Religious Liberties of European Jews Under ‘Direct Attack’ as Greece Becomes Latest Country to Outlaw Kosher Slaughter

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The highest court in Greece on Tuesday issued a ban on the slaughter of animals in accordance with the religious rites of both Jews and Muslims, leading one Jewish leader to warn that the community’s freedom to observe its religious laws “is under direct attack across Europe.”

In its ruling, the Hellenic Council of State — the Supreme Administrative Court of Greece — determined that the slaughter of animals for kosher and halal consumption was illegal under both Greek and European law. The court upheld a complaint from an animal rights organization, the Panhellenic Animal Welfare and Environmental Federation, that slaughtering animals without prior stunning contravened animal protection legislation.

The Greek court’s decision is another blow to efforts in Europe to protect *shechita* — the binding rules outlined in the Torah that concern the killing of animals for human consumption — from judicial censure. Under the laws of *shechita*, pre-stunning of animals is not permitted.

Earlier this month, Belgium’s Constitutional Court [affirmed](https://www.algemeiner.com/2021/10/01/jewish-groups-angered-by-belgian-courts-decision-upholding-ban-on-kosher-slaughter/) the legality of a ban on ritual slaughter first introduced in 2017. That decision followed last December’s [shock ruling](https://www.algemeiner.com/2020/12/17/you-are-not-welcome-here-european-union-court-ruling-against-kosher-meat-production-threatens-foundations-of-jewish-life-community-leaders-warn/) of the European Court of Justice — the supreme arbiter of European Union law — permitting EU member states to ban the slaughtering of animals without pre-stunning. Meanwhile, Poland’s government is currently preparing legislation that will ban the production of kosher and halal meat by 2025.

Several other European countries have imposed [legal restrictions](https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/2020%20Legislation%20Factsheet%20-%20Ritual%20slaughter.pdf) on ritual slaughter. The practice is banned entirely in Slovenia while pre-stunning is required in Cyprus, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, Sweden and Switzerland.

Commenting on the Greek court’s decision, Rabbi Menachem Margolin, chairman of the European Jewish Association (EJA) observed that the “downstream consequences” of the ECJ’s ruling last December were already manifesting.

“Jewish Freedom of Religion is under direct attack,” Margolin said in a statement. “It started in Belgium, moved to Poland and Cyprus and now it is Greece’s turn.”

Margolin pointed out that “attack” on kosher slaughter was being directed from “the very institutions that have vowed to protect our communities.”

“What use is it to protect Jews while legislating fundamental pillars of our religion out of existence?” he asked.

The Greek decision came just three weeks after the European Union’s executive branch, the European Commission, unveiled a nine-year strategy to counter antisemitism and foster Jewish life among its 27 member states.

While the EU strategy recognized that antisemitic threats to Jews take various forms, such as the promotion of lurid conspiracy theories or the denial of Israel’s right to exist, the 25-page document presented the ECJ’s ruling on kosher slaughter as enabling member states to strike “a fair balance between respect for the freedom to manifest religion and the protection of animal welfare.”