

MONACO 2019 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution guarantees freedom of religion and its public expression and prohibits compelling participation in religious ceremonies. Roman Catholicism is the state religion, and state ceremonies often include Catholic rituals. Religious groups must apply to the government to build a public place of worship and to receive recognition, which provides certain legal rights and privileges. Optional Catholic religious instruction is available in public schools. In April the government refused to recognize the Jehovah's Witnesses for a third time, despite Supreme Court rulings, including one in February, annulling the government's two previous decisions not to recognize the group. Without recognition, the government and the Jehovah's Witnesses said the group could not open a place of worship in the country.

The only private religious schools were Catholic. According to the government, while the law permits private, non-Catholic religious schools, there was insufficient demand for them. Muslim, Protestant, and Jewish representatives said there was no need for them to open a religious school but believed the government would likely agree, if asked, to a request to open one.

In September representatives from the U.S. Consulate General in Marseille discussed with the government its nonrecognition of the Jehovah's Witnesses. Consulate officials also met with members of the Jehovah's Witness, Protestant, Jewish, and Muslim communities and discussed their views on issues pertaining to religious freedom in the country.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 31,000 (midyear 2019 estimate), of whom 7,600 are citizens. According to a December 2018 Monegasque government estimate, the total population is 38,300, of whom 8,378 are citizens. The French government estimates 93 percent of the population is Catholic. Protestant officials state Protestants represent 2 percent of the population, with 200-220 families. According to press reports and observers in the country, the Russian Orthodox Church has approximately 300 members. According to the European Jewish Congress and the local Association Culturelle Israelite (Jewish Cultural Association), approximately 1,000 residents, most of whom are noncitizens, are Jewish. According to a long-time Muslim resident,

there is a small Muslim community of approximately 200 persons, most of whom are noncitizens from North Africa. The Jehovah's Witnesses report 200 members who work in the country, 20 of whom reside there. A small number of residents adhere to other religious beliefs.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution guarantees individuals freedom of religion and public worship and protects the freedom to express opinions on all issues, provided no crimes are committed in the exercise of those freedoms. No one may be compelled to participate in the rites or ceremonies of any religion or to observe its days of rest.

The constitution states Roman Catholicism is the state religion.

Religious associations wishing to establish an office or place of worship, own or lease property, or hire employees must first obtain official recognition from the Ministry of the Interior, which responds to such requests within one month. The government has granted recognition to the Protestant, Russian Orthodox, and Jewish communities.

In addition to obtaining official government recognition, any religious group wishing to construct a place of worship in a public space must seek prior approval from the Ministry of Interior.

The government does not tax religious institutions.

Catholic religious instruction is available in public schools as an option and requires parental authorization. Private schools may provide instruction for religions other than Catholicism.

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

Government Practices

On February 18, the Supreme Court annulled the government's 2018 decision to reject the Jehovah's Witnesses' second application for recognition. In 2017, the Supreme Court annulled the government's 2016 rejection of the Jehovah's Witnesses' first recognition application. On April 2, the Jehovah's Witnesses

applied for recognition for a third time; on April 29, Minister of State (prime minister equivalent) Serge Telle issued a written decision that again refused to extend government recognition to the group. Jehovah's Witnesses stated that without recognition they could not establish a headquarters in the country where they could worship and welcome new members. According to the government, the group's religious doctrine was hostile to the Catholic Church, and the hostility undermined the state and its institutions as well as public order. In its February ruling, the Supreme Court stated the government refused to recognize the group because it was concerned about proselytism and considered the Jehovah's Witnesses to have an extreme and intolerant nature. According to the same court ruling, the government also argued the Jehovah's Witnesses presented a danger to public order because of what it termed "troubling practices, such as: 1) refusing blood transfusions; 2) not denouncing pedophilia; 3) asking members to donate their property for the benefit of the church; 4) being hostile to other religions; 5) refusing to grant freedom of expression to members; 6) encouraging members to isolate themselves from the world and their families under penalty of excommunication; and 7) compelling converts to conform to all doctrines."

The government again reported it did not receive any requests for new sites during the year from any religious group.

Catholic rituals continued to be a part of many state ceremonies, including annual national day celebrations.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

The only private religious schools were Catholic. According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, although private schools offering instruction in other religions were permitted by law, there was insufficient demand for such schools. Muslim, Protestant, and Jewish representatives said there was no need for them to open a religious school but believed the government would likely agree, if asked, to a request to open one.

Places of worship included Catholic and Protestant churches, and one synagogue. The Russian Orthodox Church established a congregation in 2018. The Russian Orthodox community was using a Reformed Protestant church building until it could construct its own church. According to religious groups, it was difficult to build new places of worship due to high real estate prices. There were no mosques.

According to Catholic Archbishop of Monaco Bernard Barsi, there was no officially recognized Muslim community in the country. A member of the Muslim community said the community did not want to be officially recognized because it was mostly nonreligious and it would be too expensive to build a place of worship. Muslims worshiped at a mosque in Beausoleil, just across the border in France, and in private prayer rooms in their own residences. Jehovah's Witnesses also worshipped in nearby locations in France, in Menton, Beausoleil, or Nice.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy and Engagement

In September representatives from the U.S. Consulate General in Marseille met with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' Directorate for Diplomatic Relations and Consulates and discussed its nonrecognition of the Jehovah's Witnesses. Consulate officials met Jehovah's Witnesses representatives in March and September to discuss their religious freedom concerns, including the government's refusal to recognize the group.

In October consulate staff met with representatives of the Jewish and Muslim communities, as well as with members of one of the country's two Protestant churches, the United Protestant Church. They discussed the groups' views on issues pertaining to their exercise of religious freedom in the country, including the establishment of places of worship and government attitudes towards religious schools.