



Montenegro

International Religious Freedom Report 2007

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The law provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

There were some instances of societal discrimination directed against representatives of religious minorities.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 5,417 square miles and a population of 630,000. According to the 2003 census, more than 74 percent of the population is Orthodox, 18 percent Muslim, and 3.5 percent Roman Catholic. The remaining population is largely agnostic, atheist, or undeclared.

Several foreign missionaries from various religious groups are present.

Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution and laws provide for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice. The Government at all levels sought to protect this right in full and did not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

There is no state religion. The Constitution mentions the Orthodox Church, Islamic religious community, and Roman Catholic Church by name, stating that these and other religions are separate from the state. There is no legislation to regulate the work of religious communities. Religious studies have not been introduced as a subject in primary or secondary schools.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

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

The "reis" (leader) of the Islamic community noted that Muslim prisoners had difficulty in receiving "halal" food, such as meals without pork. The Government did not allow Muslim women to wear headscarves when being photographed for official purposes.

The Serbian Orthodox Church claimed long delays by the Government in returning its property, which comprises a significant part of the country's territory. The Catholic Church also announced claims on property in several locations. The law on restitution treats religious property as it treats privately owned property; however, in practice the Government did not take any action regarding the claims. In March 2007 the Government adopted amendments to the law and forwarded them to Parliament, but Parliament took no action concerning the amendments.

On June 7, 2006, the 2004 land ownership case between the Government and Catholic priest Don Branko Sbutega was closed due to his death in April 2006.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

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 Abuses and Discrimination

There were some instances of societal discrimination against representatives of religious minorities; however, religion and ethnicity are intertwined closely throughout the country, and it was difficult to identify discriminatory acts as primarily religious or primarily ethnic in origin.

Tensions continued between the Serbian and Montenegrin Orthodox Churches. The two groups continued to contend for adherents and make conflicting property claims, but the contention was not marked by significant violence. On April 18, 2007, police prevented several hundred members of the noncanonical Montenegrin Orthodox Church (MOC) from holding a service in the Serbian Orthodox monastery in Cetinje. The MOC, registered as a nongovernmental organization, maintained that all Serbian Orthodox Church (SOC) religious facilities belong to the MOC, claiming that the SOC forcibly occupied them after the country united with Serbia in 1918. The MOC announced that it would take over all Orthodox facilities, with or without the help of the state. The SOC replied that it was the only legitimate owner of the Orthodox monasteries and churches. The Government recognizes the existence of both groups, and President Filip Vujanovic announced that the state would guarantee the property rights of all legal owners, including those of the SOC.

There were reports that disagreements between ethnic Albanian Muslims and Catholics became more pronounced after the police operation "Eagle's Flight," in which 15 ethnic Albanian Catholics were arrested in September 2006 on charges of terrorism. Their trial began on May 14, 2007, and was ongoing at the end of the period covered by this report. There were reports that underlying the terrorism plots was a struggle for political leadership between Catholic and Muslim Albanians in northern Albania.

Incidents occurred in Ulcinj and Podgorica in which so-called Wahhabis attacked imams in mid-2006. In Ulcinj Wahhabis attacked imam Resulbegovic Safet and his father four times. The First Instance Court of Ulcinj levied fines against the perpetrators in all four cases. In Podgorica Admir Pepic verbally threatened the "reis" Rifat Fejzic. Police reported that criminal charges were brought against Pepic.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights and continued to promote ethnic and religious tolerance throughout the country. U.S. embassy officials met regularly with leaders of religious and ethnic minorities, as well as with representatives of the Serbian Orthodox Church, to promote respect for religious freedom and human rights.

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