

# HUNGARY 2017 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

## Executive Summary

The Fundamental Law (constitution) provides for freedom of religion, including freedom to choose or change religion or belief, and to manifest religion or belief through religious acts, ceremonies, or other means; the constitution's preamble states the nation recognizes "the role of Christianity" in "preserving nationhood" and values the country's "various religious traditions." It prohibits religious discrimination and speech violating the dignity of any religious community. The constitution stipulates separation of religious communities and state and the autonomy of religious communities. According to law, the incorporation of religious groups, which provides for financial benefits and government support, requires the approval of two thirds of parliament. Parliament again did not vote on pending applications for incorporation status by religious groups, in violation of its own legal procedures and despite a finding by the Constitutional Court that the body's failure to vote was unconstitutional. In July the Constitutional Court ruled parliament must amend the law to allow individuals to donate the same proportion of their taxes to unincorporated religious groups as to incorporated ones; parliament had not done so by year's end. The government launched a criminal investigation of the Church of Scientology (COS) and again barred it from moving into new headquarters. The Constitutional Court overturned a local law in Asotthalom prohibiting the wearing of burqas. Muslim groups criticized the government for anti-Muslim remarks by Prime Minister (PM) Viktor Orban and other senior officials. Jewish leaders expressed concern the government's continuing campaign against a prominent Jewish Hungarian American business executive could incite anti-Semitic acts.

There were incidents of assault and hate speech against Muslims and Jews, including Holocaust denial, and vandalism of religious properties. Muslim groups cited attacks on Muslims, which they attributed largely to the government's anti-Muslim rhetoric, and said victims were often afraid to report incidents to the police. Jewish groups reported the level of verbal anti-Semitic incidents remained approximately the same as the previous year. According to a poll by Zavecz Research, 60 percent of respondents considered Muslims to be very dangerous for the future of the country, and 27 percent considered Jews to be very dangerous. Another survey reported that in 2016, one third of respondents had what it termed extreme or moderately anti-Semitic views, while 53 percent downplayed the extent of the Holocaust. In February approximately 600 members of extremist organizations, including neo-Nazis, marched in Budapest and elsewhere to

commemorate victims of the fight of Nazi and Hungarian army divisions against the Soviets. The leader of one group at the rally shouted praise of the Waffen SS. In November The Action and Protection Foundation (TEV) organized a conference on anti-Semitism.

U.S. embassy and visiting U.S. officials met with senior government officials, including cabinet ministers at the Office of the Prime Minister, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Ministry of Human Capacities (MHC), to advocate religious freedom and urge the government to reconsider the law on religion and amend those provisions which resulted in restrictions and discrimination against certain minority religious groups. U.S. officials also expressed concern about anti-Muslim rhetoric by government officials and about the COS investigation. U.S. officials met with various religious groups to discuss rising anti-Semitism and anti-Muslim sentiment and hosted meetings with religious leaders to discuss religious freedom.

## **Section I. Religious Demography**

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 9.9 million (July 2017 estimate). The Hungarian government does not collect official data on religious affiliation; however, the 2011 national census included an optional question on religious affiliation. Of the 73 percent who responded, 51 percent identified as Roman Catholic, 16 percent as Hungarian Reformed Church (Calvinist), 3 percent as Lutheran, 2 percent as Greek Catholic, and less than 1 percent as Jewish; 23 percent reported no religious affiliation, and 2 percent indicated they were atheists. Other religious groups together constituting less than 5 percent of the population include Greek Orthodox, the Faith Congregation (a Pentecostal group), the COS, Russian and other Orthodox Christian groups, other Christian denominations, Buddhists, and Muslims. The Jewish population is largely concentrated in the capital, while other religious groups are distributed around the country.

## **Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom**

### **Legal Framework**

The Fundamental Law, the country's constitution, provides for freedom of conscience and religion, including freedom to choose or change religion or belief, and freedom – alone or in community with others and in public or in private – to manifest religion or belief through religious acts or ceremonies, or in any other way, in worshipping, practice, and observance. It prohibits religious

discrimination as well as speech “aimed at violating the dignity” of any religious community.

The constitution’s preamble states that “We recognize the role of Christianity” in preserving the nation and “value the various religious traditions” in the country. The constitution stipulates separation between religious communities and state and the autonomy of religious groups. According to the constitution, the state may, at the request of religious communities, cooperate with them on community goals.

Implementing legislation provides for a dual system of religious communities, consisting of “incorporated churches” with which the state cooperates on community goals as outlined in the constitution, and “organizations engaged in religious activity” (religious organizations). Neither category is limited to Christian organizations.

Religious organizations acquire incorporated church status through an application submitted to the MHC and, if found eligible, by a subsequent two-thirds vote of parliament. The church is then by law entered onto a list of incorporated churches. The MHC has 60 days following the initial application to assess whether the group fulfills all the administrative criteria, which include a variety of documentation and qualification requirements. To qualify for incorporated church status, a religious group must have existed as a religious organization in the country for 20 years, in which case it must have a membership of 0.1 percent of the total population, (approximately 10,000 persons) or be registered as a religious organization and have existed for at least 100 years internationally, in which case its foreign affiliation must be certified by at least two other churches of “similar doctrine” recognized in foreign countries. Its activities must not conflict with the constitution or other laws or violate the rights and freedoms of other communities. A group must also prove that its primary purpose is to conduct religious activity; have a formal statement of faith and rites, bylaws and internal rules, and elected or appointed administrative and representative bodies; and officially declare that its activities are not in violation of the laws or the freedom of others. The MHC is obligated to consult with a qualified lawyer, historian of religions, scholar of religions, or sociologist with an academic degree prior to issuing its decision. Applicants may appeal the MHC’s decision in the Budapest Public Administration and Labor Court and, ultimately, to the Curia, the country’s highest judicial authority.

Following a favorable MHC decision on the applicant’s eligibility, the MHC submits the application to parliament’s Judiciary Committee, which has 60 days to

invite the applicant to a public hearing and to submit an assessment to parliament on the group's compliance with additional criteria. These criteria include an assessment that the group poses no threat to national security (provided by parliament's National Security Committee), that it does not violate the right to physical and mental health or the protection of life and human dignity, and that the group is suitable for long-term cooperation with the state in promoting community goals based on its founding documents, number of members, network of institutions providing public services, and access by larger societal groups to such services.

Approval of a request for incorporated church status requires a two-thirds majority vote by parliament, which must take place within 60 days of a motion by parliament's Judiciary Committee. If a religious group receives such parliamentary approval, the state must grant specific licenses to the group to support its participation in tasks to achieve community goals. If parliament rejects the application, a detailed explanation is required and the applicant may challenge parliament's decision in the Constitutional Court within 15 days. The law does not prescribe any consequences if parliament does not act within the 60-day period, nor is there opportunity for appealing parliamentary inaction.

A 2011 law on religion automatically deregistered more than 300 religious groups and organizations which had previously had incorporated church status. Those organizations are required to reapply if they wish to regain incorporated church status; their applications are also subject to the approval of a two-thirds majority of parliament.

The law lists 27 incorporated churches, including the Catholic Church, a variety of Protestant denominations, a range of Orthodox Christian groups, other Christian denominations such as The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Seventh-day Adventists, the Salvation Army, several Jewish groups, and the Hungarian Society for Krishna Consciousness, the sole registered Hindu organization. The list also includes Buddhist and Muslim umbrella organizations, each encompassing a few individual groups, bringing the total number on the registered list of incorporated churches to 32.

The law authorizes the Budapest Metropolitan Court to register a group as a religious organization if it has at least 10 founding individual members whose primary objective is to conduct religious activities that do not violate the constitution, other laws, or the rights and freedom of other communities. The organization's membership may consist only of individuals; no "legal persons"

such as corporations or other associations may be members. The court must approve applications that meet all of these criteria. Applicants must submit the name and address of the organization, names and addresses of founding members, identifying information on the group's legal representative and the term of his or her appointment, the founding documents of the group, and a statement that the primary objective of the organization is to conduct religious activities. If the court rejects an organization's application, the decision is subject to appeal to the Budapest Metropolitan Court of Appeals.

Every registered (but not unregistered) religious community may use the word "church" in its official name regardless of whether it is officially recognized by parliament as an "incorporated church." Officials from both incorporated churches and registered religious organizations not recognized by parliament are not obligated to disclose information shared with them in the course of their faith-related service, such as during rites of confession.

The Hungarian Civil Liberties Union (HCLU) reports that unregistered religious organizations enjoy protection for faith-related services. Unregistered groups are allowed to function and to worship but lack legal status and the rights and privileges granted exclusively to registered religious communities.

By law, no state office may determine or supervise a registered religious community's faith-based activities. Their doctrines, internal regulations, and statutes are not subject to state review, modification, or enforcement. Their names, symbols, and rites are protected by copyright law, while buildings and cemeteries are protected by criminal law. Unregistered groups, according to HCLU, enjoy copyright and at least some other protections, but the law is unclear about the extent of those other protections.

The constitution establishes a unified system for the Office of the Commissioner for Fundamental Rights (ombudsman). The ombudsman investigates cases related to violations of fundamental rights – including religious freedom – and initiates general or specific measures for their remedy.

Incorporated churches have certain privileges not available to religious organizations, such as greater access to state funding and exemption from state oversight of their financial operations connected to religious activities. Incorporated churches and their associated institutions (classified as "internal religious legal entities") that provide public services, such as healthcare, education, or other social services, are automatically eligible for full state subsidies (a subsidy

based on the number of persons receiving services coupled with a supplementary subsidy) for all their public service activities. Religious organizations may also take over or establish public service institutions and are entitled to receive a per capita state subsidy to cover the wages of the staff employed by these institutions. They may also apply for additional funding from an additional budgetary allocation.

For incorporated churches and religious organizations that operate their own schools, the state provides subsidy, based on the number of students enrolled, for employee wages, but only incorporated churches automatically receive a supplementary subsidy for the schools' operating expenses. According to the law, religious organizations may apply to the MHC for a supplementary operational subsidy covering approximately 30 percent of their total costs for schools, and the MHC decides on a case-by-case basis whether to grant it.

Taxpayers may allocate 1 percent of their personal income taxes to a nongovernmental organization (NGO), including a religious organization, and another 1 percent to an incorporated church (but not to any other religious organization), and the church then receives additional matching funds from the government. On July 14, the Constitutional Court ruled the provision prohibiting taxpayers from making an additional 1 percent allocation to unincorporated religious organizations was unconstitutional. According to the decision, all religious communities – including unincorporated religious organizations – should be eligible to collect the 1 percent personal income tax donations for churches. The court did not clarify whether its decision covered unregistered religious groups. The court set a deadline for parliament to modify the law by December 31. The Constitutional Court said the state can differentiate between religious communities and make its own decision about which ones it wants to support; however, it may not force its decision on citizens and constrain their religious choices. The ruling was a result of a citizen's suit against the National Tax Authority.

Both incorporated churches and religious organizations are free to use taxpayer donations as they wish. Only officials of incorporated churches are exempt from personal income tax under certain conditions. Land owned by a religious group deregistered in 2011 may be retained by the religious organization that is the deregistered group's legal successor. Both religious organizations and incorporated churches are prohibited from purchasing agricultural land. Incorporated churches, but not religious organizations, may acquire new agricultural land as a gift or an inheritance.

If incorporated churches or religious organizations cease to exist (e.g., by dissolving themselves) and have no legal successor, their assets become state property that must be used to finance public services. This may also occur if, upon the initiative of the government, the Constitutional Court issues an opinion that the activity of the incorporated church violates the constitution, and parliament confirms the decision by a two-thirds majority vote. The Constitutional Court also issues opinions upon the request of the Budapest Metropolitan Court on whether a religious organization is in violation of the constitution.

Treaties with the Holy See regulate relations between the state and the Catholic Church, including financing of public services and religious activities and the settlement of claims for property seized by the state during the Communist era. These treaties serve as a model for regulating state relations with other religious groups, although there are some differences in the rights and privileges the state accords to each of the religious groups with which it has agreements. The state has also concluded formal agreements with the Hungarian Reformed Church, the Hungarian Lutheran Church, the Federation of Jewish Communities in Hungary (MAZSIHISZ), and four Orthodox Churches.

Military and law enforcement personnel may freely practice their religion in private and also at their workplaces if their religious practice does not violate their mandatory service duties. The Catholic Church, the Reformed Church, the Lutheran Church, and Jewish congregations receive automatic authorization to provide chaplain services to the military; other incorporated churches and religious organizations must seek permission.

Penitentiaries generally allow inmates free practice of religion, including providing them with special diets, such as kosher, vegetarian, and pork-free meals. All incorporated churches and religious organizations must seek permission to offer pastoral services in prisons. Rejection of access requests may be appealed to the National Prison Service, the prosecutor's office, or the ombudsman. Detainees have the right to participate in communal religious services three times a week and to contact without supervision representatives of incorporated churches or religious organizations having permission to access the facility. Detainees in special security regimes may only receive individual spiritual care and are excluded from community spiritual programs. In the case of pretrial detainees, during the course of the criminal investigation a public prosecutor or judge may restrict personal interaction with a religious representative but not participation in communal religious services.

Incorporated churches receive automatic authorization to provide pastoral services in hospitals, while religious organizations must seek permission.

One-hour-per-week faith-and-ethics or ethics-only education is mandatory through the first eight grades of public school. Students and their parents choose between the faith-and-ethics class provided by an incorporated church of their choice or a generic ethics course taught by public school teachers. Religious groups are entitled to prepare their own textbooks and determine curricula for their faith-and-ethics classes. Private schools are not obligated to introduce faith-and-ethics or ethics classes. Unincorporated religious organizations are not entitled to provide religious education as part of the mandatory curricula in public schools, but they may offer extracurricular, optional religious education in public schools if requested by students or parents.

Incorporated churches and religious organizations have the right to open their own schools. In addition, the law affords incorporated churches and religious organizations the right to assume operation of public schools through a formal agreement with the MHC. In these cases, the government continues to fund the schools. Religious communities, school teachers, the affected parents, or the operator of the school may initiate such transfers, but they can only be executed if the designated religious community is able to collect the signatures of more than 50 percent of the parents and adult students enrolled at the school. Whether newly established or converted from public status, religious schools are free to conduct their own religious teaching without government input and to make faith education mandatory and not substitutable with an ethics class. The government inspects both religious and public schools every two years to ensure they conform to government standards.

The constitution prohibits speech that violates the dignity of any religious community. The law includes a prohibition of “calling for violence” – in addition to inciting hatred – against a religious community or its members, punishable by up to three years’ imprisonment. The law provides a maximum punishment of three years in prison for impeding someone else through violence or threats from freely exercising his or her religion. Abusing an individual because of his or her religious affiliation is punishable by up to three years in prison.

Physical assault motivated by the victim’s actual or suspected religious affiliation is a felony punishable by one to five years in prison. Violence against a member of the clergy is classified as violence against an “individual providing public service”

and is similarly punished with a prison sentence of one to five years. Any person who engages in preparation for the use of force against any member of a religious community is guilty of a misdemeanor punishable by imprisonment not exceeding two years.

The law prohibits public denial, expression of doubt, or minimization of the Holocaust, genocide, and other crimes against humanity committed by the National Socialist or Communist regimes, punishing such offenses with a maximum sentence of three years in prison. The criminal code makes wearing, exhibiting, or promoting in public the swastika, the logo of the Nazi SS, or the arrow cross in a way that harms the human dignity or the memory of victims a misdemeanor, punishable by detention for a period ranging from five to 90 days.

The law provides for the lifting of official immunity of a member of parliament (MP) who incites hatred against religious communities or publicly denies crimes of the Communist or National Socialist regimes. No MP has been the subject of such a proceeding.

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

### **Government Practices**

*Summary paragraph.* By year's end parliament had not amended the law as mandated by the Constitutional Court in July to allow individuals to donate a portion of their taxes to religious organizations in the same way they could to incorporated churches. The government paid a fine to a religious group as ordered by the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) as compensation for losses incurred by the government's revocation of the group's status as an incorporated church. Parliament also did not vote on any of 14 pending applications by religious groups previously found eligible for incorporation, despite a legal obligation to do so. The government launched a criminal investigation of the COS and denied for a second time permission for the group to move into headquarters in Budapest. The Constitutional Court ruled an Asotthalom law banning burqas and restricting the activities of muezzins was unconstitutional. Incorporated churches reported their reliance on financial support from the government inhibited their ability to speak out on matters of public concern. Muslim groups complained about anti-Muslim statements by PM Orbán and other government officials. Jewish groups expressed concerns about PM Orbán's praise for a World War II (WWII)-era politician who signed anti-Jewish laws. The government continued its

campaign and public messaging against a prominent Jewish Hungarian American business executive, which Jewish leaders said could incite anti-Semitic acts.

By year's end, parliament had not complied with the July ruling by the Constitutional Court to amend the provisions of the religion law which the court found unconstitutional that allowed individuals to allocate an additional 1 percent of their income tax to incorporated religious groups but not to unincorporated ones. In addition, parliament again failed to revise other provisions of the religion law the Constitutional Court had previously found unconstitutional in 2015, namely that the short (four months) and preemptory legal deadline for religious groups to fulfill requirements for a change of legal status violated religious freedom. Separately in 2015, the Constitutional Court had also ruled, in agreement with a 2014 ECHR decision, that the law's criteria for incorporated church eligibility related to the minimum membership (0.1 percent of the population) and length of operation (20 years domestically or 100 years internationally) of a religious organization violated the ECHR's finding of an obligation of neutrality and impartiality.

In December 2016, the government's Data Protection Authority (DPA) launched a data protection investigation of the COS. According to the COS, the DPA seized various documents and files from its offices in Budapest and Nyiregyhaza, including "preclear folders" (PCs) containing what the COS called confidential communications between penitents and their minister. The COS stated the seizure of the PCs constituted a violation of privacy and of members' right to freedom of religion. In the same month the Church filed a legal complaint contesting the seizures, and individual COS members filed complaints with the ombudsman. On October 17, the DPA issued a report which, according to the COS, portrayed the Church's spiritual practices as mind manipulation, a portrayal which the COS denied.

According to the COS, the DPA then filed a complaint against the Church, alleging criminal abuse of personal data, and turned over its seized materials to the National Bureau of Investigation (NBI). On October 18, 60 NBI agents raided the COS headquarters in Budapest, seizing documents and sealing off the building. On October 19, the criminal section of the tax office, investigating possible financial crimes, executed search warrants and seized documents at COS offices in Budapest and 15 other locations. According to the COS, the authorities also froze the Church's bank accounts and placed a lien on its Budapest headquarters. The Church's spokesperson called the search "religious suppression under the guise of data protection." State authorities said their actions stemmed from concerns with

methods of personal information collection and storage, and not from the COS's religious views. The COS said Church members demonstrated in front of the DPA, the tax office, and parliament following the raid. The government did not recognize the COS as an incorporated church but had approved its registration as a religious organization.

On April 25, the ECHR ordered the government to pay 3 million euros (\$3.6 million) to the Hungarian Evangelical Fellowship (MET) as compensation for losses in 2012-14 resulting from the government revocation of MET's incorporated church status. The government and MET had failed to reach agreement on compensation by December 28, 2016, as ordered by the ECHR. The government made the payment on October 16, before the ECHR's October 25 deadline.

Parliament failed again to vote on any of the 14 applications by religious groups which the MHC had previously found eligible for incorporation, despite the 60-day legal deadline for action on an MHC referral. On December 20, the Constitutional Court ruled parliament's failure to act within the 60-day legal deadline for action violated the constitution. The MHC reported no religious groups submitted new applications for incorporated church status during the year.

The Constitutional Court ruled in April that the ban passed in 2016 by the town of Asotthalom on the wearing of burqas and chadors and on the call to prayer by muezzins was unconstitutional. The court said local authorities could not pass regulations directly affecting a basic right or restricting it.

In January the government denied for the second time a COS application for a certificate of occupancy for its headquarters and place of worship in Budapest. The government had denied the first application in May 2016 and subsequently issued an order requiring the COS to vacate the building. In January the COS challenged the denial of the certificate of occupancy in the Administrative and Labor Court of Budapest and requested a stay of the order to vacate the site. On October 12, the court denied the request for a stay of the order. The Church appealed the denial, and the appeal was pending at year's end. COS lawyers said they believed the city of Budapest was acting "in bad faith" and that the Church remained gravely concerned the city could take away its headquarters and place of worship.

The government continued to provide approximately 94 percent of its total financial support to incorporated churches and other religious groups to the Roman Catholic Church, the Hungarian Reformed Church, the Lutheran Church, and the

Jewish community, which it considered to be the country's four "historical" religious groups, an unofficial designation the media also used. The government said more than 94 percent of citizens who reported a religious affiliation were affiliated with the four historical religious groups.

As of November 9, the government had provided 59.2 billion forints (\$229 million) to incorporated churches for a range of activities, including maintenance of buildings, support for religious instruction and culture, support for community programs and investments, and wages of church employees. The government allocated additional funding for churches providing public educational and social services. Of this amount, the Catholic Church received 38.7 billion forints (\$150 million), the Reformed Church 9.4 billion forints (\$36.4 million), the Lutheran Church 2.9 billion forints (\$11.2 million), MAZSIHISZ 2.7 billion forints (\$10.4 million), and the Unified Hungarian Jewish Congregation (EMIH) 762 million forints (\$2.95 million). The government support for incorporated churches also included funding to a dozen churches for renovating their buildings and organizing community programs. As part of this support the government made two allocations totaling 2.4 billion forints (\$9.3 million) to the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC), which according to census data had approximately 2,400 members. Press reports speculated that members of the ROC, who did not have a place to worship in the western part of the country, would be able to build their own church in the town of Heviz.

Some incorporated churches expressed concern that if they spoke out on issues of public importance, the government would withdraw some of its financial support, which in many cases constituted two thirds or more of the churches' total funding.

On December 27, the government awarded an additional 88 billion forints (\$340.5 million) to some incorporated churches and religious organizations, with the Reformed Church receiving almost 59 billion forints (\$228.3 million) of this total.

According to tax authorities tracking the 1 percent tax allocations designated to incorporated churches, all major churches suffered significant losses both in terms of the value and number of donations. Donations to the Catholic Church decreased from 2.6 billion forints (\$10.1 million) in 2016 to 2.2 billion forints (\$8.5 million). The three large historic churches – Catholic, Reformed, and Lutheran – combined lost almost 450 million forints (\$1.7 million) and 120,000 tax contributors. Church leaders expressed fears that if this trend continued, the dependence of churches on the state might increase, weakening their religious autonomy. The government modified the law during the year so that, effective January 1, 2018, these

declarations would not have to be submitted by individuals on a yearly basis but would be valid until the taxpayer changed them.

The number of church-run schools slightly increased. Of elementary and secondary schools, 14.3 percent were operated by incorporated churches and 0.1 percent by religious organizations in the 2016-17 school year. Of preschools (ages 3-7), 7.2 percent were operated by incorporated churches and 0.1 percent by religious organizations. Approximately 207,600 students studied at preschools and elementary and secondary schools operated by registered religious communities (incorporated churches and religious organizations), compared to 204,000 in the 2015-16 school year. Approximately half of these students were in schools operated by the Catholic Church.

Religious entities provided social services to 107,918 persons and child protection services to 8,992 persons over the year (32.4 percent by the Catholic, 27.1 percent by the Reformed, and 12.96 percent by the Hungarian Baptist churches).

On September 14, the ECHR dismissed a 2009 complaint by a former pastor, whom the Hungarian Reformed Church had dismissed for disciplinary reasons, alleging that Hungarian courts had failed to deal with a monetary claim by the pastor against the Reformed Church. The pastor had filed a suit and subsequent appeals in 2007-09, which ended with a Supreme Court finding that the dispute involved ecclesiastical law and was outside of the court's jurisdiction. The ECHR ruled that the domestic courts' conclusion that the case was governed by ecclesiastical rather than domestic law was not unreasonable.

There were numerous reports of perceived anti-Muslim rhetoric by government officials and politicians, including at the highest levels. Muslim groups criticized as anti-Muslim the government's statements portraying asylum seekers and migrants, most of whom were Muslim, as dangerous for the future of the country and Europe and unable to integrate into European society. On November 3, governing Fidesz Party parliamentary group leader Gergely Gulyas said, "There will be no mosques in Hungary; that is how we respond" to acts of terrorism. In response to this comment, Zoltan Bolek, President of the Hungarian Islamic Community (HIC) issued a statement reading in part, "We have been experiencing Islamophobia for years and it is regrettable that ... other churches did not stand by us against statements directed against us!"

In his remarks in Baile Tusnad, Romania on July 22, PM Orban said Europe was being de-Christianized and that "European Union leaders ... are seeking a new,

mixed, Muslimized Europe.” HIC President Bolek, whose members he said were almost all citizens, attributed public hostility toward the community largely to the anti-Muslim and antimigrant rhetoric of senior government officials and some media outlets. Jewish groups expressed fear that public discourse targeting certain societal groups, in this case migrants and Islam, could spread to include other minorities or religious groups.

At the European Parliament in May, PM Orban described a Jewish Hungarian-born Holocaust survivor, U.S. citizen, and business executive as a “financial speculator attacking Hungary” who had “destroyed the lives of millions of Europeans.” Frans Timmermans, Vice President of the European Commission, stated he found that language anti-Semitic, after which Foreign Minister Peter Szijjarto stated the government’s disputes with the businessman had “absolutely nothing to do” with his Jewish origins.

In July the government launched a billboard campaign featuring a picture of this businessman, with text stating he should not be allowed to “have the last laugh.” MAZSIHISZ President Andras Heisler called on PM Orban in an open letter to end the campaign, which he said was not anti-Semitic, but could lead to anti-Semitic acts. Vandals spray painted a bus stop and bench with the words “Die, rotten Jews” followed by the businessman’s name, and billboards in Budapest and elsewhere were defaced with the graffiti “stinking Jew” written on the businessman’s face; images of the graffiti circulated widely on the internet and social media. The graffiti recalled the “dark periods of Hungarian history,” Heisler declared.

At a June 21 ceremony, PM Orban called WWII Regent and Hitler ally Miklos Horthy, who signed anti-Jewish laws into effect in the interwar period, an “exceptional statesman.” MAZSIHISZ President Heisler said in a statement that due to the era of anti-Semitism that was associated with Horthy’s name and his responsibility for the deaths of 600,000 Hungarian Jews and tens of thousands of Hungarian soldiers in the Don army, his era “cannot be put as an example for future generations.”

On July 18, during a visit of Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu, PM Orban declared Hungary’s failure to protect its Jewish citizens during WWII was a crime. He again stated the country had “zero tolerance towards anti-Semitism.” During his visit to the Dohany Street synagogue (the largest synagogue in Europe and the second largest in the world) with PM Orban and PM Netanyahu, MAZSIHISZ President Heisler welcomed Orban’s remarks about the country’s war-time

collaboration with the Nazis, but commented there were still “two-faced assessments of the Holocaust.”

On February 14, PM Orban met with Heisler following demonstrations earlier that month in Budapest and elsewhere by extreme-right groups that included neo-Nazis. Heisler called the demonstrations “unacceptable,” and the PM agreed the government should seek a legal solution to stop them. The two men also reportedly discussed possible government assistance to rebuild the Zuglo Synagogue in Budapest, which burned down in 2016.

Speaking at the 150th anniversary of the act on the political and civil emancipation of Jewry on November 21, Under Secretary for Social and Heritage Protection and Special Cultural Investment Projects Csaba Latorcai said Jewish culture was undergoing a renaissance in the country, and the government regarded the more-than-5,000-year-old intellectual and spiritual heritage of Jews as valuable. According to Latorcai, “The survival and strengthening of Europe, and Hungary in it, should be sought in the depths of the faith rooted in the Jewish-Christian traditions and in sincere dialogue.”

On July 5, the Chabad-affiliated EMIH presented a new Hungarian translation of the Talmud to the public. EMIH Rabbi Slomo Koves thanked the government for its “support and cooperation in preserving spiritual heritage.” MHC State Secretary Miklos Soltesz urged a return to religious and cultural traditions, referencing the flourishing Jewish cultural life in the country and enumerating political and financial support for the reconstruction of many synagogues.

In July Minister of Agriculture Sandor Fazekas officiated at the opening in Csongrad County of Europe’s largest kosher slaughterhouse for geese.

In an interview on December 15, Jobbik Party Chairman Gabor Vona stated that he had pushed his party in a more centrist direction, and that it would not return to its far-right origins or to making anti-Semitic remarks. According to Vona, “The kind of anti-Semitic expressions which took place in Jobbik earlier are impossible to imagine. Or if they did, they would naturally draw the most severe sanctions.”

The government again took no action to advance the plan to open a new Holocaust museum and education center, the House of Fates; the project remained pending, although the physical infrastructure of the museum had been completed by the end of 2016. Some Jewish groups and historians criticized the museum as an attempt to obscure the involvement of Hungary and Regent Horthy in the Holocaust and

stress instead the role of Hungarian rescuers. Senior government officials repeatedly issued assurances that the museum would be opened only if Jewish community representatives reached a consensus agreement on the content of museum exhibits.

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

### **Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom**

The number of physical and verbal anti-Muslim incidents increased, while the level of anti-Semitic incidents remained largely unchanged compared with the previous year, according to accounts by the respective communities. Incidents against the two groups included assault, discriminatory treatment, hate speech, and vandalism.

The Brussels Institute, founded by the NGO TEV, registered 16 incidents of anti-Semitic hate speech and two of anti-Semitic vandalism from January to June. The group reported 48 anti-Semitic incidents in 2016, compared with 52 cases in 2015 and 37 in 2014. Incidents in 2016 consisted of one threat, 10 cases of vandalism, including the painting of swastikas and other Nazi symbols, and 37 instances of hate speech, much of it on social media.

HIC, one of two existing Muslim groups, with a membership of 5,000-10,000, reported a continued increase in anti-Muslim public sentiment, although it did not cite statistics. The HIC and Organization of Muslims in Hungary cited fear among community members of physical and verbal attacks and harassment. Zoltan Sulok, head of the Organization of Muslims in Hungary, said his group's members experienced a negative impact from antimigrant and anti-Muslim rhetoric. Many members, he added, did not bother to report incidents because they did not believe doing so would lead to any effective action by authorities. Muslim organizations said individuals often associated Muslims with terrorists, and women could be threatened for wearing headscarves.

According to HIC President Bolek, frequent verbal attacks and comments on social media, such as a Jihad Watch Facebook site, incited hatred and sometimes urged action against the Muslim community. He stated the community reported that Muslim women wearing headscarves were spat upon or verbally harassed daily, but they generally did not report these incidents to the police because the police did not respond sympathetically to such complaints. Bolek called on the churches and other religions to express solidarity with Muslims and act against hate speech.

A poll of approximately 1,000 persons conducted by Zavecz Research in April found 60 percent of respondents considered Muslims to be very dangerous for the future of the country and 22 percent as slightly dangerous. Twenty-seven percent of respondents perceived Jews as very dangerous and 21 percent as slightly dangerous.

In April TEV published its 2016 annual report on domestic anti-Semitism, based on a survey conducted by the Median Opinion and Market Research Institute. The report concluded that approximately one third of citizens harbored anti-Semitic views. The study cited “cognitive” anti-Semitism (receptivity to stereotypes, misconceptions, and conspiracy theories) and “affective” anti-Semitism (emotional rejection of Jews). Between 2015 and 2016, the proportion of the population that researchers categorized as “strongly anti-Semitic” and “moderately anti-Semitic” remained consistent (20 percent and 13 percent, respectively). Eleven percent of respondents said there were no gas chambers in the concentration camps (up from 7 percent in 2006), 18 percent said Jews had “made up” a large part of the history of the Holocaust, and 24 percent said the number of Jewish victims in the Holocaust was much less than generally stated.

On November 29, Jewish leaders, politicians, and security experts discussed anti-Semitism at a TEV-organized conference titled, “Is there a Future for Jews in Europe?” Some speakers described Islamic immigrants as “dangerous” and criticized the Jobbik Party for contributing to anti-Semitism. The speakers included a representative from the American Jewish Committee and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, who praised the government for measures taken to decrease anti-Semitism, raised concerns about Jewish safety and security in Europe, addressed potential links between Islamic migration and anti-Jewish attitudes, and said some nationalist movements had elements of anti-Semitism. He also stated recent efforts to alter and distort history – including attempts to rehabilitate and erect statues to WWII-era anti-Semitic Hungarian leaders and attempts to construct the new Holocaust museum – damaged the country’s international reputation. Two other speakers faulted the government for using anti-Semitic code words in its media campaign against a Jewish businessman. Ministry of Foreign Affairs State Secretary for Security Policy and International Cooperation Istvan Mikola cited the need to “continue to fight against all forms of anti-Semitism and to ensure that everyone was free to practice their religion ...”

In March HIC opened a cultural center and prayer house in one of Budapest's districts and named it after Gyula Germanus, a 20th century professor of oriental studies and an expert on Islam. According to District Deputy Mayor Zoltan Rozgonyi (Fidesz Party), many local residents expressed concerns about the new center. Referring to the European City Charter on safeguarding the rights to safe and violence-free living conditions, he said the municipality was responsible for guaranteeing the safety of the local community. District Mayor Gergely Karacsony (opposition Dialogue Party) called the issue a matter of private real estate in which the local municipality had no say and no obligation to provide an opinion and information. He added administrative measures could only be taken if HIC breached the rules. Speaking to the press, HIC President Bolek called the building "a house of peace" and stressed there would be no place for extremism or violence there. HIC also publicly assured the mayor the HIC intended to abide by the law.

On February 6, approximately 600 members of extreme right organizations, including neo-Nazis and sympathizers of the country's WWII-era, Nazi-collaborationist Arrow Cross Party, rallied in a prominent park in Budapest and other cities around the country for a Day of Honor commemoration of the victims of a failed attempt by German and Hungarian troops to break through Soviet lines besieging Budapest in 1945. At the Budapest rally, the former leader of the militant fascist group Army of Highwaymen, Zsolt Tyirityan, praised a Nazi paramilitary group, shouting, "Appreciation and my respect to the Waffen SS! Glory to the Waffen SS!"

On December 9, Scientologists protested in Budapest in support of religious freedom for Scientology and other faiths and to protest the law on religion that deregistered hundreds of religious groups, including the Church of Scientology. Local press estimated the number of protesters at approximately 100, while the COS said more than 1,500 persons participated. "We have come to a crossroad for religious freedom in Hungary," said Attila Miklovicz, Director of Public Affairs of the COS Budapest. Another Scientologist, Timea Vojtilla, stated, "We want the government to ensure true religious freedom, and not let certain agencies hinder the free exercise of our religion." The demonstration ended with the reading of the Creed of the Church of Scientology.

The Attila Hotel and Restaurant in Budapest's 3rd District unveiled a bust in tribute to WWII Regent Horthy in its courtyard on June 17. The mayor and village council of Perkata approved another bust of Horthy in May but, due to protests, revoked their approval; that bust was instead placed in a private castle in Kaloz.

Numerous extreme ethnic nationalist websites, run by groups such as Kurucinfo, the Army of Highwaymen, Ero es Elszantsag, and HunHir, continued to publish anti-Semitic articles.

On June 1, anti-immigration activists spray painted a circle with a line drawn through a bomb and the medieval Christian Crusader motto “*Deus vult!*” (“God wills it!”) on the pavement in front of the HIC mosque in Debrecen. The group also published a video in which its activists – without showing their faces – said they did not want to live on a continent where “foreign cultures can crush our several-thousand-years-old heritage,” and urged people “to say no to Islamization!” HIC President Bolek called the incidents “outrageous” and “stupid.” He added that HIC was a peaceful community, and just because they were Muslims, they should not be confused with terrorists. The HIC declined to file a police report but the Hajdu-Bihar County police launched a vandalism investigation. Approximately 1,000 Muslims living around Debrecen, most of them foreign students, prayed at the mosque.

A monument commemorating Jewish slave workers killed in the Holocaust was defaced in Balf, west of Budapest, in August. A government spokesman issued a “strong condemnation” of the act. Police investigated but did not identify the perpetrators.

#### **Section IV. U.S. Government Policy and Engagement**

In frequent meetings with cabinet ministers, state secretaries and deputy state secretaries in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, and other government officials, including in the Office of the Prime Minister and MHC, U.S. embassy representatives continued to advocate religious freedom and urge reconsideration of the religion law to amend those provisions that resulted in discrimination against minority religious groups. U.S. officials also voiced concerns regarding the government’s anti-Islamic rhetoric and the COS investigation.

The U.S. Special Envoy for Holocaust Issues visited the country May 17-20 and, accompanied by embassy officials, met with officials at the Office of the Prime Minister and representatives of Jewish communities, the Holocaust Memorial Center, and the House of Terror Museum. The Special Envoy encouraged government officials to intensify their efforts to restitute now-heirless property seized from Jews during the Holocaust and to develop an inventory of the heirless

property that had yet to be restituted. In a press conference, he urged people to avoid using words that acquired anti-Semitic context during the 1930s and 1940s.

Embassy and visiting State Department officials met with representatives of the Jewish community to discuss anti-Semitism and the challenges of promoting tolerance education and historical truth, issues related to its legal status and relationship with the government, restitution issues, and commemoration of the Holocaust.

Embassy officials maintained regular contact with leaders of religious communities, including the four historical groups, as well as Baptists, Muslims, MET, and COS, to understand their issues of concern, encourage religious freedom and tolerance, and discuss the effects of the religion law and anti-Islamic rhetoric.

On September 25, the Charge d’Affaires hosted an interfaith breakfast with leaders of the Catholic, Reformed, Evangelical-Lutheran, and Jewish religious communities, as well as with the leaders of the HIC and the Hungarian Baptist Church to discuss the legal status of religious groups, the financial dependence of their communities on the government, and the importance of interfaith tolerance.

On April 11, in a show of support for the Bet Orim Reform Jewish Congregation, which lost its incorporated church status due to the 2011 law, the Charge d’Affaires attended a seder hosted by that group. On April 19, he participated at the commemoration of the Hungarian victims of the Holocaust at the Pava Street Holocaust Memorial Center.

The Charge d’Affaires attended and delivered remarks at the opening of the Gyula Germanus Islamic Cultural Center on March 31, where he said the purpose of the center was to share good ideas which could serve as an antibody to fear, hatred, and prejudice. On June 14, the HIC awarded the embassy the Gul Baba Award for its continuous support of the Muslim community in the country over the previous 10 years.