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'ATTACK ON OUR FAITH' Belgium bans halal and kosher slaughter sparking furious backlash by religious groups

Muslims and Jews say new laws are an assault on their religious freedom

By Felix Allen

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A BAN on ritual slaughter in Belgium has sparked a furious backlash from Muslims and Jews who say it is an assault on their religious freedom.

Hardline nationalist politicians drove through new laws which make it illegal to produce halal and kosher meat in most of the country.



Ritual slaughter of animals was outlawed on January 1 in Flanders, the region that is historically home to most Belgian Jews.

A similar law will come into effect in August in Wallonia, the French-speaking south.

Only the Brussels region, which has a large Muslim population, escaped the ban, reports [The Times](#).

A survey last year found most butchers shops in the Belgian capital sell only halal meat.



New laws make it illegal to produce halal and kosher meat but it will still be available in shops

The laws - initiated by Flemish nationalist minister Ben Weyts - are seen as a crackdown on unregulated Muslim slaughterhouses.

Islamic groups launched a failed court appeal against the ban, branding it an attack on "one of the most basic alimentary stipulations of the Muslim faith - the obligation that animals must be subjected to ritual slaughter".

Jews have also been caught up in the law. A kosher meat plant in Antwerp, which used to process 80,000 chickens a month, has been forced to close.

Pinchas Goldschmidt, president of the Conference of European Rabbis, said: "It is a sad day for religious freedom in Europe.

"We are in the midst of an attack on the freedom of religion."

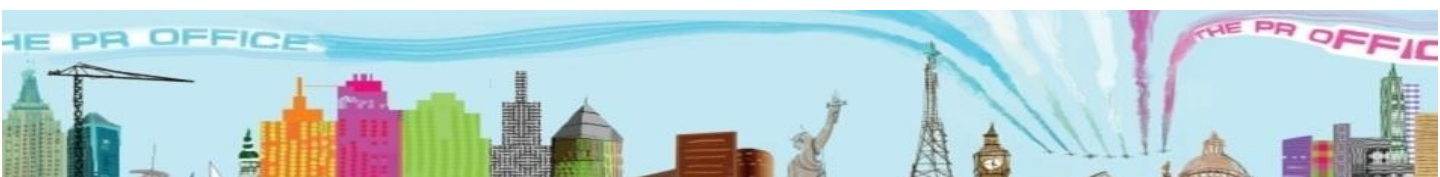
Halal and kosher meat will still be available in shops across Belgium, but with added costs to transport it from further afield where the slaughter is still legal.

Nechemia Schuldiner, a leader of the Shomre Hadas Orthodox Jewish community of Antwerp, told the Times of Israel: "The problem is the message it sends. It tells Jews: We don't want you here."

Defenders of the law insist it is motivated purely by animal welfare.

Belgian campaign group Gaia wants the Brussels region to join the ban.

Its president Michel Vandebosch said: "We are not seeking the prohibition of ritual slaughter, simply that an end is put to suffering that is technically avoidable."



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Most butchers in Brussels sell only halal meat, a survey found

Much of Europe's halal meat comes animals that are stunned before their throats are slit.

But stricter Muslims and Jews say their faith demands the animals be in perfect health at the moment of death.

Sweden, Denmark, Finland, Lithuania, Slovenia, Switzerland, Norway and Iceland already ban ritual slaughter.

<https://www.thesun.co.uk/news/8137016/belgium-bans-halal-and-kosher-slaughter-sparking-furious-backlash/>

