

U.S. Department of State
Annual Report on International Religious Freedom for 1999:
Slovenia

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SLOVENIA

Section I. Freedom of Religion

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government respects this right in practice. No person can be compelled to admit his religious or other beliefs.

There are few formal requirements for recognition as a religion by the Government. The requirements are technical, and there were no reports that any group was denied registration during the period covered by this report. The Government's Office for Religious Communities registers organizations as religious with the Ministry of Interior and also convenes regular meetings of all 35 registered religious communities in the country. This registration entitles such groups to obtain value-added tax (VAT) rebates on, and duty-free importation of, all items used for religious purposes. All groups in the country have been given equal access to registration and tax rebate status.

While no data are available on active participation in religious services, citizens identify themselves as follows: about 71 percent are Roman Catholic, 2.5 percent are Serbian Orthodox, and 1.5 percent are Sunni Muslim. Protestants, largely Lutherans concentrated in the eastern part of the country, constitute less than 1 percent of the population. The remainder of the population considers itself agnostic or atheist.

Foreign missionaries (including a 73-member Mormon mission) and religious groups (including Hare Krishna, Scientology, and Unification organizations) operate without hindrance.

Religious groups, including foreign missionaries, must register with the Ministry of the Interior. This registration entitles such groups to value-added tax (VAT) 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 the schools continues to be an issue of debate. The Constitution states that parents are entitled to give their children "a moral and religious upbringing." Before 1945 religion was much more prominent in the schools, but now only those schools supported by religious bodies teach religion.

The Roman Catholic Church was a major property holder in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia before World War II. After the war, much church property--church buildings 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 and/or compensation) within a fixed period. The first post-independence government in 1991 was a center-right coalition headed by a Christian Democrat prime minister. However, a subsequent change of government in 1992 to a center-left coalition led by current Prime Minister Janez Drnovsek led to a virtual standstill in denationalization proceedings for several years. The strong opposition of the current Government toward returning large tracts of forest and other property to the Catholic Church is an oft-cited reason for the paralysis of the denationalization process.

As of June 1999, only one-third of all cases had been adjudicated at the initial administrative level. Restitution of church property is a politically unpopular issue, and the Catholic Church, despite its numerical predominance, does not have the political support necessary to force a faster pace for denationalization.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report.

There were no reports of religious detainees or prisoners.

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

Section II. Societal Attitudes

Societal attitudes toward religion are complex. Historical events dating long before Slovene independence color societal perceptions of 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 Slovenia, and many were prominent Catholics.

Interfaith relations are correct, although there is little warmth between the majority Catholic Church and foreign missionary groups, such as the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, which are viewed as aggressive proselytizers.

Section III. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Embassy has discussed religious freedom worldwide in the overall context of the promotion of 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 specifically discussed church property during these sessions.

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