norway, Iceland, Denmark, and Slovenia among the nations that do not

provide for any exceptions. "Well, I'm sorry, in Belgium the law is above religion and that will stay like that".

Once imposed there, the **Brussels** region - which has a large Muslim population - will be the only part of the country to still allow ritual slaughter methods to be used. Those who adhere to their religious rules will soon be forced to order their meat from overseas, which community members say will mean paying more, and could even lead to food shortages.

"We are in the midst of an attack on the freedom of religion". "This ban is presented as a revelation by animal welfare activists, but the debate on animal welfare in Islam has been going on for 1,500 years". It was applauded by both animal rights and nationalist groups. "Our way of ritual slaughtering is painless".

Pinchas Goldschmidt, president of the Conference of European Rabbis and chief rabbi of Moscow, said that it was "a sad day for religious freedom in Europe".

He first proposed the ban upon taking his role and hailed its parliamentary approval at *the time*, tweeting: "Proud animal minister". Most other European countries have religious exceptions to the humane slaughter regulations.

Yaakov David Schmahl, a senior rabbi in Antwerp, told the paper: "It definitely brings to mind similar situations before the Second World War, when these laws were introduced in Germany".

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