



Publication: The Algemeiner (online)

Date: 09.07.2020

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Jewish Leaders Hopeful After European Court of Justice Hearing on Belgian Religious Slaughter Ban



by Benjamin Kerstein



Illustrative. Photo: Reuters / Agustin Marcarian.

Community leaders said they were hopeful after a hearing on a ban on kosher and halal slaughter enacted by the Walloon and Flemish regions of Belgium took place on Wednesday, with Jewish and Muslim representatives charging that the prohibition violated European laws on freedom of religion.

The chief rabbi of Belgium, Albert Guigui, who was present at the hearing, told *The Algemeiner* on Thursday, "We hope that the judges will be sensitive to the arguments we





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have put forward. We also hope that they will understand that the future of the Jewish communities depends on their freedom of worship and that these laws infringe the essential values of our democracies.”

The hearing took place in Luxembourg at the European Court of Justice, which interprets EU law at the request of judges in member states.

The Jewish community was represented by lawyers from the Jewish Central Consistory of Belgium and the Coordinating Committee of Jewish Organizations in Belgium (CCOJB). On the Muslim side, there were lawyers from the Muslim Executive of Belgium.



Group Urges for Amid Ongoing Hatred

up raised the alarm on
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Defending the ban were lawyers representing the Walloon and Flemish governments. Also present were representatives from the European Commission and the Council of Europe.

Lawyers for the Jewish and Muslim communities cited Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights and Article 10 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, both of which guarantee freedom of religion. Their opponents claimed that the religious rights of minorities have been respected because the Jewish and Muslim communities can import religiously acceptable meat from other countries.

The *European Jewish Press* [reported](#) that the CCOJB argued that under European law, “religious slaughter may be regulated but not prohibited,” and a religious exemption to such laws was required.

It added that importation of meat “does not justify the prohibition.”

“If production is prohibited in a country, the overall supply, and the security of that supply, is restricted,” it said.





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“I think this whole legal process follows the evolution of society,” Guigui noted. “People are becoming more sensitive to the animal welfare issue and believe that stunning [before slaughter] helps reduce animal suffering. Which, in reality, has not been demonstrated. But unfortunately, this is the situation.”

“We have, of course, tried to demonstrate that Judaism is the first animal protection society and that a large number of [Jewish] laws aim to protect animal welfare,” Guigui added.

The Belgian ban prohibits killing animals without stunning them beforehand, something that is not permitted in Jewish or Muslim law.

Guigui said, “I do not rule out the possibility that some people seek through these measures to penalize the Jewish and Muslim religious minorities.”

Asked whether he was optimistic or pessimistic about the final ruling, Guigui replied, “We must always be optimistic. ‘Tikva’ — hope — is one of the fundamental values of Judaism. After 2,000 years of exile, Israel has found nothing better for its national anthem than ‘Hatikva’ — ‘The Hope.’ Now is not the time to despair.”

According to the *European Jewish Press*, Yohan Benizri — president of the CCOJB — was also hopeful after Wednesday’s hearing, saying, “It would be surprising, in light of the case law and the hearing today, that the Court would not follow our reasoning in this case.”

“Those who argue that this is a choice between animal welfare and religious freedom are missing the point,” he asserted. “We are very sensitive to animal welfare considerations, but the prohibition of religious slaughter in two Belgian regions is incompatible with EU law, and a violation of our fundamental rights.”

“This prohibition is unbecoming in a democratic society whose health is measured in light of the way it pursues its highest values while respecting its minorities,” he continued.

Gady Gronich — chief executive of the Conference of European Rabbis — told *The*





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Algemeiner, “We are pleased that the local communities were confident following the arguments presented during yesterday’s hearing at the European Court of Justice. This judgement has huge ramifications for world Jewry and we hope that European judges will take this into account when finalizing their decision on whether to lift the bans on the religious slaughter of animals for food in the Belgian regions of Flanders and Wallonia.”

“The local communities experienced great difficulties over Pesach in relation to the import of kosher meat due to the COVID-19 outbreak and served as a stark reminder that Jewish communities cannot rely entirely on the supply chain,” he pointed out.

“Objections to religious slaughter are merely an insidious attempt at population control,” Gronich charged. “These bans coincided with a climate of rising antisemitism and the propagation of far-right extremist movements across Europe. A continuation of such laws would only add fuel to the fires.”

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