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Rabbis: Push to ban circumcision shows 'lack of tolerance'

Conference of European Rabbis responds to Swedish push to ban circumcision, says it represents 'request for Jews to leave Sweden.'

Contact Editor Yoni Kempinski, 07/10/19 16:01



Circumcision (illustrative)

iStock

The Conference of European Rabbis (CER) recently warned that Sweden's [push to ban male circumcision](#) may be the beginning of a wave of bans across Europe.

CER is an Orthodox rabbinical alliance that unites more than 700 religious leaders of Europe's mainstream synagogue communities.

The organization's president, Chief Rabbi Pinchas Goldschmidt, said: "The Swedish

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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."



"We see this decision as the beginning of a new wave of legislation against circumcision in Europe. This is part of the evil wind of legislative initiatives against religious commandments in Europe. We will enlist the international community, as we did in Iceland and other countries, in order to fend off this attack.

"Even though the Swedish Center Party is not part of the coalition, we must remember that it represents 8% of the votes, holds 31 seats in the 349-member Parliament, and is the third-largest party in Sweden.

"Over the past few years we have seen a number of similar legislative attempts against circumcision in Finland, Iceland, Denmark, Sweden, and Norway. We have seen how the process moves forward and only after a battle we waged with the help of international organizations, not one of these countries banned [circumcision].

"To our joy, all the parties in Sweden rejected the proposal to ban or limit circumcision, other than the Green Party, which described circumcision as 'problematic, all of the parties have kept to the law Sweden passed twenty years ago which regulated circumcision in Swedish law.

Frans Timmermans, Executive Vice President-Designate of the European Commission, sent a New Year's letter to Europe's Jews and rabbis, and sent a Hebrew copy to CER's Rabbi Avraham Gigi.

"On behalf of the European Commission, I would like to extend my warmest greetings to all Jewish Europeans, their friends and families, and Jews around the world when you welcome the year 5780," Timmermans wrote.

"May you celebrate Erev Rosh Hashana (the Jewish New Year) surrounded by your loved ones and enjoy blessed High Holidays. The enduring traditions of Rosh Hashanah remind us of the deep values of Judaism and allow us to celebrate its remarkable heritage and contribution to our continent.





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"Europe's Jewish communities are as diverse as Europe itself. Rosh Hashana gives us the chance to assess the state of the continent: challenges such as climate change, social inequality and the next technological revolution test our values and our resolve. In an uncertain world, Europe must take the lead in defending universal values.

"The coming year will remind us of the 75th anniversary of the end of the Shoah (Holocaust - ed.) and the liberation of the Nazi death camp Auschwitz-Birkenau which I visited earlier this year on Holocaust Memorial Day. I was fortunate to speak to hundreds of young people about the lessons we should heed, and the responsibility we all must bear. We will also commemorate 30 years since the fall of the Berlin Wall leading to the end of the Communist regimes, which is concomitantly the liberation of Jewish life beyond the Iron curtain and the unification of Europe.

"Most importantly, we have to cherish, nourish, and defend our democracies. We know that where extremism flourishes, the poison of antisemitism is not far away. Based on our own terrible history of the Shoah we have a special responsibility to tackle it wherever it rears its head. I am glad we were able to bring the topic of antisemitism to the informal plenary of the UN General Assembly, acknowledging that antisemitism and hatred must be fought around the world.

"Jewish Europeans rightfully take pride in their Jewish identity, in particular young Jewish Europeans. It is essential for an open and tolerant Europe that Jewish voices are heard and Jewish life can flourish.

"I wish you and all your family Shana Tova U'Metukah (a good and sweet year)."

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