
GOVERNMENT RESTRICTIONS ON RELIGION RISING IN EUROPE □ **PEW RESEARCH CENTRE STUDY**

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17.07.2019

EuroNews (16 July 2019)

Government restrictions on religion have increased worldwide over the past decade but particularly in Europe, a new study by the Pew Research centre has found.

The Washington-based think-tank surveyed 198 countries for its latest annual report into religious restrictions and found that over the decade between 2007-2017, laws, policies and actions by state officials that restrict religious beliefs and practices have increased "markedly".

It highlighted that although religious restrictions remain higher in the Middle East-North Africa region, the biggest increases over the last decade have been in Europe and in sub-Saharan Africa.

Governmental interference

It flagged, for instance, the growing number of European governments placing limits on Muslim women's dress. In 2007, there were five countries reported to have such restrictions in Europe, by 2017, that number had quadrupled to 20.

France implemented a ban on full-face coverings in 2011, while in Bosnia-Herzegovina, employees of judicial institutions are prohibited from wearing "religious insignia" at work, including headscarves.

The number of European governments interfering in worship or other religious practices has also risen. The report noted in Germany and Slovenia, Muslim and Jewish groups protested against authorities describing child circumcision for nonmedical reasons as assault or criminal offence.

Meanwhile, a new law in Hungary implemented in 2012 changed the registration process for religious groups and deregistered more than 350 groups, "adversely affecting their finances and the ability to offer charitable social services," the report said.

Pew also flagged Spain as having experienced the largest increases in its score for government limits on religious activity. Catalonia introduced bans on the burqa and niqab, while religious groups such as Latter-day Saints and Jehovah's Witnesses have faced restrictions on public preaching and proselytising.

Violence

Social hostilities related to religious norms also rose dramatically in Europe. Four countries in 2007 reported having individuals or groups who used violence or the threat of violence to try and force others to accept their own religious practices and beliefs.

A decade later, there were 15 countries including the United Kingdom □ where a Sunni Muslim man killed an Ahmadi Muslim shopkeeper because he had "disrespected the Prophet Muhammad".

Ukraine was also included in this list □ in 2015, four Jehovah's Witnesses were beaten and held at gunpoint in the country until they declared Orthodox Christianity as the only true religion.

Germany was found to have the highest score measuring violence related to religious norms in 2017.

Sociologist Thomas Schirrmacher estimated in a US government report, cited in Pew's study, that thousands of conversions to Christianity in Germany were linked to the refugee crisis.

Religious groups reportedly used fear of deportation to promote conversions offering free lunch and transportation costs as incentives, according to the report.

Assaults on individuals have also increased with 25 European countries reporting such hostilities in 2017, compared to just six a decade earlier.

Kaynak/Source: