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USDOS – US Department of State (Author)

2022 Report on International Religious Freedom: Austria

Executive Summary

The country's constitutional documents provide for freedom of religious belief and affiliation and prohibit religious discrimination, including providing for an individual's freedom of faith and conscience and the right to the public exercise of religion by churches and religious societies, the free exercise of religion for all citizens, and an individual's right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion and provides this right to churches and religious communities. The law prohibits public incitement to hostile acts against religious groups. Antidiscrimination legislation also prohibits discrimination on religious grounds. Citizens have the right to sue the government for constitutional violations of religious freedom.

The government continued its efforts to address hate crimes, including those motivated by religion, and specifically enhanced its efforts to address antisemitism. As part of its implementation of 38 concrete measures against antisemitism recommended by the 2021 *National Strategy to Combat Antisemitism*, the government established an executive department in the Federal Chancellery on Austrian Jewish Cultural Heritage and announced the "Prevention of Antisemitism through Education" initiative. During the year, the Federal Chancellery's Office for Religious Affairs continued to implement stricter annual government monitoring of the finances of mosques and Muslim cultural associations, focusing on financial flows from foreign state institutions.

Physical violence against individuals or vandalism of property based on religion continued to be rare. Most 301 religiously motivated incidents during the year involved hate speech, insults, and incitement of violence. The Jewish Religious Society (IKG) reported 381 antisemitic incidents in the first half of 2022, down from 562 in the first half of 2021, the year of the

largest annual number of cases (965) since documentation began 20 years ago. The interior ministry documented 5,464 incidents in its 2021 *Hate Crimes Report*, with 750 (13.7 percent) involving hatred against a religion. Dokustelle, an initiative of youth volunteers documenting anti-Muslim racism, reported that there were 1,061 anti-Muslim incidents in 2021, with most involving hate speech (725 cases).

The Ambassador and other U.S. embassy representatives met regularly with government officials, including from the Federal Chancellery's Office for Religious Affairs, the Ministry for Women, Family, Youth and Integration, the Division of Dialogue of Cultures and Religions at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), and the Ministry of Interior, to discuss religious freedom issues. Embassy officers also met with leaders of religious youth organizations to discuss issues such as antisemitism and anti-Muslim sentiment.

In May, the Ambassador participated in the International Liberation Ceremony at the former World War II-era concentration camp in Mauthausen and embassy staff joined workshops for the design of a new memorial at the nearby former Gusen concentration camp. In September, the U.S. Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Antisemitism delivered a virtual keynote address to parliament in honor of the 30th anniversary of the Austrian Commemoration Service. In November, the Special Adviser to the Secretary of State on Holocaust Issues delivered virtual remarks at the Vienna symposium marking the completion of Austrian compensation payments to victims of National Socialism in the United States. Throughout the year, the embassy used social media platforms to deliver messages about religious freedom.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 8.9 million (midyear 2022). According to government estimates, Roman Catholics constitute 55.2 percent of the population; Muslims – predominantly Sunni – 8.3 percent (approximately 8 percent of Muslims are Shia); Eastern Orthodox churches (Russian, Greek, Serbian, Romanian, Antiochian, and Bulgarian) 4.9 percent; and Protestants (Augsburg and Helvetic confessions) 3.8 percent. Groups that together constitute less than 5.5 percent of the population include Jehovah's Witnesses, Jews, and other Christian and non-Christian religious groups. Those unaffiliated with any religion constitute 22.4 percent of the population.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

A combination of historical and modern constitutional documents provide for freedom of "conscience and creed." The 1867 Basic Law of the State

provides for the individual's freedom of faith and conscience and the right to the public exercise of religion by churches and religious societies. The State Treaty of St. Germain (1920) provides for the free exercise of religion for all citizens. The European Convention on Human Rights, incorporated into the constitution in 1964, provides for the individual's right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, and also guarantees this right to churches and religious communities in conjunction with the right of association. Freedom of religion therefore has two aspects: the individual's right to practice (or not practice) religion individually, and the rights of churches and religious communities as corporate bodies.

The law provides for freedom of religious belief and the rights of all residents to join, participate in, leave, or abstain from association with any religious community. The law stipulates, "Duties incumbent on nationals may not be impeded by religious affiliation."

Antidiscrimination legislation prohibits discrimination on religious grounds. Citizens have the right to sue the government for constitutional violations of religious freedom.

The law prohibits public incitement to hostile acts against a church group, religious society, or other religious group if the incitement is perceivable by "many people," which an official government commentary on the law and the courts interpreted as 30 or more individuals. The prohibition also applies specifically in the case of incitement in print, electronic, or other media available to a broad public. The law also prohibits incitement, insult, or contempt against religious groups, if such action violates human dignity.

During the year, the Office for Religious Affairs implemented the 2021 amendment to the Federal Act on the External Legal Relationships of Islamic Religious Societies providing for stricter annual government monitoring of the finances of mosques and Muslim cultural associations, focusing on financial flows from foreign state institutions. The legislation also allows the Office for Religious Affairs to request the names of legal representatives and religious functionaries of recognized Islamic religious societies that are public law corporations and allows for revocation of their legal status if they fail to maintain the applicable requirements, with the approval of the IGGO.

The law divides registered religious groups into two officially recognized legal categories: legally recognized churches and religious societies (referred to here as "religious societies") and state-registered religious denominational communities (referred to here as "confessional communities"), with the latter enjoying fewer obligations and privileges. Separately, religious groups not qualifying for either religious society or confessional community status may apply to become associations, a status applicable to a broad range of civil society groups. Some groups organize as associations while waiting for the government to recognize

them as confessional communities. Members of religious groups not legally recognized, like any individual, may practice their religion “insofar as this practice is neither unlawful nor offends common decency.”

The country has 16 religious societies: the Catholic Church; the Protestant Churches of the Augsburg and Helvetic Confessions; the Orthodox Church; the Jewish religious community; the Islamic Religious Community (IGGO); the Armenian Apostolic Church; the Syrian Orthodox Church; the Coptic Orthodox Church; the Old Catholic Church; the United Methodist Church; The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints; the New Apostolic Church; the Buddhist Union; Jehovah's Witnesses; the Alevi Society; and the Free Churches (an umbrella organization for five different religious groups).

Legal recognition as a religious society requires existence as a denominational group in the country for a period of at least 20 years (of which 10 years must be in organized form and at least five years must be as a confessional community). In addition, the respective religious society must have a membership of at least 0.2 percent of the country's population according to the latest census. The “public law corporation” status of religious societies allows them to engage in several public or quasi-public activities, such as government-funded religious instruction in both public and private schools. The government grants all religious societies tax relief in two main ways: donors do not pay taxes on donations, and the societies receive exemption from property tax for all buildings dedicated to the active practice of religion or administration of such. Religious societies are exempt from a surveillance charge, otherwise payable when the state provides security to religious groups, as well as from administrative fees for garbage collection and other municipal services. Additionally, in comparison with other religious groups, religious societies maintain a higher level of protection for their internal autonomy.

The law governing relations between the government and the Catholic Church makes various Catholic holidays official national holidays.

There are also 10 confessional communities: the Baha'i Religious Community; the Christian Community – Movement for Religious Renewal; the Seventh-day Adventist Church; the United Pentecostal Church; the Hindu Religious Community; the Pentecostal Church of God; the Islamic-Shiite Religious Community; the Old Alevi Community; the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification (Unification Church); and the Sikh Faith Community.

To gain government recognition as a confessional community, a group must have at least 300 members and submit to the Office for Religious Affairs, located at the Federal Chancellery, its statutes describing the goals, rights, and obligations of members as well as membership regulations, a list of officials, and financing information. A group must also submit a written description of its religious doctrine, which must differ

from that of any previously recognized religious society or confessional community. The Office for Religious Affairs determines whether the group's basic beliefs are consistent with public security, order, health, and morals and with the rights and freedoms of citizens.

Contributions to confessional communities' charitable activities are tax deductible for those who make them and tax free for the groups receiving them, but the communities are not exempt from property taxes. Confessional communities may provide pastoral care in prisons and hospitals.

All religious societies can receive government funding for pastoral care provided in prisons, hospitals, senior homes, and military installations with the amount of funding based on the size of the society's membership.

A religious group registered as an association seeking to obtain confessional community status is subject to a six-month waiting period from the time of application to the Federal Chancellery. After this period, groups that have applied automatically receive the status unless the government issues a decree rejecting the application.

Religious societies, confessional communities, and religious associations all have the juridical standing needed to engage in such activities as purchasing real estate in their own name and contracting for goods and services, but the latter two are not eligible for the financial and educational benefits available to religious societies.

According to the law, any group of more than two persons pursuing a nonprofit goal qualifies to organize as an association. Groups may apply to the Ministry of Interior to obtain such status. To become an association, a group must submit a written statement citing its common nonprofit goal and commitment to function as a nonprofit organization.

Associations have juridical standing, the right to function in public, and many of the same rights as confessional communities. Associations may not offer pastoral care in hospitals or prisons or receive tax-deductible contributions.

The Church of Scientology and several smaller religious groups, such as Sahaja Yoga and the International Society for Krishna Consciousness, have association status.

The law stipulates that funding for the day-to-day operations of mosques must be derived from domestic sources, Islamic teachings and practices must not violate federal law (compliance is determined by the Office for Religious Affairs), and Islamic institutions should "take a positive stance" toward the state and society.

The law provides an explicit legal definition of, and legal protection for, Islamic practices, such as circumcision and preparation of food in conformity with religious rules, and states Muslims may raise children and youth in accordance with Islamic traditions.

The law allows for Islamic theological university studies, which the Universities of Innsbruck and Vienna offer.

Separate laws govern relations between the government and each of the religious societies. The laws have similar intent but vary in some details, since they were enacted at different times over a span of approximately 140 years. As with the Muslim community, a law provides explicit protections for Jewish religious practices, including circumcision and ritual slaughter.

The law bans full-face coverings in public places for everyone in the country, with exceptions made only for artistic, cultural, or traditional events, in sports, or for health or professional reasons. The objectives of this federal law are "to promote integration by strengthening participation in society and to ensure peaceful coexistence in Austria." According to the law, integration is regarded as "a process involving society as a whole, the success of which depends on the participation of all people living in Austria and is based on personal interaction." Failure to comply with the law is an administrative violation. The law prescribes a €150 (\$160) fine but does not entitle police to remove the face covering.

The government allows headwear for religious purposes in official identification documents, provided the face remains sufficiently visible to allow for identification.

In accordance with a 2020 Constitutional Court ruling that overturned a headscarf ban for children in elementary school, children of all ages may wear headscarves and other head coverings in schools.

The government funds, on a proportional basis, religious instruction for the 16 officially religious societies by clergy or instructors provided by those groups for children in public schools and government-accredited private schools. The government does not offer such funding to other religious groups. A minimum of three children is required to form a class. Attendance in the respective religion classes is mandatory for all students who are members of those religious groups unless they formally withdraw at the beginning of the school year; students younger than age 14 require parental permission to withdraw from religion classes. Religious instruction takes place either in the school or at sites organized by religious groups. Some schools offer ethics classes for students not attending religious instruction. Religious education and ethics classes include the tenets of different religious groups as comparative religious education.

The curriculum for both public and private schools includes compulsory antibias and tolerance education, including religious tolerance, as part of civics education across various subjects, including history and German-language instruction.

Holocaust education is part of history instruction and is also part of other courses such as civics.

The Equal Rights Agency, an independent agency falling under the jurisdiction of the Federal Chancellery Minister for Women, Family, Youth, and Integration, oversees discrimination cases, including those based on religion. The agency provides legal counseling and mediation services, and it assists with bringing cases before the Equal Treatment Commission, another independent government agency. In cases where it finds discrimination, the commission makes a recommendation for corrective action. In a case of noncompliance with the recommendation, the case goes to court. The commission may issue expert reports for plaintiffs to present before the court. Only a court may order corrective action and compensation.

The law bans neo-Nazi activity and prohibits public denial, belittlement, approval, or justification of the Holocaust or other Nazi crimes against humanity in print, broadcast, and other media. According to the Interior Ministry, 1,671 cases were reported under the law in 2021. According to the Justice Ministry, the government convicted 222 persons under the law in 2022, approximately the same as the 226 convictions in 2021.

The law on hate speech, including religiously motivated hate speech, requires online platforms to identify and delete posts that can be classified as hateful or defamatory. The law defines hate speech to include single offenses, cyberbullying, and photographs taken surreptitiously, for which a person may be prosecuted in court. The law also facilitates recourse by allowing individuals subjected to online hate speech to seek redress directly with the relevant communication platform, rather than going through civil courts. It mandates that companies designate a contact person to whom affected individuals and government authorities can send complaints, and it requires platforms to issue annual reports on how they received and processed hate speech complaints. Platforms that repeatedly fail to comply are subject to fines of up to €10 million (\$10.7 million). The law applies only to large, for-profit communication platforms with more than 100,000 users and revenues of €500,000 (\$534,000) or more per year. Videos on video-sharing platforms such as YouTube or Facebook are excluded, as they are subject to a separate EU law, but comments on the videos fall under the new law.

Under the Citizenship Law, amended in 2022 and 2019, individuals persecuted by the Nazi regime and their descendants are eligible for Austrian citizenship without having to give up their existing citizenship.

From January to September, the state granted 3,022 persons citizenship under this title.

The law bans certain symbols the government considers extremist, including those pertaining to the Muslim Brotherhood, ISIS, al-Qaida, Hizballah, and the Croatian Ustasha.

The law prohibits incitement, insult, or contempt against a group because of its members' race, nationality, religion, or ethnicity or if the statement violates human dignity. The law imposes criminal penalties for violations.

The government requires a visa for visitors from non-visa-waiver countries or individuals who would stay beyond 90 days, including religious workers of confessional communities or associations. Foreign religious workers of groups recognized as confessional communities or associations must apply for a general immigrant visa that is not employment or family based and is subject to a quota. Foreign religious workers belonging to religious societies also require immigrant visas but are exempt from the quota system. Religious workers from Schengen or EU-member countries are exempt from all visa requirements.

The country is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Government Practices

In November, the government presented plans to toughen the law against neo-Nazi activity, following a consultation process with representatives from the IKG, the Documentation Center of the Austrian Resistance (DOEW), and the Mauthausen Committee of Austria. The impetus for toughening the law stemmed from the high-profile trial of a warrant officer in the country's armed forces who had worn a self-made Nazi uniform and made Hitler salutes. Although a court convicted him in September, he received only a suspended sentence and transferred to a civilian position but remained in military service because existing laws did not allow for a military discharge. Among the proposed amendments to the law is a ban on Holocaust trivialization, which would prohibit wearing yellow stars marked "not vaccinated," as happened during protests against COVID-19 restrictions. Additionally, the amended law would allow for domestic jurisdiction concerning offenses committed abroad. Convicted civil servants would automatically forfeit their office.

The IGGO continued to express objections to the amendment to the law on the External Legal Relationships of Islamic Religious Societies, stating it was discriminatory and interfered with religious freedom and the internal affairs of the Muslim community. In response, the Office for Religious Affairs stated that all religious public law corporations in the country must adhere to the same restrictions concerning foreign funding and

administrative requirements, but that only Islamic groups had violated either of these restrictions.

During the year, the Documentation Center Political Islam (DPI) published reports on the Muslim Brotherhood in Germany and Austria (November), the Anastasia movement in Austria (November), Antisemitism in Islamist and Right-Extremist Ideologies (November), and a basic analysis of Salafism (April). The DPI primarily researched and disseminated information on the phenomenon of “political Islam,” defined by the DPI as “an ideology underlaid by a claim to power that seeks to transform or influence society, culture, the state, or politics on the basis of such values and norms considered Islamic by their proponents, but which contradict the principles of the democratic rule of law and human rights.” The Federal Chancellery funds the DPI through the Austrian Fund for the Documentation of Religiously Motivated Political Extremism, itself a legally independent foundation.

The Federal Office of Sect Issues offered advice to persons with questions about groups that it considered sects and cults. The office was nominally independent but government funded, and the Minister of Women, Family, Youth, and Integration appointed and oversaw its head.

During the year, the Federal Chancellery funded the restoration of up to 230 graves at the historic Waehring Jewish cemetery in Vienna. The government and state leadership also hosted receptions on the occasion of key religious holidays of the different religious societies.

The city of Vienna continued work on the “Campus of Religions,” which it financed and launched in 2019 and expected to complete in 2028. The campus was planned as a site where members of nine religious groups could conduct their own activities while working together and engaging with the general public. Campus participating groups were: the Catholic Church; the Protestant Churches of the Augsburg and Helvetic Confessions; the Orthodox Church; the Jewish Religious Society; the Islamic Religious Society; the New Apostolic Church; the Buddhist Union; the Hindu Religious Community; and the Sikh Faith Community.

Religious and civil society organizations continued to criticize the “Islam Map,” created by experts from the Islamic Theological Institute of Vienna University in partnership with DPI and first published in 2021. Critics of the map, which lists all Islamic institutions in the country, said its existence could suggest that Muslim activities must be monitored. Some saw the map as stigmatizing and stated that the publication of private addresses of Muslim functionaries could pose a security threat.

In January, Federal President Alexander Van der Bellen, government and parliamentary leadership, and Israeli Foreign Minister Yair Lapid gathered in Vienna at the invitation of the IKG to commemorate the liberation of Auschwitz and to sign a joint declaration to “constantly and actively

oppose antisemitism, antigypsyism, xenophobia, and any form of discrimination.”

In January, officials presented the first report on the implementation of 38 concrete measures against antisemitism recommended by the *2021 National Strategy to Combat Antisemitism*. According to the report, measures implemented in 2021 to combat antisemitism in the country included initiatives in the areas of education and integration as well as measures to protect Jewish communities and provide effective law enforcement. In addition, the report committed to establishment of a continuous exchange between state structures and private institutions for the prevention of antisemitism. The report also cited the establishment of an executive department in the Federal Chancellery on Austrian Jewish Cultural Heritage, which was adopted unanimously by parliament in January 2021.

During the year, the executive department in the Federal Chancellery on Austrian Jewish Cultural Heritage led efforts to standardize the documentation of antisemitic incidents and crimes in the country along with those of other EU member states in order to improve comparability.

In March, President of the National Council Wolfgang Sobotka and Lower Austria Governor Johanna Mikl-Leitner announced that the former synagogue in St. Pölten would be developed into a cultural and exhibition center. The synagogue was home to the Jewish Community of St. Pölten from 1913 until the November 1938 pogrom. The center was scheduled to be completed by 2024 as part of the European Capital of Culture St. Pölten event at a cost of €4.6 million (\$4.9 million).

In March, Interior Minister Gerhard Karner and Mauthausen Memorial Director Barbara Glück announced preparations for development of the Gusen Memorial, following the country's purchase of additional lands on the site of the former Gusen concentration camp. The first two workshops connected with the development were conducted at the Gusen site in November with involvement of victims' groups and diplomatic representatives.

In May, EU and Constitution Minister Karoline Edtstadler hosted counterparts from 15 EU member states at the two-day European Conference on Antisemitism with a view to facilitating an exchange on preventive measures and methodology on registration of incidents.

In June, at the first annual National Forum against Antisemitism held in Vienna, 80 high-ranking representatives of society pooled their knowledge on best practices to combat antisemitism and promote Jewish life in the country. EU and Constitution Minister Edtstadler chaired the event.

In July, Chancellor Karl Nehammer visited Yad Vashem and announced a new multiyear cooperative partnership between Yad Vashem and the

Federal Chancellery, with the amount of €1.5 million (\$1.6 million) allocated for the term 2022-24, to enhance efforts in Austria to increase Holocaust remembrance, education, and research. The Chancellor wrote in the Yad Vashem guest book: "For every Austrian citizen, Yad Vashem is an eternal reminder of our accountability during the Shoah, but also in the many years, decades, and centuries before, when antisemitism and anti-Jewish hatred flourished in Austria and laid the foundations for the greatest crime in humanity. Yad Vashem is also a reminder that we must protect Jewish life and keep it alive today and fight decisively against all forms of antisemitism in Austria, in Europe, [and] all over the world."

On September 1, to mark the 30th anniversary of the introduction of the Austrian Commemoration Service, Foreign Minister Alexander Schallenberg delivered the opening speech at an event in parliament. The Commemoration Service is a voluntary group where young Austrians promote the memory of the victims of National Socialism and engage in related educational work abroad. Schallenberg said that "through their service at Holocaust memorial sites around the world, young Austrians learn about the unspeakable human crime of the Shoah; also, as representatives of our country, they embody the forward-looking responsibility for the dark chapters of our history."

In September, EU and Constitution Minister Edtstadler and Education Minister Martin Polaschek announced the "Prevention of Antisemitism through Education" initiative, a government effort aimed at equipping school principals, education administrators, and teacher-training colleges to combat antisemitism. Of the 38 recommendations in *the 2021 National Strategy to Combat Antisemitism*, 10 were directly linked to the education sector.

In October, in response to increased attacks on religious sites in the country, the European Commission-funded project "Strengthening the security and resilience of at-risk religious sites and communities" held training sessions and workshops for officials of the IGGO and its mosques. The workshops provided participants with knowledge in areas such as spatial planning, security, resilience building, and cooperation with law enforcement authorities and trained them to respond adequately to security threats.

The Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research announced on October 6 the establishment of a center for research on antisemitism and right-wing extremism, in cooperation with the Austrian Agency for Education and Internationalization. The agency developed a strategy paper for the educational sector. The ministry committed to provide the center with €175,000 (\$187,000) annually.

In April, the General Settlement Fund for Victims of National Socialism completed its work under the 2001 Washington Agreement, having disbursed approximately €150 million (160 million) to nearly 20,000

individuals. On November 14, a symposium in Vienna discussed future challenges, such as the need for more Holocaust education and immediate government action to condemn Holocaust trivialization. In November, the Mauthausen Memorial Board signed an agreement with the U.S. Holocaust Museum to collaborate on digitizing and preserving hundreds of thousands of original documents from the Austrian concentration camp.

In June, the government announced that the Ministry for Social Affairs would provide funding for Dokustelle.

In December, the Federal Chancellery hosted the second Vienna Forum on Countering Segregation and Extremism in the Context of Integration, with an emphasis on protecting diaspora communities from radical influences and extremist ideologies.

The education ministry's research center on right-wing extremism and antisemitism, in concert with the DOEW, provided schools with material for Holocaust education and to support investigations into right-wing extremism.

The country is a member of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

The Interior Ministry documented 5,464 cases of hate crimes in its *2021 Hate Crimes Report*, the most recent report available. The report divided hate crimes into nine categories: Ideology (2,052 cases), national/ethnic background (1,874), religion (750 – approximately 35 percent each were attributed to anti-Muslim and antisemitic hate crimes), complexion (408), sexual orientation (376), gender (354), social status (287), age (266), and disability (252). The Interior Ministry also issued an awareness brochure on hate crimes, which is available in nine languages.

Dokustelle reported that there were 1,061 anti-Muslim incidents in 2021 compared with 1,402 in 2020. According to the center, a vast majority of the 1,061 incidents reported involved female victims, particularly visibly Muslim women. The report indicated that most of the 2021 anti-Muslim cases concerned hate speech (725), followed by incitement of violence (108), insults (97), discrimination (41), vandalism (25), physical assaults (16), acts of police violence (16), threats (7) and 21 “other” cases. Most of the 965 antisemitic cases were related to hate speech, insults, and incitement of violence (836), followed by vandalism (95), threats (22) and physical assaults (12). Dokustelle said that an increase in incidents was recorded following anti-Muslim remarks made by officials from the far-right Freedom Party (FPÖ).

From January to June, the IKG recorded 381 incidents of antisemitic crimes, reflecting a 32.2 percent decline from the 562 incidents reported for the same period in 2021. Most of the antisemitic cases reported in the first half of 2022 were related to hate speech, insults, and incitement of violence (301), followed by vandalism (61), threats (12) and physical assaults (7). IKG only reports incidents that have been clearly identified by their experts as antisemitic in accordance with the definition provided by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance. To enable international comparability, the categorization of reported antisemitic incidents by the IKG follows that of Germany's Federal Association of Departments for Research and Information on Antisemitism and the UK's Community Security Trust.

The IKG recorded a disproportionate share of perpetrators with a Muslim background in antisemitic incidents involving threats (14 out of 22) and physical violence (7 out of 12). Such incidents included a physical attack on a boy recognizable as Jewish on the Salztor Bridge in Vienna and a threat to a non-Jewish student on the subway who had been reading a book about Jewish history.

In June, a group of 35 juveniles aged 14 to 17 recorded antisemitic video footage in front of the Mauthausen Memorial site in Upper Austria.

In July, unknown persons destroyed a glass stele that commemorated the former house of prayer of the Beth Aharon Temple Association in Vienna. The memorial, erected in 2011, showed how the street would look in the present had the house of prayer not been destroyed.

In March, witnesses reported an incursion and theft of five gold-plated candlesticks from the parish church in the city of Villach. The perpetrators also violently removed an image of the Virgin Mary.

In March and April, the Boycott Divestment and Sanctions movement against Israel held its "Israeli Apartheid Week" in Vienna.

In April, representatives from the Conference of European Churches provided a safety training course for church officials and worshippers in Vienna.

In April and May, witnesses reported six different cases of vandalism of churches across Austria, with occult messages smeared on walls, religious symbols blemished, and bibles burned.

During the spring and summer, unknown persons committed acts of vandalism at a number of mosques across Austria, including an incident on June 6 when somebody vandalized with anti-Muslim slogans and symbols.

In August, unknown persons tore the flag of the Jewish Religious Society at the Vienna Campus of Religions.

A counseling center in Vienna managed by the Society against Sect and Cult Dangers, a nongovernmental organization (NGO) that described itself as an organization working against harm caused by “destructive cults” such as Scientology, continued to distribute information to the general public and provide counseling for former members of such groups. All provinces funded family and youth counseling offices that provided information on “sects and cults.

A report presented in June by the NGO Initiative for Discrimination-Free Education listed a total of 121 cases of discrimination in schools in 2021, down from 186 cases in 2020, of which 18 percent reflected anti-Muslim sentiment and 1 percent antisemitism. Most of the cases (64 percent) were attributed to racism.

Seventeen Christian groups, consisting of the Catholic parishes, various Protestant denominations, and Orthodox and Old Oriental Churches, continued to meet twice a year in the Ecumenical Council of Churches in Austria to discuss religious cooperation. Ten groups had observer status on the council.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy and Engagement

The Ambassador and other embassy representatives met regularly with government officials, including from the Federal Chancellery’s Office of Religious Affairs; the Federal Chancellery’s Ministry for Women, Family, Youth and Integration; the Division of Dialogue of Cultures at the MFA; and the Ministry of Interior, to discuss religious freedom and the protection of religious minorities. Topics included the concerns of religious groups, integration of Muslim refugees, cooperation with religious groups in combating terrorism, and measures to combat antisemitism and anti-Muslim sentiment.

The Ambassador and other embassy representatives met with religious group representatives from the IGGO, IKG, and Catholic Church to discuss their relationship with the coalition government, instances of discrimination, and interreligious dialogue. Embassy officers also met with religious youth groups, such as the Muslim Youth of Austria, the Catholic Youth of Austria, and the Protestant Youth of Vienna, to discuss problems such as antisemitism and anti-Muslim sentiment.

The embassy continued to work closely with the Jewish community and Austrian partners to promote religious tolerance and fight antisemitism. In May, the Ambassador participated in the Holocaust commemoration at the International Liberation Ceremony at the former concentration camp

in Mauthausen, Upper Austria. The Holocaust commemorations traditionally promote the values of religious tolerance and free speech, as well as diversity and inclusion.

Embassy representatives continued to serve on the International Advisory Board of the Mauthausen Memorial Agency to promote Holocaust remembrance and education, and in November attended the participatory workshop for diplomatic representatives to provide input in the new Gusen Concentration Camp Memorial Site. Embassy representatives also engaged with officials from the DOEW.

In honor of the Days of Remembrance of the Victims of the Holocaust, the embassy facilitated cooperation between the Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies of Yale University, the Vienna Wiesenthal Institute for Holocaust Studies, the Institute for Folk Music Research and Ethnomusicology, and the Exilarte Center, in producing a concert of songs originally sung in villages and towns, ghettos, and concentration camps across Central and Eastern Europe. The Ambassador also delivered opening remarks at the Jewish Museum in Vienna at an exhibition about Stefan Edlis, a Jewish Austrian, who fled Vienna to the United States in 1941. The event was well attended by members of the local Jewish community.

In May, the embassy organized a workshop with deradicalization expert Arno Michaelis and members of the Muslim Youth of Austria. The session focused on the importance of universal respect for freedom of religion or belief for all. In addition, the Ambassador wrote the foreword for a Muslim Youth of Austria brochure, and embassy officials expressed support for the Muslim Youth of Austria by celebrating the group's 25 anniversary with its leadership and attending the institution's annual iftar event.

In September, the U.S. Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Antisemitism delivered a virtual keynote address at parliament in honor of the 30th anniversary of the Austrian Commemoration Service, noting the importance of country's *National Action Strategy against Antisemitism* while highlighting the need to reach out to the local Jewish community and stressing that "the fight against antisemitism is a fight for our democratic values, for justice, and the health of our nations."

In November, the U.S. Department of State's Special Envoy for Holocaust Issues met with the MFA's Secretary General Peter Launsky-Tieffenthal in Washington and highlighted on social media "the importance of accurate Holocaust commemoration and the importance of fighting antisemitism." Later that month, the Special Adviser to the Secretary of State on Holocaust Issues delivered virtual remarks at the Vienna symposium marking the completion of Austrian compensation payments to victims of National Socialism in the United States.

In November, the embassy convened a listening session of youth leaders from a range of faith communities to forge interfaith connections and hear about their diverse experience of religious freedom in the country.

During her regional trips throughout the country, the Ambassador held regular meetings with archbishops, bishops, and other local representatives of the Catholic Church, discussing issues ranging from religious tolerance to interfaith dialogue, and the future of the Catholic Church. Embassy participation in interfaith commemorative masses in solidarity with Ukraine sent a strong signal of solidarity to members of the Orthodox community and to Ukrainian refugees in Austria. In June, the Ambassador, a visiting Department of State official, and embassy staff visited a refugee care center in Vienna run by Caritas Austria, the social aid organization of the Catholic Church, to learn about the church's support for Ukrainians arriving in Austria. Throughout the year, the embassy used social media platforms to deliver messages about religious freedom.

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