

Brussels, 26 October 2020.

Dear Mr. Chairman, Deputy Prime Minister,

*We are addressing you on an issue which is extremely important for Jews: the Bill on Animal Welfare and its negative impact on our religious freedom.*

*Poland is one of the largest suppliers of kosher meat, a fact widely recognised and deeply appreciated by Jews across Europe and elsewhere.*

*The Bill on Animal Welfare puts the European Jewish community almost overnight in a radically different situation. There are many questions arising in this context. Why? Why has there been no attempt to discuss this with the religious communities outside of Poland who are very painfully affected by this ban? We are ready and available to discuss our concerns with you at any time.*

*In one of your interviews, you stated that you are guided by a desire to protect living creatures from unnecessary suffering, which you called 'a very Christian gesture'. When it comes to animal protection, we do not believe that Christianity is any different to Judaism.*

*In fact, and without wishing to labour the point, minimising the suffering of an animal is a central tenet of the Jewish Faith.*

- The Torah declares: "Six days shall you do your tasks and on the seventh day rest, in order that your ox and donkey shall rest..." (Exodus 23:12)
- In Exodus 23:5, we find: "If you see [even] your enemy's donkey struggling under a load, don't refrain from helping him; surely help him [to unload].".
- Deuteronomy 12:21 describes the commandment to slaughter animals before eating them. Many commentators explain that one purpose of this command is that kosher slaughter is a humane way of killing, causing only minimal suffering to the animal.
- Deuteronomy 22:6-7 is the commandment to send away the mother bird before taking the eggs for our own use. The commentators explain that seeing the eggs taken away causes distress to the mother, which is partially alleviated by sending her away.
- Deuteronomy 22:9 is the prohibition against plowing with two different kinds of animals because plowing with animals of different species causes distress to one another.
- Deuteronomy 25:4 declares: "Don't muzzle the ox as it threshes" because it is stressful for an animal to be surrounded by food, yet unable to eat.

*One thing we notice from all of these commandments is that they go far beyond merely avoiding active cruelty to animals. In most cases the commandment is to take positive action to alleviate any distress to them. We believe, and this is all too easily forgotten - or worse ignored - in the public debate on ritual slaughter, that an animal should first and foremost live with dignity; to reach the end of its life also in a dignified way. Additionally, I must add that a Jew is even forbidden from having breakfast until he has fed his animals and on the day of slaughter an animal must be fed as usual, to ensure it is not in distress right up until the end.*

*In kosher slaughter, we are not talking about a whim, a passing trend, to be easily given up when the next one comes. We are talking about one of the foundations of Jewish practice, which has been a requirement for Jews since antiquity. Freedom of conscience and religion and freedom of religious practice in Poland are safeguarded, among others, by the Constitution of the Republic of Poland, the European Convention on Human Rights, the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.*

*You will remember the famous ruling of the Polish Constitutional Court, which decided in 2014 that the ban on ritual slaughter of animals for the needs of the followers of Judaism and Islam is unconstitutional.*

*The Court emphasized at the time that animal protection does not take precedence over constitutional safeguards of freedom of religion, and ritual slaughter is protected precisely within the scope of religious freedom. "The constitutional guarantee of freedom of religion includes the performance of all acts, practices, rituals, and rituals that are religious in nature. By the same token, constitutional protection also extends on religious activities far removed from the conventional behaviour prevailing in a given country, including activities that may be unpopular from the point of view of the majority in society" - emphasized the Court.*

*We appeal to you, Sir, to maintain the status quo, which is equally supported by important social and economic considerations. The ban on ritual slaughter will affect not only the Jewish - and Muslim - communities of united Europe, but also the thousands of Poles employed in the agricultural sector, and farmers will suffer horrendous financial losses.*

*The value of Polish beef exports is estimated at PLN 6.7 billion a year, of which ritual slaughter represents PLN 2 billion, which is almost one-third. This is a macro scale. On a microscale: on average, one farm supplies between 10 and 15 cattle per year for ritual slaughter alone. This means that the liquidation of ritual slaughter for exports will make several thousand people redundant in meat processing plants and on farms.*

*According to estimates by the Polish Association of Cattle Producers, more than 350 000 farms that operate in cattle breeding, will suffer losses. Yet, as I am sure you know, Mr. Chairman, with each of these figures associated is the fate of thousands of people which is hanging in the balance.*

*Poland is a country with a long and rich and sometimes painful history. The Polish and Jewish people share much in common in this regard.*

*We are convinced that you realize this fact perfectly well, Mr. Chairman, as much your Brother of blessed memory, a great friend of the Jewish people, realized it. The evidence of this friendship is universally known, and without it, the long-awaited Museum of the History of Polish Jews would probably not have been established.*

*In closing Mr Chairman, it is appropriate to express our gratitude to the Committee for the Dialogue with Judaism of the Polish Bishops' Conference for the position they have taken, showing their understanding for the desiderata of the Jewish communities concerning kosher slaughter carried out following centuries-old Jewish tradition.*

*We ardently and sincerely hope that this tradition, whose very raison d'être is geared towards animal welfare and minimising animal suffering is allowed to continue in perpetuity and the aspects of the Bill relating to Kosher slaughter amended to reflect this.*

*With my most respectful regards,*



Rabbi Menachem Margolin  
Chairman  
European Jewish Association