

HUNGARY 2016 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. 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 churches. According to law, the incorporation of religious groups, which provides for financial benefits and government support, requires the approval of two-thirds of parliament. Several dozen previously incorporated churches continued to try to regain their legal status, lost when a law on religion was enacted in 2011, despite Constitutional Court rulings, including one in June, holding certain provisions of the law unconstitutional. In a months-long government media campaign in support of a government-initiated referendum on October 2 to disallow the compulsory settlement of refugees, most of whom were Muslim, in the country without consent of parliament, government officials at the highest levels, including the prime minister and cabinet ministers, repeatedly used antimigrant, anti-Islamic rhetoric. Prime Minister Viktor Orbán and other senior officials spoke of the importance of defending the “Christian values of Europe” against the flow of Muslim migrants, who they said could not integrate into European society. The prime minister described the arrival of asylum seekers in Europe as “a poison” and said “every single migrant poses a public security and terror risk.” An overwhelming majority of voters supported the government’s position, but the low participation rate rendered the referendum invalid. On November 8, parliament narrowly failed to enact a constitutional amendment to block the European Union (EU) quota of refugees. In October the government formed a new state secretariat for the defense of Christian communities around the world. Islamic organizations reported incidents of discrimination by government officials and politicians. The government awarded a state honor to Zsolt Bayer, an openly anti-Semitic journalist and founding member of the governing Fidesz Party.

There were incidents of assault, discrimination, and hate speech against Muslims and Jews, including Holocaust denial, and 542 recorded incidents of vandalism of religious properties. Jewish groups reported the level of anti-Semitic incidents remained approximately the same as the previous year, but Muslim groups reported an increase in attacks on Muslims, which they attributed largely to the government’s anti-Muslim rhetoric. According to the Hungarian Islamic Community (HIC), there were four physical incidents and three verbal insults

against women wearing headscarves and approximately 12 cases of discrimination. Muslim leaders said victims were often afraid to report incidents to the police. A survey conducted in March found a majority of respondents expressed negative opinions about Islam. A 2015 survey concluded 35 percent of citizens held anti-Semitic views, a slight increase over the previous year.

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 for religious freedom and to urge the government to reconsider the 2011 religion law and amend those provisions which resulted in restrictions and discrimination against certain minority religious groups. U.S. officials also expressed concern about anti-Islamic rhetoric by government officials, and the Ambassador strongly and repeatedly criticized the state's issuance of an award to Zsolt Bayer. U.S. officials met with various religious groups to discuss rising anti-Semitism and anti-Muslim sentiment. The visiting Under Secretary of State for Civilian Security, Democracy, and Human Rights met with representatives of the Muslim, Catholic, Reformed, and Jewish communities to discuss the government's antimigrant messaging campaign and the climate of religious freedom. The Ambassador hosted meetings with religious leaders to discuss religious freedom. In public speeches, she spoke out in support of the Muslim community, against anti-Islamic sentiment, and on the need for all to speak out against anti-Semitic hate speech.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 9.9 million (July 2016 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, less than 1 percent as Jewish, 23 percent indicated no religious affiliation, and 2 percent indicated they were atheists. Religious groups together constituting less than 5 percent of the population include Greek Orthodox, the Faith Congregation (a Pentecostal group), 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 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 people) 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, a

historian of religions, a 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 appeal.

A 2011 law on religion automatically deregistered more than 300 religious groups and organizations which had previously had incorporated church status. Those organizations were required to reapply if they wished to regain incorporated church status; their applications were 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 number of individual groups, bringing the total number on the registered list of incorporated churches to 32 individual religious groups. Including dioceses and monastic orders, 202 entities are associated with the 32 incorporated churches.

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 for the group's legal representative and the term of his or her appointment, the founding documents of the group, and the 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. Unregistered groups are allowed to function and to worship but lack legal status and the rights and privileges granted exclusively to registered religious communities.

Every registered 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.

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.

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 people 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.

Incorporated churches and religious organizations receive a per capita subsidy, based on the number of students enrolled, from the state for employee wages at their schools, but only incorporated churches automatically receive a supplementary subsidy for 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 whether to grant it on a case-by-case basis.

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, which then receives additional matching funds from the government. 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 as 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, which requires confirmation by a two-thirds parliamentary majority. 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, but the decision on its dissolution depends solely on the Budapest Metropolitan Court.

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 workplace 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 associations 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 and a generic ethics course taught by public school teachers. Churches 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. Religious communities, school teachers, the affected parents, or the operator of the school can 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 standards conform to those of government-run schools.

The constitution prohibits speech that violates the dignity of any religious community. On October 11, parliament amended the law to include 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 from freely exercising his or her religion through violence or threats. 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 (ICCPR).

Government Practices

There were numerous reports of perceived anti-Muslim rhetoric by government officials and politicians, including at the highest levels, voiced in connection with the European refugee crisis, as well as government endorsement of an individual who engaged in anti-Semitic rhetoric. The government initiated a national referendum (held on October 2) on whether the EU should be able to establish quotas for the settlement of refugees, most of whom were Muslim, in the country without the approval of parliament. In the months preceding the referendum, the government ran a media and political campaign in which governing officials repeatedly stated that European and Christian values needed to be protected from the threat posed by Islam. On July 26, Prime Minister Orban described the arrival of asylum seekers in Europe as “a poison” and said his country did not want or need “a single migrant,” adding that “every single migrant poses a public security and terror risk.” An official government booklet mailed to all 4.1 million households in the country stated “illegal immigration increases the threat of terror. We reject forced settlement, because it would increase the danger of terror. The immigrants largely come from places where European states are engaged in military campaigns. This significantly increases safety risks.” The overwhelming majority of participants voted no to the EU quotas, but a low participation rate rendered the referendum results invalid. On November 8, parliament narrowly failed to enact a constitutional amendment to block the EU quota of refugees. Law enforcement and judiciary agencies continued to prosecute anti-Semitic incidents,

including assault and hate speech, but Muslim groups cited a fear among community members of reporting assaults and other incidents to authorities. Parliament failed to amend the provisions of the religion law the Constitutional Court had previously found unconstitutional and those the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) had previously declared in violation of the European Convention of Human Rights. The ECHR awarded monetary compensation to seven religious groups with outstanding claims against the government for nonpecuniary damages, while the decision on the claim of the Hungarian Evangelical Fellowship (MET) remained pending. Unincorporated religious organizations had limited access to public funding and to religious activities in public institutions. Some religious groups questioned the transparency of income tax donations for incorporated churches. Numerous groups and individuals criticized the government's decision to award a state decoration to journalist and political activist Zsolt Bayer, whom critics denounced for his defamatory writings about Jews and other groups.

During the first seven months of the year, courts convicted 23 individuals of violence against members of religious, ethnic, racial, or other societal groups. Details on the incidents and their motivation were unavailable. As of August 1, there were no final court convictions for incitement of religious hatred.

MAZSIHISZ registered one incident of public expression of anti-Semitism by political party representatives and national or local government officials during the first six months of the year and the Action and Protection Foundation (TEV), an NGO monitoring and combating anti-Semitism in the country, reported two such cases. All the reported cases were connected to Jobbik Party members.

MAZSIHISZ reported that on January 11, Elod Novak (Jobbik Vice President and Member of Parliament) reacted to the international success of the domestic Holocaust movie production, the *Son of Saul*, on Facebook by criticizing the "Holocaust industry" and asking why more "national" topics were not turned into movies. On June 6, the president of Jobbik called on Novak to resign from his parliamentary seat, which he did effective August 31. Novak remained a member of Jobbik.

On July 31, the high commissioner of the national police ordered police protection of churches following the July 26 killing of a Catholic priest in France reportedly carried out in the name of ISIS. After inquiry into affected religious groups, on August 6, the Ministry of Interior informed the public of the increased police

patrols around all religious buildings during masses and other religious services. The special protection measures remained in force at the end of the year.

On September 20, Zoltan Bolek, President of the HIC, sent a private letter to Prime Minister Orbán, asking for protection against what he called the growing number of physical and verbal attacks and threats against Muslims. In the letter, Bolek said “the conflicting and irresponsible statements of many politicians and journalists” was the cause of public hatred against Muslims in the country. At year’s end, the prime minister had not responded to Bolek’s letter. Also in September *The Bangkok Post* newspaper quoted Bolek as saying, “...state media keeps putting out stories about anything a Muslim has done or is alleged to have done somewhere.”

Parliament again failed to amend those provisions of the religion law that the Constitutional Court had previously found unconstitutional, and the contested provisions remained in effect at the end of the year. On June 28, the ECHR awarded monetary damages to seven deregistered churches (four Buddhist groups, two Neopagan groups, and one Taoist group) which had been plaintiffs in a 2014 case in which the ECHR had ruled that parts of the religion law violated the plaintiffs’ freedom of association with respect to the freedom of religion. These groups had gone back to the ECHR in 2015 when they had been unable to reach a satisfactory settlement with the government. The government paid the ECHR-ordered total of 540,000 euros (\$569,000) to the seven plaintiffs before the September 28 deadline. Each of the plaintiffs received amounts ranging between 40,000 and 140,000 euros (\$42,100 to \$147,000). In addition, the ECHR awarded two Jewish groups, plaintiffs in a case filed in 2012, 800 euros (\$840) and instructed the two groups to split the award between them. The nine groups remained unincorporated.

The government and MET failed to reach a final settlement after the ECHR gave them another six months to reach an agreement. On June 16, the MET submitted its compensation claim of 450 million forints (\$1.53 million) to the government for its losses in 2015 of the unpaid 1 percent personal income tax allocation for incorporated churches, the supplementary state subsidies for its social welfare and educational institutions, and the wage supplement for its staff working in its institutes. The parties failed to reach an agreement by the December 28 deadline. MET also continued its legal effort to gain access to financial subsidies for 2015 and 2016 at the Budapest Metropolitan Public Administration and Labor Court and

at the Curia and to regain its lost incorporated church status at the Constitutional Court. Six cases involving MET were pending at year's end.

On June 29, in a case involving the Brunstad Christian Church (Keresztesy Testveri Gyulekezet), the Constitutional Court repeated its July 2015 ruling (which had applied only to the case of the Budapest Autonomous Congregation) that the provision in the law requiring the length of operation (either 20 years domestically or 100 years internationally) of religious groups applying for incorporated status violated the European Convention on Human Rights. This Constitutional Court ruling applied only to the Brunstad Christian Church. Based on the Constitutional Court ruling, the Budapest Metropolitan Public Administration and Labor Court ordered the MHC to reconsider the Brunstad Christian Church's application for incorporated church status, which it had previously rejected in 2014. By year's end, the MHC had not reconsidered the Church's application. At the end of the year, four other constitutional compliance cases involving the religion law were pending at the Constitutional Court.

Since 2013, out of the total of 29 applications for incorporated church status, the MHC rejected 15 cases and found 14 applicant groups eligible for incorporation and had moved their applications forward for parliamentary action. Despite the 60-day legal deadline for action on an MHC referral, parliament had not voted on any of the 14 applications. The MHC reported no religious groups submitted new applications for incorporated church status during the year.

On March 30, the Curia ruled that the Budapest Autonomous Congregation (BAC) could not gain automatic inclusion in the list of incorporated churches. The BAC, which had been seeking recognition as an incorporated church since losing its church status in 2011, had won favorable decisions in the Constitutional Court and the Budapest Metropolitan Public Administration and Labor Court, which the MHC had appealed to the Curia in 2014. According to the Curia's ruling, the religious organization needed to complete the registration process for incorporated church status and obtain parliamentary approval of that status before it could be listed in the official state registry of incorporated churches. Two other cases filed by religious groups remained pending at the Curia at the end of the year. The Curia did not name the groups.

During the year, courts closed out the cases of 13 deregistered churches, which had no remaining assets for the government to liquidate. Seven such cases remained pending at the end of the year.

Many smaller congregations, mostly Christian but also Jewish and Buddhist, continued to struggle to survive following their deregistration and loss of state funding as a result of the 2011 religion law. “We are nearly dying,” said Mihaly Ungvari, a member of Church of God United Pentecostal, which had about 2,000 members. Ungvari stated the head of the Church had to take a second job and “many members had left for established churches.” A U.S. academic suggested the government was waging a war of attrition on religious groups through the religion law and said the government would win because it was not honoring the rule of law.

News website *Politico* reported in November that government spokesman Zoltan Kovacs stated the previous system of church subsidies existing prior to the 2011 religion law had been abused and needed to be “reined in.” He said, “It’s not about curtailing freedom of religion or curtailing freedom of worship in any way.” *Politico* cited Fidesz Member of Parliament Gergely Gulyas as blaming the opposition for failing to pass proposed amendments to the religion law in 2015, which would have created a three-tier system for religious groups. According to *Politico*, Gulyas said the government fully intended to amend the law to bring it in line with the decisions of the ECHR and the Constitutional Court.

The government continued to provide approximately 90 percent of its total financial support 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 by which the media also referred to these groups. The government did not specify how much it provided to each group.

The government provided 5.6 billion forints (\$19.1 million) supplemental funding in fiscal year 2015 to match the 4.3 billion forints (\$14.6 million) allocated by taxpayers as 1 percent of personal income tax to the 31 incorporated churches that requested listing on tax declaration forms. On the 2015 personal income tax return forms, 50 formerly recognized churches that became religious organizations received the allowed 1 percent tax contribution for their work as NGOs, with total contributions reaching 16.7 million forints (\$56,900). During 2016, none of the 59 formerly recognized churches that were not yet registered as religious organizations succeeded in completing the necessary administrative court process for registration. These churches thus remained ineligible to receive the 1 percent tax donation for churches, which had a combined worth of 85 million forints

(\$289,000) for those churches in 2011 and 2012, the last two years they were eligible to receive such donations. The Budapest Municipal Court did not provide any information as to why none of the 59 formerly recognized churches were able to complete the registration process or how long the registration applications had been pending.

During the year, the government provided 46.2 billion forints (\$157 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. The government also provided a total of 121.7 million forints (\$414,000) to religious organizations for operational costs of religious activities. The 46.2 billion forints in government support for incorporated churches included two billion forints (\$6.8 million) in grants to a dozen churches for renovating their buildings and organizing community programs. Of the two billion forints, MAZSIHISZ received 31.2 million forints (\$106,000); the Orthodox Jewish community 9.5 million forints (\$32,300); and the Unified Hungarian Jewish Congregation (EMIH) nine million forints (\$30,700) for the renovation of their cemeteries and synagogues. In addition to the two billion forints, and as part of its 46.2 billion forint grant, the government gave the Orthodox Jewish community 603 million forints (\$2.05 million) for schools, elderly homes, and synagogues.

On December 20, as a result of an unexpected budget surplus, the government awarded an additional one-time payment of 121 billion forints (\$412 million) to 43 incorporated churches and religious organizations for various operational costs, which they received by the end of the year. The payments ranged from 1 million to 2.2 billion forints (\$3,400 to \$7.5 million), and were dispersed throughout various local units of the major denominations, as well as other religious organizations.

EMIH continued to criticize the system of an additional 1 percent in income tax allocations for incorporated churches on the basis of the lack of transparency and inability to verify the counting of individual taxpayers' donation slips. On November 4, EMIH Rabbi Slomo Koves sent a letter to the minister of national economy in which he requested that individuals be able to voluntarily share their personal information with the incorporated church to which they allocated their tax donation.

The MHC continued to provide supplementary operational funding to three religious organizations maintaining schools: the MET, the Dzsaj Bhim Buddhist community, and the Christian Family Church Religious Association. During the year, the three groups received a total of 569 million forints (\$1.94 million). The MHC reported that no other religious associations requested a supplementary subsidy during the year.

On November 23, upon the proposal of Mayor Laszlo Toroczkai (vice president of the Jobbik Party), the Council of Asotthalom, a village in Csongrad County, adopted a decree that banned public Muslim calls to prayer on the basis that they “disturbed public peace and generated fear” and banned wearing clothes that covered the full body (*burqa*, *niqab*, chador, and “burkini”). The HIC criticized the decree and appealed to the Constitutional Court to rescind it. On December 14, the Csongrad County government office declared the Asotthalom Council decree unlawful. On December 16, the ombudsman filed a petition with the Constitutional Court seeking the annulment of the decree on the basis that it violated freedom of religion and freedom of expression. The petition remained pending. Jobbik Party leader Gabor Vona publicly criticized the decree. The decree remained in effect at the end of the year.

On December 24, Jobbik Party leader Vona and party Spokesperson Adam Mirkoczy sent Hanukkah greetings to the EMIH, in which they wished the rabbi and his community “blessed, peaceful, and happy holidays.” On December 27, leading EMIH Rabbi Slomo Koves published a long response letter highlighting previous anti-Semitic statements made by Vona and his fellow party members and urged them to make such gestures in the same forums where they had previously spread hatred. On December 28, Vona responded in a Facebook post that he was surprised by Koves’ letter, which Vona said suggested Koves would have preferred not to receive a good wishes message from Jobbik. Vona said that in the previous year Jobbik had not made any anti-Semitic remarks and that “the party has emerged from adolescence... into responsible and constructive adulthood.” On the same day, the local chapter of Jobbik in the town of Vecses distanced itself from Vona’s Hanukkah greeting in another Facebook post. Subsequently, Vona said he had initiated ethical proceedings against the chapter’s leadership for what he said was a “sacrilegious” comment “completely contrary to Jobbik’s position.” Vona also stated that the ethical proceedings could have only one outcome, as “those who make such comments have to leave the party.”

The HIC reported several municipalities rejected their repeated requests to buy land for opening a new cemetery and stated they believed political reasons to be behind the refusal. According to HIC President Bolek, the existing Muslim cemetery in Budapest was expected to reach capacity by the end of the year and the community would have no place left to bury their dead.

Of elementary and secondary schools, 14.2 percent were operated by incorporated churches and 0.1 percent by religious organizations in the 2015-2016 school year. Of preschools (ages 3-7), 6.9 percent were operated by incorporated churches and 0.1 by religious organizations. Approximately 204,000 students studied at preschools and elementary and secondary schools operated by registered religious communities (incorporated churches and religious organizations), compared to 200,000 in 2014.

On February 24, the government initiated a national referendum on the following question: “Do you agree that the European Union should have the power to impose the compulsory settlement of non-Hungarian citizens in Hungary without the consent of the parliament of Hungary?” Referring to the referendum in an interview with the news website *Business Insider* in February, Prime Minister Orban said, “If somebody takes masses of nonregistered immigrants from the Middle East into a country, this also means importing terrorism, criminalism [sic], anti-Semitism, and homophobia.” Preceding the October 2 referendum, the government conducted an intensive public campaign promoting a “no” response to the referendum via billboards and posters spread around the country featuring slogans such as “Forced settlement endangers our culture and traditions.” On the day of the referendum, the Associated Press cited Imam Tayseer Saleh of the Darussalam Mosque in Budapest as commenting, “We could say that this (referendum) campaign is against the migrants but in reality it is covertly against Islam, that’s how most people understood it.” Approximately 98 percent of participants voted no, but because the participation rate fell short of the minimum threshold of 50 percent of eligible voters required by law, the referendum was invalid.

Following the referendum, Prime Minister Orban led a ruling party effort to amend the constitution via a parliamentary vote to block the refugee quotas. On November 8, parliament fell just short of the two-thirds majority vote required to enact the amendment.

In connection with the migration crisis in Europe, the prime minister and other senior government officials stated the importance of defending the “Christian values of Europe” against the flow of Muslim migrants. In a national day speech on March 15, Prime Minister Orban said “... the masses of people coming from other civilizations pose a threat to our way of life...our Christian traditions.” Citing a need to oppose the immigration policies of the European Union, Orban added that “We shall not import ... crime, terrorism, homophobia, and synagogue-burning anti-Semitism. There shall be no urban districts beyond the reach of the law, there shall be no ... immigrant riots here, and there shall be no gangs hunting down our women and daughters.” In a speech in March the prime minister said about mass migration, “It is masquerading as a humanitarian cause, but its true nature is the occupation of territory.” On October 20, the German newspaper *Passauer Neue Presse* published an interview with Prime Minister Orban in which he said, “The civilization that stems from Christianity and the civilization that stems from Islam are not compatible. They cannot mingle, but can only exist side by side. ... Our perceptions of the world are so different that they lead to parallel worlds. This is not a political issue, but the reality of life.”

On February 9, Deputy Prime Minister Zsolt Semjen said at a town hall meeting in Salgotarjan prior to local elections, “Hungarians had protected Christian Europe” from Islamic conquest “with their own bodies for 150 years,” so Hungarians possessed a “historic right to keep our common sense” regarding migration.

On April 14, Janos Lazar, Minister of the Office of the Prime Minister, stated at a press conference, “Refugees entering Europe now are strongly anti-Semitic,” when describing his government’s decision to block the vast majority of asylum seekers from Syria and Iraq from entering the country.

On August 8, Bence Retvari, State Secretary of the Ministry of Human Capacities and Vice President of the governing coalition partner Christian Democratic Party (KDNP), stated in a newspaper interview, “In the Muslim narrative, migration is nothing else but the Islamization of Europe. Therefore the main question now is who integrates whom: whether those arriving will change the customs and way of life of the European people.”

On August 20, Gyorgy Schopflin, Fidesz Member of the European Parliament, said in an exchange on Twitter with human rights activists that a “pig’s head would deter more effectively” Muslim asylum seekers at the nation’s border.

Muslim groups and human rights organizations criticized the government for what they said was spreading anti-Muslim sentiment by portraying asylum seekers and migrants, most of whom were Muslim, as dangerous for Europe's future and linking migration to terrorism.

On August 18, Zsolt Bayer received a state honor, the Knight's Cross of the Order of Merit, from Minister of the Office of the Prime Minister Janos Lazar. Bayer received the award in part for his "exemplary work as a journalist." Bayer worked as a columnist for the Hungarian daily *Magyar Hirlap* and an anchor for Echo TV, and was a founding member of the Fidesz Party. On April 4, the Israeli Ambassador sent a letter to the chief editor of *Magyar Hirlap* stating that a series of Bayer's articles "openly advocate anti-Semitic sentiments and incite against the Jewish People and the State of Israel." The Ambassador stated that Bayer's articles "not only relativize the Shoah... but also make general and false accusations against the Hungarian Jews, as if they are to be blamed for the Hungarian tragedies." On May 17, the Media Council, the state body responsible for regulating the media, imposed a fine on *Magyar Hirlap* and its website in connection with a Bayer article from 2015, which the council found promoted hatred and exclusion. According to the council, Bayer "described the community of migrants as a homogenous group... calling every member of this community above the age of 14 potential murderers." More than 100 former state award recipients, including MAZSIHISZ President Andras Heisler, returned their decorations in protest, many citing Bayer's anti-Semitic writings and other work inciting hatred against various groups. On August 25, Minister Lazar rejected calls to withdraw Bayer's award and stated that certain aspects of his work, especially his coverage of those who were imprisoned and perished in Soviet gulags, merited state recognition.

Senior government officials continued to state their concerns about a "Jewish Hungarian American businessman." The officials reported his activism to be supporting the flow of migrants by financing NGOs assisting migrants, and said his intention was to weaken the government's power by gaining political influence via the human rights NGOs he had been supporting financially. On May 20, Prime Minister Orban stated in a radio interview that the Hungarian opposition was less powerful than the political influence of organizations funded by this individual. On June 6 in parliament, Orban stated that "certain international forces were working to bring in as many migrants as possible into the EU, including Hungary." He said anyone who financed this inflow was acting against the country's national

interests. Jewish organizations stated the government's political attacks against this individual were disguised anti-Semitism.

On June 24, Sandor Szakaly – Director of the government history research foundation, Veritas Institute – gave an interview in which he described the 1920 Numerus Clausus law as an act of limitation, instead of deprivation, of rights of the Jewish people, while ensuring opportunities for others. Szakaly argued that the law, which limited the number of students who could study at a university, did not use the term Jew, but instead prescribed that the representation of any race or nationality at universities should not exceed that group's overall ratio in the country. Szakaly also denied that the Numerus Clausus had connections to Auschwitz and said neither the vast majority of Jews, nor of Hungarians knew what would happen to those deported. On June 27, MAZSIHISZ issued a public condemnation of Szakaly's statement on the Numerus Clausus law and urged the government to clarify its position on the matter. On June 29, Fidesz Party Vice President Gergely Gulyas, referring to Szakaly's statement, declared that laws passed on racial grounds were irreconcilable with the rule of law. At a June 29 meeting, Deputy Minister at the Office of the Prime Minister Nandor Csepreghy, speaking on behalf of his minister, disassociated the government from Szakaly's June 24 statements.

On March 30, the Debrecen Court of Appeals upheld the conviction of Tibor Agoston, Jobbik representative on the Debrecen city council, for violating the law banning public denial of the crimes committed by National Socialist or Communist regimes. The court ruling imposed a fine of 750,000 forints (\$2,600) on Agoston for referring to the Holocaust as a "Holoscam" at a gathering in 2014.

On May 23, the Commissioner for Fundamental Rights (ombudsman) released a report within the framework of the National Preventive Mechanism of the Optional Protocol to the UN Convention against Torture (OPCAT) on an unannounced site inspection in the Somogy County Prison in Kaposvar. The report criticized the practice of ordering prisoners to undress in groups in the prison's chapel in order to conduct full body searches, including of the genitals. The report concluded this practice was in violation of the constitutionally provided right to religious freedom because the chapel was a site for religious practice and should be protected from desecration and "scandalous behavior."

On September 29, the HIC filed a police report for incitement and violence against a community in connection with flyers and pamphlets distributed in the city of

Veszprem. According to the HIC, flyers titled “Notes on Islam” and a pamphlet titled “The Whole World is Asking Why the Muslim-Migrant Terrorists are so Eager to Commit Suicide?” generated fear within the Muslim community. The flyer stated “Jihad is the inalienable part of Islam... every tool is acceptable for Jihad: including ... mass murder.” The flyer was signed by the Veszprem chapter of the Christian Democratic People’s Party and the Archbishop of Veszprem. On October 7, the Veszprem Police Headquarters rejected the HIC complaint because it said no crime had been committed.

In October the government formed a new deputy state secretariat in the MHC with responsibility for monitoring and combating persecution of Christians worldwide, to raise broad public awareness of the issue, and to maintain contact with subject matter experts and think tanks. The government pledged 3 million Euros (\$3.2 million) in humanitarian assistance to help Christians facing violence and oppression around the world.

The government’s plan to establish a new Holocaust museum, the House of Fates, remained pending, and no new action was taken during the year. In July the Office of the Prime Minister reiterated the need for support from the Jewish community and Holocaust survivors, and stated that without that support the museum would not be built. By year’s end, the government had spent 7.5 billion forints (\$25.6 million) on the project and completed the physical infrastructure of the museum.

A total of 18,706 schoolchildren visited the Hungarian Holocaust Memorial Center (HDKE), compared with 16,934 the previous year. The government reimbursed the travel expenses of school groups arriving by train to visit the center.

The Jewish Community Roundtable Educational Expert Group (ZSKK) – an ad hoc alliance of 18 Jewish organizations – reported it concluded the first phase of its collaboration with the government aimed at adjusting educational materials to contain more information about Israel and to more prominently feature the role of Jews in the country’s history and culture. According to the ZSKK, the government incorporated approximately 70 percent of its recommendations for the fifth and ninth grade textbooks, and discussions on the remaining grades continued.

On July 14, the eight Fidesz members (including the mayor) and four opposition members of the city council of Vac voted to change the name of a street named after Balint Homan. Only the local Jobbik representative rejected the initiative. Homan was minister of religion and education between 1932 and 1942, a member

of parliament during the Nazi Arrow Cross party's rule in 1944, a cosponsor of legislation that stripped Hungarian Jews of their citizenship rights, and an advocate for the deportation of Hungarian Jews in 1944.

The government hosted three intergovernmental roundtable discussions with representatives of the Jewish community during which the community members discussed current issues of importance with relevant cabinet members and other senior government officials. At the roundtable discussions, Minister of the Office of the Prime Minister Lazar discussed renovation of Jewish cemeteries, cultural programs, the national education curriculum, and the archives of personal documentation connected to restitution for the Holocaust.

On March 30, Minister of Human Capacities Zoltan Balog gave remarks at a conference marking the centenary of the nation's official recognition of Islam. Balog stated at the conference, " we are at war, but not with Islam as a religion, a culture or community; we are at war with those who organize forces from the community of Islam by stealth and want to keep them fearful and change them forever and occupy Europe in the name of Islam."

On June 7 and 8, the MHC and the national commission for UNESCO held the third interreligious dialogue conference "Common Reflection on our Future – Conference on the Unity of Man and the Environment" in the Benedictine Abbey of Tihany. At the conference, Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, and Society for Krishna Consciousness representatives participated in panel discussions aimed at fostering interfaith dialogue on various societal challenges.

On April 15, Minister of Human Capacities Balog gave remarks in the Kozma street Jewish cemetery at an ecumenical burial service for the remains of people killed in 1944. The minister said in his speech, "the occupying forces [Nazi Germany] and Hungarian state organs jointly destroyed ... innocent Jewish lives." Representatives of the Catholic and Lutheran Churches also gave remarks at the burial ceremony. On May 21, at a conference of B'nai B'rith in Budapest, State Secretary of the Office of the Prime Minister and International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) Chair Szabolcs Takacs described the nation's involvement in the Holocaust as an act of treason and reiterated that manifestations of anti-Semitism would not be tolerated.

On March 8, the government completed its year-long chairmanship of the IHRA. Outgoing IHRA Chair Takacs cited the increase of IHRA's visibility during the

year and the group's success in exempting Holocaust archives from the EU's new data protection regulation, thereby making them more accessible.

The government provided 400 million forints (\$1.36 million) for the MTK sport club to sponsor Hungary's successful bid to host the 2019 European Maccabi Games, the largest European competition of Jewish athletes.

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 to the previous year, according to the accounts of the respective communities. Muslim leaders attributed the increase in incidents against them largely to government rhetoric. Incidents against the two groups included assault, discriminatory treatment, hate speech, and vandalism. Jewish community representatives and other civil society groups heavily criticized the erection of a bust honoring wartime member of parliament Gyorgy Donath in Budapest; the group responsible removed the statue from its site two days later in response to the negative public reaction.

MAZSIHISZ registered 19 incidents of anti-Semitism (one killing, seven threats of violence, five incidents of hate speech, four political statements of anti-Semitism, and two incidents of vandalism), during the first six months of the year. It reported 46 anti-Semitic incidents for all of 2015. TEV registered 48 acts of anti-Semitism during the year, but no cases of physical assault, compared to 52 anti-Semitic incidents in 2015, including 2 cases of physical abuse.

While they did not keep statistics, the Muslim community reported a continued increase in anti-Muslim public sentiment. Muslim leaders said public hostility toward the community stemmed largely from the anti-Muslim rhetoric of senior government officials, including a state-sponsored antimigrant campaign, and some media outlets.

According to the HIC, individuals physically attacked four women wearing headscarves in separate incidents. The HIC president reported that perpetrators pulled on the headscarves but did not injure the women. In one case, a man threatened and pulled the hair and the clothes of a Muslim woman wearing a headscarf at a gasoline station in Orbottyán on September 27. The woman reported the incident to the police. Police characterized the incident as

“rowdyism” and on October 12, said they had initiated a procedure for an “administrative offense,” which remained pending at year’s end.

Muslim community leaders reported Muslim women wearing headscarves were spat upon or verbally harassed daily, but they generally did not report these incidents to the police because the latter did not respond sympathetically to such complaints. *The Bangkok Post* newspaper in September quoted Muslim converts as saying they were verbally harassed “all the time.” One reported she was “knocked off a bicycle by a driver who said, ‘Why don’t you go back to the desert!’” According to the article, groups representing the Muslim community said discrimination and expressions of racial hatred were on the rise. HIC President Bolek said, “The coded message is that migrants ... Muslims are terrorists or criminals.”

On October 9, staff members in Budapest’s Szechenyi Baths asked two female swimmers wearing “burkinis” to change their clothes to other swimsuits after a visitor complained to the staff. The staff members cited house rules prohibiting swimsuits from reaching below the knee or above the shoulder, which they said was for health reasons, and offered alternative swimsuits for rental on site. Reportedly, the two women chose to leave the site rather than change their clothing.

The TEV continued to provide legal counseling and representation for victims of anti-Semitic incidents. The TEV filed 13 new complaints of anti-Semitic incidents, 11 for Holocaust denial and two for incitement of hatred against a community. Of the 13 cases, authorities rejected one, terminated two after finding there was no crime committed, and temporarily suspended four. Six cases remained pending with investigators. During the year, the courts issued rulings in four Holocaust denial cases initiated by the TEV in previous years.

MAZSIHISZ reported the killing of an Israeli tourist on April 22 in Tiszakecske. Police investigating the man’s disappearance found his body in an abandoned house in the woods; his money and cellphone were missing. Police arrested two men as homicide suspects who confessed to the killing. Police cited no evidence indicating a religious motivation. The case remained pending at year’s end.

On February 17, the Kaposvar regional court convicted a man for violating the law banning public denial of the crimes committed by National Socialist or Communist regimes. Following a 2014 report by the TEV, the court imposed a fine of 150,000

forints (\$510) for posting a comment on Facebook stating “there was no Holocaust” and referring to the Holocaust as a “Holoscam” in a Facebook post in August 2014.

On February 6, the Uj Magyar Garda (New Hungarian Guard), the 64 Counties Youth Movement, Betyarsereg (Army of Outlaws), and other nationalist groups gathered in Szekesfehervar to pay tribute to the German and Hungarian soldiers who attempted to break out of Buda Castle in 1945 while surrounded by Soviet forces. On February 9, MAZSIHISZ President Heisler wrote Interior Minister Sandor Pinter, asking how a neo-Nazi rally could have been permitted to take place openly in Szekesfehervar. On February 8, the Fejer County police initiated a criminal proceeding against a participant in the February 6 rally on charges of displaying banned symbols of tyranny for wearing a World War II military uniform with the symbol of the Nazi SS. On March 10, the Szekesfehervar District Court ruled in the indictment put forward by the Szekesfehervar district prosecutor’s office in a fast-track procedure against the man and sentenced him to one year of parole. On October 25, the Second Instance Szekesfehervar Regional Court upheld the first instance ruling. On June 5, the Szekesfehervar district prosecutor’s office pressed charges in the Szekesfehervar District Court against another participant in the February 6 rally for public denial of National Socialist crimes, which remained pending.

On February 12, upon the initiative of Mayor Andras Cserpalkovics (a Fidesz member) the City Council of Szekesfehervar adopted a decree condemning the February 6 event and expressing solidarity with those who felt “hurt and frightened” by the program. The decree also stated that any programs aiming to incite hatred against particular social groups were not welcome in the city and urged state authorities to take all possible legal actions to prevent such events in the future.

On February 24, the Community of the Politically Convicted (CPC), an NGO that commemorates the victims of communism, unveiled a bust of wartime parliament member Gyorgy Donath (1939-1944), a supporter of anti-Jewish legislation who was executed by the communist government in 1947. Several Jewish organizations and other NGOs protested the statue, located a few blocks from the HDKE. The district mayor’s office posted an invitation to the unveiling ceremony on its official website, and governing party officials had been scheduled to speak at the event. Following the protests, the CPC cancelled the unveiling ceremony and removed the statue two days later.

In an interview with the newspaper *Lokal* published on July 28, HIC Deputy President Istvan Toth denounced terrorist attacks committed in Europe and rejected that “they have anything to do with Islam,” adding that the Quran said Muslims should not commit murder.

On September 16, at a World Zionist Congress conference in Budapest, MAZSIHISZ President Heisler said, “We firmly believe that interspersing issues of anti-Semitism with the current European migration crisis in an unreflecting way is, in many ways, manipulative and deceptive...The teachings of our faith and the experience of history warn Jews to stand against all forms of hate speech. Hatred against ...Christians ...Muslim or other refugees is just as unacceptable for us as it is when directed against Jews.”

During the first nine months of the year, the police registered 542 cases of vandalism of religious properties. The police did not provide a breakdown of incidents by religious group targeted or other details.

On February 29, a menorah was sawn off and stolen from the Holocaust memorial in Zalaegerszeg, a loss with an estimated cost of 200,000 forints (\$680). MAZSIHISZ reported that “it is possible that the vandalism may be motivated by the collection of scrap metal rather than anti-Semitism.”

On April 21, vandals painted a cross turned upside down and a swastika on the Grand Reformed (Calvinist) Church in Debrecen, the city’s most prominent building. Debrecen police launched an investigation. Mayor Laszlo Papp (a Fidesz member) condemned the act and stated Debrecen was proud that religious denominations carried on their activity in harmony.

On September 9, the Living Memorial, an unofficial, ad hoc collection of memorabilia in Budapest’s Liberty Square commemorating the country’s 600,000 Holocaust victims, was vandalized. The perpetrators tore up photographs and destroyed or stole items left at the memorial. The destroyed and stolen items had only symbolic value, according to the Living Memorial group. The group filed a police report on the same day, but police closed the investigation for what they said was “lack of a crime.”

On April 19, the TEV published its 2015 annual report on domestic anti-Semitism based on a survey conducted by the Median Opinion and Market Research

Institute. The report concluded that, accounting for both cognitive (receptivity to stereotypes, misconceptions, conspiracy theories) and affective anti-Semitism (emotional rejection of the Jews), 35 percent of citizens harbored anti-Semitic views. The percent of extreme anti-Semites had grown from 21 percent in 2014 to 23 percent in 2015; while the percent of those with moderately anti-Semitic views increased from 10 percent (2014) to 12 percent (2015). With respect to Holocaust denial, 11 percent of respondents said there were no gas chambers in the concentration camps, 19 percent said Jews had “made up” a large part of the history of the Holocaust, and 23 percent said the number of Jewish victims was much less than generally stated. According to the survey, Holocaust denial had increased since 2006, when 7 percent of survey respondents said there were no gas chambers in concentration camps.

On March 24, the Neozopont Institute, a think tank, released the results of its phone survey of 1,000 people on domestic attitudes toward Islam. It found 64 percent of respondents believed terrorism was more characteristic of Muslims than others, 73 percent that Muslims who arrived on the continent in recent years could not integrate into European societies, 78 percent that Islam oppressed women, 64 percent that Islam was a threat to European societies, and 57 percent that Islam could not be reconciled with the European way of life, while 56 percent feared that Muslims could become the majority in Europe.

The EMIH completed the full renovation of the synagogue and rabbinical center in Mad for which the government contributed 31.1 million forints (\$106,000). The center featured an exhibit presenting the history of Jewish life in the region.

Christian churches and the Jewish community continued to organize events under the auspices of the Christian-Jewish Society, an NGO, and brought together religious scholars for discussions. The society organized approximately 30 lectures and cultural events on Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, and promoted religious tolerance and mutual understanding. On May 23, the society organized an interfaith conference at the Church of the Great Saint Teresa of Avila in Budapest, which featured Catholic Bishop Lajos Varga, Rabbi Gabor Finali, Abdul-Fattah Munif from the Organization of Muslims in Hungary, Matyas Mero from the Hungarian Society for Krishna Consciousness, Jeno Szigeti from the Adventist School of Theology, and Jozsef Szecsi from the Christian-Jewish Society.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

In numerous meetings with government officials, including cabinet ministers, state secretaries and deputy state secretaries in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Office of the Prime Minister, and MHC, the Ambassador and other U.S. embassy representatives continued to advocate for religious freedom and to urge reconsideration of the religion law to amend those provisions that resulted in discrimination against minority religious groups. U.S. officials voiced concerns regarding the government's anti-Islamic rhetoric, and at various meetings with senior government officials the Ambassador strongly criticized the issuance of a state award to Zsolt Bayer.

On January 27, President Obama cited the country in remarks delivered on International Holocaust Remembrance Day at the Israeli Embassy in Washington, D.C. The President referenced the 2015 plans to erect a statue of Balint Homan in Szekesfehervar when he said, "when a statue of an anti-Semitic leader from World War II was planned in Hungary, we led the charge to convince their government to reverse course."

On September 6, the U.S. ambassador to the UN raised concerns regarding the level of anti-Semitism in Hungary at a UN forum devoted to anti-Semitism. The ambassador noted in her speech the granting of a state award to "virulent anti-Semitic columnist Zsolt Bayer took place amidst growing anti-Semitism." She also remarked that the Hungarian prime minister was "barring Muslim refugees who seek sanctuary from mass atrocities and persecution," and had "fanned popular fears by claiming that all terrorists in Europe are migrants."

Also in September the Ambassador's keynote address to the Hungarian Journalists' Association's National Press Day event stressed the responsibility of all to speak out to counter racist, xenophobic, and anti-Semitic hate speech.

On May 26, the visiting Under Secretary of State for Civilian Security, Democracy, and Human Rights met with representatives of the Muslim community, the Catholic and Reformed Churches, and the Reform Jewish community and discussed with them the state of religious freedom, growing anti-Muslim sentiment and harassment, and the government's antimigrant messaging campaign. On May 27, the Under Secretary met with representatives of the three incorporated Jewish communities. She discussed their concerns regarding local anti-Semitism and the level of cooperation with the government, and encouraged the groups to form broader coalitions to resist discrimination.

On September 22, visiting State Department officials met with representatives of the three incorporated Jewish communities and discussed their concerns about anti-Semitism and the level of cooperation with each other and with the government. On September 23, the embassy hosted a meeting for these officials with the rector of Pazmany Peter Catholic University and representatives of the MHC, the Hungarian Civil Liberties Union, and a Reform Jewish congregation to discuss the religion law. Participants discussed the 2014 ECHR ruling and subsequent governmental actions to redraft the religion law, which parliament failed to enact in 2015. The visiting officials also met with representatives from the Muslim community, with whom they discussed the rise of anti-Islamic sentiment in the country, including harassment faced by Muslim women, hate speech on the internet, and what the Muslim representatives said was the failure of law enforcement to act when hate crimes were reported. In meetings with the head of the MET and the head of the Faith Congregation, the State Department and embassy officials discussed the religion law, including the 2011 mass deregistration and government compensation for deregistered churches.

Embassy and visiting State Department officials met with representatives of the Jewish communities and Jewish youth NGOs to discuss anti-Semitism and the challenges of promoting tolerance education and historical truth.

Embassy officers met regularly with leaders of religious organizations to discuss the effects of the 2011 religion law, including MET, the HIC and the Faith Congregation. Embassy staff maintained contact with the country's diverse Jewish community to discuss issues related to its legal status and relationship with the government, anti-Semitism, restitution issues, and commemoration of the Holocaust.

On February 4, the Ambassador hosted an "ecumenical breakfast" in the spirit of the annual National Prayer Breakfast attended by the President of the United States every year. Leaders of the Catholic, Hungarian Reformed, and Lutheran Churches joined the breakfast along with representatives of the Jewish, Buddhist, Muslim, evangelical Christian, and Baptist communities, and noted the event was the first such interfaith gathering to which they had been invited. The main focus of discussion during the breakfast was the situation of religious freedom and the separation of state and religion in the country. Several religious leaders who attended the breakfast later informed embassy officials that their relations with some other participating churches significantly improved as a result of the event.

On March 30, the Ambassador gave remarks at the centennial ceremony of the official recognition of Islam in the country. She offered support to the Muslim community just after the March 22 bombings in Brussels, saying, “As an embassy, one of our primary goals is to promote tolerance for minorities in Hungary. In pursuit of that goal, the United States stands steadfastly with Hungary’s Islamic community against all forms of Islamophobia.” Deputy State Secretary Laszlo Hegyi of the Ministry of Human Capacities also gave remarks at the event.

On April 22, the Ambassador participated at a Seder organized by the Bet Orim Reform Jewish community to express her support for the group’s struggle to regain its lost legal status and gave remarks supporting religious freedom.

On August 4, the Ambassador gave remarks at a ceremony to commemorate the birthday of Raoul Wallenberg. In her remarks, the Ambassador drew parallels between Wallenberg’s heroism in the face of the Holocaust and the country’s current challenges. “When somebody is victimized, whether they are a migrant ...Jew, or anyone else, we all have the moral responsibility to stand up against their victimization. This is never easy, and sometimes it comes at great cost.” Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade State Secretary for Cultural Diplomacy Istvan Ijgyarto and Jakab Istvan, Deputy Speaker of Parliament and Fidesz MP, also gave remarks at the event.