

Slovenian (78)

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U.S. DEPARTMENT of STATE

Slovenia**International Religious Freedom Report 2002**

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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 in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has a total area of 12,589 square miles, and its population is approximately 1.99 million. Estimates of religious identification vary. According to the 1991 census, the numbers are: Roman Catholic, 1.4 million (72 percent); No answer, 377,000 (19 percent); Atheist, 85,500 (4.3 percent); Orthodox, 46,000 (2 percent); Muslim, 29,000 (1.5 percent); Protestant, 19,000 (1 percent); Agnostic, 4,000 (0.2 percent); and Jewish, 201 (0.01 percent).

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, Scientology, and Unification organizations) 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 recognized as legal entities; to date no groups have been denied registration. The Government proposed an amended Religious Communities Act to Parliament in 1998 that would have offered non-profit status to registered religious communities; however, this bill had not yet been adopted as of the end of the period covered by this report.

In 1999 the Government signed an agreement regarding the legal position of the Roman Catholic Church in Slovenia with the Bishop's Conference, and concluded a similar agreement in 2000 with the Evangelical (Lutheran) Church of the Augsburg Confession in Slovenia. Other religious communities have expressed interest in negotiating similar agreements with the Government. In December 2001, the Government concluded an Agreement on Legal Questions with The Holy See.

Religious groups, including foreign missionaries, must register with the Ministry of the Interior if they wish to receive value-added tax rebates on a quarterly basis. All groups in the country report equal access to registration and tax rebate status.

The appropriate role for religious instruction in schools continues to be an issue of debate. The Constitution states that parents are entitled to give their children "a moral and religious upbringing." Only those schools supported by religious bodies teach religion.

In May 2002, the Law on Defense was amended to include a provision specifically providing military

personnel with the right to religious services and creating a chaplain corps to provide services in the Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant, and Muslim faiths.

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. After Slovenian independence in 1991, Parliament passed legislation calling for denationalization (restitution or compensation) within a fixed period. Despite the Catholic Church's numerical predominance, restitution of its property remains a politically unpopular issue. In July 2001, the Ministry of Agriculture issued a decree returning approximately 20,396 acres of forests in Triglav National Park to the Church. However, in May 2002, this decree was annulled by the Ljubljana Administrative Court in response to multiple legal challenges.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Muslim community registered a complaint with the Ombudsman during the period covered by this report because public broadcaster RTV Slovenia refused to allow them free airtime to address their community during Ramadan—a privilege granted to the Catholic, Serb Orthodox, and Protestant communities during their respective religious holidays. The Ombudsman pursued the complaint with TV Slovenia, which agreed to grant airtime to the Muslim community for this purpose in 2002.

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.

Section III. Societal Attitudes

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 stems 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. Societal attitudes towards the minority Muslim and Serb Orthodox communities generally are tolerant; however, some persons fear the possible emergence of Muslim fundamentalism.

Interfaith relations are generally amicable, although there is little warmth between the majority Catholic Church and foreign missionary groups, such as the Mormons, which are viewed as aggressive proselytizers.

While there are no governmental restrictions on the Muslim community's freedom of worship, services commonly are held in private homes under cramped conditions. The community has conceptual plans to build a new facility in Ljubljana. As of June 2002, a potential site had been identified and necessary amendments to the city plan were under consideration by the local government. However, processes to obtain permits are notoriously complex, and offer anyone who might wish to oppose the construction many opportunities to delay the project.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting 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. Additionally the Embassy has made informal inquiries into the status of the mosque construction project (see Section II). The Embassy meets with members of all major religious communities, with representatives of nongovernmental organizations that address religious freedom issues, and with government officials from relevant offices and ministries.

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