

Israel, Jewish groups blast EU court ruling against kosher and halal slaughter

European Court of Justice says authorities can effectively ban religious ritual slaughter; Israeli Foreign Ministry says decision sends 'a harsh message to all European Jewry'.



Illustrative: A butcher in Jerusalem, April 26, 2010. (Abir Sultan/Flash90)

The European Court of Justice ruled Thursday that authorities can order that animals be stunned before slaughter in a move decried by Israel and religious groups as attacking their traditions.

The court backed a regulation imposed in the Flemish region of Belgium banning the slaughter of livestock that have not been stunned on animal rights grounds.

The measure was seen as effectively outlawing the Jewish kosher and Muslim halal traditions, which require livestock to be conscious when their throats are

slit.

“The court concludes that the measures contained in the decree allow a fair balance to be struck between the importance attached to animal welfare and the freedom of Jewish and Muslim believers to manifest their religion,” the ruling said.

Israel’s foreign ministry lashed out at the verdict as “sending a harsh message to all European Jewry.”

“Beyond the fact that this decision harms the freedom of worship and religion in Europe, a core value of the EU, it also signals to Jewish communities that the Jewish way of life is unwanted in Europe,” the ministry said in a statement.

“It is important that a way is found to change the decision and enable Jewish EU citizens to hold Jewish practices,” the ministry said.

An umbrella organization for Jewish groups in Belgium called the decision a “denial of democracy” that did not respect the rights of minority groups.

“The fight continues, and we will not admit defeat until we have exhausted all our legal remedies, which is not yet the case,” Yohan Benizri, head of the Belgian Federation of Jewish Organisations, said.

The head of the European Jewish Congress said the ruling “severely undermined” the right to perform Jewish religious practices.

“This ruling is a heavy blow to Jewish life in Europe and in essence tells Jews that our practices are no longer welcome. Telling Jews that their ways are not welcome is just a short step from telling Jews that we are no longer welcome,” Moshe Kantor said in a statement.

He said the EJC would fight the court decision.

“Europe’s Jewish communities will not rest until our fundamental rights are asserted and protected under the full weight of European law,” Kantor said.

The ruling was also denounced by the Belgian Federation of Jewish Organizations and the European Jewish Association.

“This is a sad day for European Jewry. For decades now, as animal rights have

come into vogue, Kosher slaughter has come under relentless attack, and subject to repeated attempts to ban it," EJA chairman Rabbi Menachem Margolin said in a statement.

Margolin dismissed "the entirely bogus premise" that kosher slaughter is more cruel to animals.

"What today's ruling does is put animal welfare above the fundamental right of freedom of religion. Simply put, the beast takes preference over man," he said. "What a terrible message to send to European Jewry, that you and your practices are not welcome here. This is a basic denial of our rights as European citizens."

The Conference of European Rabbis said the ruling "flies in the face" of recent statements from European authorities on protecting Jewish life.

"The bans have already had a devastating impact on the Belgian Jewish community, causing supply shortages during the pandemic, and we are all very aware of the precedent this sets which challenges our rights to practice our religion," it said in a statement.

The group also noted previous bans on ritual slaughter were pushed by the far-right.

"We now face a situation where, with no consultation of the local Jewish community, a ban has been implemented and the implications on the Jewish community will be long lasting," it said. "Europe needs to reflect on the type of continent it wants to be. If values like freedom of religion and true diversity are integral, then the current system of law does not reflect that and needs to be urgently reviewed."



A butcher shop selling halal meat in Paris, France, March 9, 2012. (AP Photo/Michel Euler)

The Muslim community in Belgium also reacted with dismay to the verdict.

The Belgian Coordination Committee of Islamic Institutions said the decision had been a “big disappointment” and argued that the court was pandering to populist sentiments.

“The Court of Justice seems to have given in to the growing political and societal pressure from populist movements which are waging a symbolic struggle against vulnerable minorities throughout Europe,” the group said in a statement.

But the ruling was welcomed by the authorities and animal rights activists who had demanded the ban, arguing that stunning animals so that they are unconscious when they are killed is more humane.

“Today is a great day... for the hundreds of thousands of animals who, thanks to this decision, will be spared the hellish pains of slaughter without stunning for religious purposes,” said Michel Vandebosch, the head of animal rights group GAIA. “For me, after more than 25 years of relentless struggle... this is one of the

happiest days of my life.”

Belgium’s Flanders regional government issued the order in 2017, which took effect in 2019, that slaughterhouses must stun livestock before slaughtering them.

The argument was made that this would “reduce their suffering,” and animal rights activists had pushed for the ban.

Source:

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