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Swedish political party fighting to ban circumcision

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(JTA)

A Swedish political party has voted to change its official stance in favour of banning circumcision.

The Swedish Centre Party voted 314-166 at its annual meeting to work to fight the non-medical circumcision of boys. Party chief Annie Loof was among the party leaders who criticized the vote.

The Centre Party received approximately eight percent of the votes in last year's national election, earning 31 seats in the 349-seat parliament. It broke with its centre-right alliance earlier this year and now backs the left-wing ruling coalition, though it's not officially part of the bloc.

The vote drew fierce debate in the country between advocates, who say circumcision infringes on children's rights, and critics, who say a ban would threaten the country's Jewish and Muslim populations.

"A ban on circumcision would make Jewish life in Sweden impossible," Aron Verständig, chairman of The Official Council of Swedish Jewish Communities, said in a statement.

Chief Rabbi Pinchas Goldschmidt, president of the Conference of European Rabbis (CER), commented:

'The Swedish Centre Party's decision to promote a ban on religious circumcision is a request for Jews to leave Sweden, the most liberal of EU states. We mourn the lack of tolerance and loss of diversity in today's Sweden.'

According to Swedish law, circumcision can be performed only by medical practitioners or those



licensed by the country's Health and Welfare Board.

Sweden's Jewish community numbers about 20,000 and has faced a range of challenges in recent years — from the rise of anti-Semitism that at times has turned violent to policy proposals that community members say make their lives difficult or impossible.

There have been attempts to ban circumcision and the import of kosher meat, citing children's and animal's rights. A 1988 law banned the slaughter of poultry without stunning, which makes shechita impossible, though Jews were initially granted an exemption. A 1937 law had banned the kosher slaughter of cows and sheep.

