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Slovenia

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The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has a total area of 7,827 square miles, and its population is approximately 1,964,036. Estimates of religious identification vary. According to the 2002 census, the numbers are: Roman Catholic, 1,135,626; Evangelical, 14,736; Other Protestant, 1,399; Orthodox, 45,908; Other Christian, 1,877; Islam, 47,488; Jewish, 99; Oriental, 1,026; other religion, 558; Agnostic, 271; Believer, but belongs to no religion, 68,714; Unbeliever/atheist, 199,264; Did not want to reply, 307,973; Unknown, 139,097.

The Orthodox and Muslim populations appear to correspond to the country's immigrant Serb and Bosniak populations, respectively. These groups tend to have a lower socioeconomic status in society.

Foreign missionaries, including a mission of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) and other religious groups (including Hare Krishna, Church of Scientology, and the Unification Church) operate without hindrance.

Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. The Government at all levels strives to protect this right in full and does not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

There are no formal requirements for recognition as a religion by the Government. Religious communities must register with the Government's Office for Religious Communities if they wish to be legal entities, and registration entitles such groups to rebates on value-added taxes. In response to complaints from several groups that the Office had failed to act on their registration applications, the Secretary General of the Government clarified registration procedures and instructed the Office to process outstanding applications. As of September 2003, the Office had approved 6 out of 10 pending applications. The applications pending as of the end of 2003 were for Holy Church Annasann, Traditional Catholics, Church of Holy Innocence, and a religious community referred to as "Reformed Gospel Church".

Registered religious groups, including foreign missionaries, may receive value-added tax rebates on a quarterly basis from the Ministry of Finance. All groups in the country report equal access to registration and tax rebate status.

The appropriate role for religious instruction in schools continued to be an issue of debate during the period covered by this report. The Constitution states that parents are entitled to give their children "a moral and religious upbringing." Only those schools supported by religious bodies taught religion.

After independence in 1991, Parliament passed legislation calling for denationalization (restitution or compensation) within a fixed period. The law provides for denationalization (restitution or compensation) of church property—church buildings and support buildings, residences, businesses, and forests—that were nationalized after World War II by the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. By the end of September 2003, the Government had completed 32,614 (86 percent) of the 38,156 denationalization claims filed. During the period covered by this report, the Government reallocated existing resources, including judges, to reduce the backlog.

The Roman Catholic Church was a major property holder in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia before World War II. After the war, much church property—churches and support buildings, residences, businesses, and forests—was confiscated and nationalized by the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Despite the Catholic Church's numerical predominance, restitution of its property remains a politically unpopular issue. In 2001 the Ministry of Agriculture issued a decree returning approximately 20,396 acres of forests in Triglav National Park to the Church; however, in 2002 the Ljubljana Administrative Court annulled this decree in response to multiple legal challenges. The Catholic Church challenged the annulment of the decree in the Supreme Court, and a portion of the forest lands was returned in late 2003.

According to the Office for Religious Communities, it has been government policy since 1991 to pay the share of social insurance contribution for clergy and other full time religious workers that is normally paid by an employer. The Human Rights Ombudsman was investigating complaints from several smaller religious communities that they do not receive this benefit; however, this ceased to be an issue during the reporting period. According to the Office of the Human Rights Ombudsman, past complaints were tied to the registration problem that was resolved when the Secretary General exerted pressure for timely registration of religious groups.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion; however, the Muslim community has experienced difficulty in receiving permission from the Government to build mosques.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or of the refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

Section III. Societal Attitudes

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom.

Societal attitudes toward religion are complex. Historical events dating long before the country's independence color societal perceptions regarding the dominant Catholic Church. Much of the gulf between the (at least nominally) Catholic center-right and the largely agnostic or atheistic left stemmed from the massacre of large numbers of alleged Nazi and Fascist collaborators in the years 1946-48. Many of the so-called collaborators were successful businessmen whose

assets were confiscated after they were killed or driven from the country, and many were prominent Catholics. The current perception in the country is that this gulf is a political historical issue. After independence, right-of-center political groups called for a purge of Communist government and business officials, but this call quickly was replaced by one for reconciliation. Since religious undertones today are minor and tangential, this issue no longer attracts public attention.

Interfaith relations were generally amicable, although there was little warmth between the majority Catholic Church and foreign missionary groups that were viewed as aggressive proselytizers. Societal attitudes toward the minority Muslim and Serb Orthodox communities generally were tolerant; however, some persons feared the possible emergence of Muslim fundamentalism. While there are no governmental restrictions on the Muslim community's freedom of worship, services commonly are held in private homes under cramped conditions.

There are no mosques in the capital of Ljubljana. The lack of a mosque has been due, in part, to a lack of Muslim community organization and to complex legislation and bureaucracy in construction and land regulations. The Muslim community has conceptual plans to build a new facility in Ljubljana. In 2001 the Ljubljana Municipality Council selected one of five potential sites that the city previously had identified for the facility and tasked the city's planning department to begin preparing the materials necessary to move ahead with the project. At the beginning of 2003, Ljubljana mayor Danica Simsic expressed support for the Mosque and the location on which it is to be built. In August 2003, the Agency for Environment granted permission to the Ljubljana Department for Urbanism to make zoning changes that would enable construction of the Mosque on the selected site. City councilor Mihael Jarc launched an initiative in December 2003 for a referendum opposing the zoning regulation change that would enable mosque construction and collected the requisite 11,000 signatures to call the referendum. Extreme supporters of the referendum effort said that the country could become a "terrorist breeding ground" if the mosque were constructed. In April Jarc stated that Muslim values are seen as somehow opposed to the Jewish, Christian and Orthodox European tradition. On April 18, the City Council voted to acknowledge the petition as legitimate and set the referendum date for May 23. Ombudsman Matjak Hanzek noted, however, that referendum gatherers used tactics asking residents to "sign a petition against the mosque" rather than a zoning change. Simsic considered the referendum to be an unconstitutional, unlawful encroachment on the constitutionally guaranteed rights of religious minorities and sent the initiative to the Constitutional Court to decide whether the referendum is in accordance with the Constitution and whether it violates basic human rights. On April 28, the Constitutional Court issued a temporary injunction halting the referendum. On June 28, the City Council voted to reverse its earlier position and support Mayor Simsic's effort to have the constitutionality of the referendum decided by the Court.

The Government promotes anti-bias and tolerance education through its programs in primary and secondary schools, with the Holocaust as an obligatory topic in the contemporary history curriculum. However, teachers have a great deal of latitude in deciding how much time to devote to it. The country formally joined in the Council of Europe's proclamation of May 9, 2004, as Holocaust Memorial Day. Schools carried out various activities to remember the Holocaust that day, for example, watching documentaries, written assignments and discussions on the topic.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. Embassy has held extensive discussions with the Government on the topic of property denationalization in the context of the rule of law, although it has not discussed specifically church property during these sessions. In addition the Embassy has made informal inquiries into the status of the mosque construction project. The Embassy meets with members of all major religious communities, representatives of nongovernmental organizations that address religious freedom issues, and government officials from relevant offices and ministries.

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