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Comment: Are shafts allowed? – Wake up call for religious freedom in Europe

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Jews and Muslims see themselves under increasing pressure in Europe. This is due to laws that are now under scrutiny at the European Court of Justice in Luxembourg. Religious freedom is at risk, Christoph Strack warns.

This Wednesday, the judges of the European Court of Justice (ECJ) in Luxembourg are discussing a key element of European identity – religious freedom. And Jews and Muslims in Germany fear for their existence, even for their long-term stay in Europe.

Case C 336/19 concerns religious slaughtering, the ritual slaughter of animals without prior stunning. This has been banned in parts of Belgium since 2019, initially in Flanders and now also in Wallonia. After the legislative process, the Belgian constitutional court asked the ECJ whether the strict ban on slaughtering was compatible with the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights and the religious freedom guaranteed there. The trial in Luxembourg follows. [Decisions on similar issues leave it open whether the European Court of Justice gives priority to religious freedom.](#)

Religions no longer welcome?

Never before have the European Rabbinical Conference and the Muslim World League spoken together on such a sensitive and important issue. For the first time ever, the two top representatives [Oberrabbiner Pinchas Goldschmidt](#) and the [Secretary General of the World League, Sheikh Mohammed Al-Issa](#), under a common letterhead. Both see the practice of their religion threatened in this matter.

"If the Belgian bans are upheld, the message the European Court of Justice sends to religious minority communities in Europe is clear: 'You are not welcome.' "it says among other things. And: "We cannot expect religious communities to remain in Europe and make



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a contribution to local societies if the mere act of consuming their food is considered a crime.”

Sure, you can ignore this vote: Why should we be interested in the opinion of an Orthodox rabbi from Moscow and a Saudi representative of Islam? But that overlooks how much both have been looking for dialogue with very different sides for years and have sworn off old enemy images. Ultimately, there is a movement that has global relevance and that is unfortunately not adequately accompanied or even noticed by very few politicians. This is a topic that only a few really care about at the national and European level.

Religious freedom is becoming less important

Committed Christians were the main impetus for the European idea, the process of unification after the Second World War: Konrad Adenauer, Alcide de Gasperi, Robert Schuman. In their Europe, religion and freedom of religion were a matter of course. And now? A few weeks ago, the new EU Commission under the German Ursula von der Leyen announced that it would no longer have an EU special representative for religious freedom worldwide. And in Istanbul – another example – stands the Hagia Sofia, the symbol of worldwide Orthodox Christianity, world cultural heritage and a museum for decades, shortly before the takeover by Erdogan Islam in Turkey. Critical voices from the top of the EU? From Berlin or Paris? Nothing! This shows that the current subject of the ECJ judge’s negotiations belongs in a larger framework.

Goldschmidt and Al-Issa, the Jew and the Muslim, recall in their appeal, which is hard to beat in terms of clarity, of times when religious dietary rules (to which ritual slaughtering was no longer permitted) could no longer be practiced. Here comes the reference to prohibitions before the Second World War, “which marginalized Jewish communities across Europe”. We all know how the story went on.



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“Violation of Europe’s core principles”

“Although religious freedom is anchored in European democracies as a fundamental right, it is meaningless if individuals and communities do not have the freedom to practice their religion,” the religious representatives warn. And whoever forbids Muslims to eat halal or Jews kosher food “violates the core principles for which Europe should stand.”

The deliberations of the Luxembourg judges are one thing (and judicial judgments as an interpretation of applicable law must be respected) – the action of political decision-makers is another. Then a clear clarification of religious freedom and clarifying exemptions are required in such a way that slaughter without stunning in a religious context must be approved. Because the unusual and unusually clear warning of the senior religious representatives is a wake-up call for a tired and self-sufficient Europe.

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<https://www.web24.news/u/2020/07/comment-are-shafts-allowed-wake-up-call-for-religious-freedom-in-europe.html>

