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Belgium Ban on Kosher Slaughter a Message not Lost on European Jews



Antwerp – The recently enacted ban on ritual slaughter has shocked the Jewish community here, not only for its insensitivity but for bucking even guarantees made by the European Union. Belgium's estimated 35,000 Jews are puzzled by the new law that went into effect on January 1st and are hoping that it is nothing more than acceding to the wishes of animal rights activists that will ultimately be changed. The ban is being challenged in the courts for violating religious freedom. Many Jewish

leaders see it as an obvious form of anti-Semitism citing other precedents where kosher slaughter and male circumcision (brit milah) were initially targeted with other restrictions coming later. In Antwerp where upward of 20,000 Jews rely on the local shechita as do Jews from other smaller European markets, they will now have to import meat from Brussels (which is not affected by the law) and from neighboring European countries. Most countries in the EU allow religious exceptions to the EU law requiring animals to be made insensible to pain before slaughter, usually by stunning. Especially troublesome, one rabbi told Kosher Today, is when animal rights activists dictate to us what Jewish law is. As an example, he cited a statement by Ann De Greef, director of Global Action in the Interest of Animals, a Belgian animal welfare group, who insisted that stunning does not conflict with kosher and halal doctrine, and "they could still consider it ritual slaughtering." But the rabbi disagreed, saying that her statement is completely contrary to halacha and if pain avoidance is what she is looking at, then our method of shechita completely avoids pain. "This is a sad day for European Jewry," says Rabbi Pinchas Goldschmidt, President of the Conference of European Rabbis. A local Belgian Rabbi, Yaakov David Schmahl, from Antwerp, said the law "definitely brings to mind similar situations before the Second World War, when these laws were introduced in Germany."

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