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EU Court Adviser Backs Religious Animal Slaughter Without Stunning

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Court of Justice of the European Union. (EU Court of Justice)

BRUSSELS (Reuters) - EU judges should strike down a Belgian law requiring all animals to be stunned prior to their death, which has effectively outlawed slaughter according to Jewish and Muslim rites, an EU court adviser said on Thursday.

Gerard Hogan, an advocate general of the Court of Justice of the European Union, said an EU law of 2009 set out that animals should normally be stunned before they are slaughtered, but made a clear exception for slaughter prescribed by religious rites.

EU judges typically follow the opinions of advocate generals, although they are not bound to do so. They would normally deliver their ruling in two to four months.

Yohan Benizri, president of Belgium's branch of the World Jewish Congress welcomed the opinion in a statement.

"The European Union to which we wholeheartedly adhere cannot allow a religious freedom to be simply shattered like





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this. Democracy is first and foremost measured in light of the treatment of minorities, and no one could possibly question our community's integration in Europe. I want to believe that the Court of Justice will also follow our reasoning in this case," he said.

Global Action in the Interest of Animals (GAIA), which was a leading advocate for Belgium's ban, expressed disappointment with the ruling and asked how the court could reconcile the present opinion with several EU member states that have long-standing bans on slaughter without prior stunning.

The case came to the EU court in Luxembourg after a 2017 decree in the Belgian region of Flanders to amend its law on protection and welfare of animals by requiring all animals be first stunned.

Jewish and Muslim association challenged the decree and Belgium's Constitutional Court referred the case to the EU Court of Justice.

Hogan said the religious exception reflected the European Union's desire to respect freedom of religion and the right to manifest religious belief in practice and observance despite avoidable suffering caused to animals.

Jewish and Muslim methods of slaughter involves the animals' throats being cut with a sharp knife, which advocates says results in death almost immediately. Traditionally, prior stunning is not permitted.

Chief Rabbi Pinchas Goldschmidt, president of the Conference of European Rabbis, expressed optimism that the opinion would be accepted by the EU's justices.

"We welcome the Advocate General's opinion that the bans on Shechita in two Belgian regions are not lawful," he said. "We trust that the Court will take note of the Advocate General's opinion when it comes up with its judgement later this year."

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