



CLSF Latvijas Cilvēktiesību komiteja F.I.D.H. Latvian Human Rights Committee

МФПЧ Латвийский комитет по правам человека

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Freedom of conscience in Latvia, 2018-2019

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In 2018, the Constitutional Court has delivered some progress for freedom of conscience, by cancelling restrictive provisions on creating churches, i.e., the sort of religious organisations with full range of rights.¹

However, in 2019 the Parliament of Latvia has imposed new unjustified restrictions, by amending the Law on the Latvian Orthodox Church,² under an urgent procedure. Now, the law provides that the head of the church and its bishops must be citizens of Latvia, having lived in Latvia for the last 10 years. This is especially relevant for that particular church, as many of its followers (mostly ethnic Russians, Ukrainians, Belarussians) are stateless, some are foreign citizens. Moreover, LOC is, under canonical law, an autonomous part of the Russian Orthodox Church, which has criticized the amendments.³ According to a media report, the parliament's own legal service warned against the amendments.⁴

This is sadly not an isolated case. An analogous provision was earlier inserted in the Agreement of 2002 between the Republic of Latvia and the Holy See, requiring Roman Catholic bishops to be Latvian citizens.⁵

Recommendations for Latvia:

- to refrain from interference with the choice of leadership by religious organisations;
- to move forward without delay with restitution of Jewish community property.

¹ <http://www.satv.tiesa.gov.lv/en/press-release/the-norms-that-prohibit-newly-established-congregations-from-establishing-a-religious-association-church-before-the-registration-period-of-ten-years-expires-or-if-one-church-has-already-been-registered/>

² <https://likumi.lv/doc.php?id=184626> Section 4 of the law (in Latvian)

³ <https://www2.stetson.edu/~psteeves/relnews/190701c.html>

⁴ <http://orthochristian.com/121695.html> See also <http://www.baltic-course.com/eng/legislation/?doc=149560>

⁵ <https://likumi.lv/doc.php?id=66742> See Article 5. English text below the Latvian one