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Die Zeugen Jehovas in Ostmittel-, Südost- und Südeuropa. Zum Schicksal einer religiösen Minderheit.
Jehovah's Witnesses in East Central, South Eastern and Southern Europe. The fate of a religious minority.

Hans-Hermann Dirksen: Verfolgung kleiner Religionsgemeinschaften in der Sowjetunion am Beispiel Bessarabiens und der Bukowina

The history of the smaller denominations in Bessarabia and the Bukovina is exemplary for the development of minor religions in the Western Republics of the USSR. Starting with the switch of this territory over to Romania in 1918 individuals could enjoy more religious freedom than under tsardom, although limited by the fear of communism of the governmental authorities. For example they fought the Pentecostal Church, the Reform-Adventists and the Jehovah's Witnesses with repeated bans. Beginning with the brotherhood in arms of Antonescu and Hitler the question of conscientious objection arose, leading to more persecution. When the Red Army reoccupied the territory in 1944 they also began drafting which resulted in a twofold persecution of those convicted for conscientious objection before by the Romanian regime. Being part of the Soviet Empire for the next decades brought no relief for the small denominations but rather, surveillance by the MGB / KGB as well as continued persecution and incarceration for allegedly endangering the Soviet state. By forced resettlement in 1949 and 1951 the State's Security tried to solve the problem, deporting mainly Jehovah's Witnesses to different parts of Siberia, only to extensively distribute their beliefs to these remote areas. After realizing that adherents of the denominations still played a vital role in the underground, efforts of the KGB increased, and methods of decomposition within the denominations to split up the believers were introduced. Persecution only stopped when the Soviet regime broke down followed by legal recognition of most of the denominations in the Republic of Moldova as well as in other former Soviet Republics.

Wolfram Slupina / Konstantin Berezsko: Multiple Diktaturerfahrungen der Zeugen Jehovas in der Ukraine im 20. Jahrhundert

The history of Jehovah's Witnesses (JWs) in Ukraine shows the religious politics of at least three dictatorial regimes. Until 1945 the history of Western Ukraine developed differently from that of the rest of the country. Religious minorities in Western Ukraine enjoyed relative freedom until the arrival of the first fascist regimes in 1939. During these rules (1939-1945) JWs faced fierce opposition, but grew from 1,000 to over 5,000 members in Western Ukraine. In Eastern Ukraine the communist government refused JWs official registration, forcing them into a semi-legal status which resulted in persecution. Soon after the post-war reunion of Ukrainian territories under Soviet leadership, over 1,000 JWs were jailed or sent into gulags. In 1951 over 6,000 of them were exiled. Despite continued arrests, JWs kept growing. At well over 135,000 members today, their history provides a rich field for study.

Wolfram Slupina / Aleksandra Boczek: Religiöse Verfolgung und staatliche Repression der Zeugen Jehovas in Polen 1936-1945 sowie 1950-1989

With the occupation of Poland, including Danzig, in 1939, Jehovah's Witnesses (JWs) were subjected to repressive persecution in the west and in the General-gouvernement by the Nazis, and in the east of the country both by the communists and subsequently the Nazis. 675 Polish JWs and 151 from Danzig were arrested. Of these, 562 were sent to concentration camps. 191 Polish JWs (including Danzig) lost their lives, 39 were executed. Yet, despite this cruel persecution, during the 6 years of war their number more than doubled to 2,880. Afterwards JWs in Poland were again persecuted, this time by the communist authorities for about 40 years (1950-1989). During that period ca. 16,000 of them were sentenced to lengthy terms of imprisonment, some even lost their lives. Finally on May 12, 1989, the legally-binding registration of JWs was completed. There are now some 127,000 active members, making it the third largest religious community in Poland.

Ewa M. Guzik-Makaruk: Zeugen Jehovas in Polen. Rechtliche Situation nach 1989

This paper is entitled „Jehovah's Witnesses in Poland. Legal situation after 1989”. It consists of 5 parts in which the author describes as follows: the historical background, the year of 1989 – as a mile-stone, the legal status of churches and religious unions (associations, organizations) in Poland after 1989 and the regulations directly concerning the Jehovah's Witnesses as a religious union in Poland after 1989. The author analyzes the constitutional regulations concerning religious beliefs, appropriate international legal standards and conventions which were ratified by Poland, national regulations connected with the freedom of religious beliefs and the liberty of conscience and the register of churches and religious unions in Poland. Additionally the author describes regulations of criminal law which protects the freedom of religious beliefs and liberty of conscience from certain kinds of violations. One may say that Jehovah's Witnesses have the same rights as the other churches and registered religious unions in Poland; without any form of discrimination in this regard.

Stanislav Přebyl: Tschechisches Staatskirchenrecht und die Zeugen Jehovas

The present paper deals with the aspects of the law of state and church regarding the existence of Jehovah's Witnesses (JWs) on Czech soil. Even during the political liberalisation of 1867 within the Austrian monarchy and the period of the first Republic of Czechoslovakia (1918-1938) did the state not accept the refusal of military service. Two periods can be distinguished during the Communist regime: the Stalinist era with its brutal repression, and the “normalisation” of the regime, which lasted twenty years, after the 1968 Prague Spring. While during the first period the regime heavily persecuted JWs, during the second, a kind of collaboration established itself, within which, through mutual corruption, and even collaboration with the secret service StB., the regime came to a good level of understanding with some representatives of JWs. In 1980, surprisingly, the religious community made a request of official acknowledgment. But the Ministry of Culture recognised the JWs as a registered religious community only in 1993. This recognition, however, is connected with insecurities about the question whether the community misled the state regarding its

official doctrine, especially about the refusal of blood transfusions for minors. On the other hand, it is a good thing that the JWs are recognised by the state in the Czech Republic, since thus their activities become more transparent for the public at large.

Annegret Dirksen: Wechselnde Regimes – wechselnde Vorwürfe. Jehovas Zeugen in Ungarn

Due to the situation after World War I, when Hungary suffered the loss of two thirds of its territory and population, it was the national idea that became the focus of politics. Although religious freedom was granted by law, the activities of new religious movements were regarded with suspicion. Because of their evangelizing activities especially the Bible students / Jehovah's Witnesses, but also other groups, were viewed as national enemies. Authorities called the Witnesses "billeting officers of Communism" and suspected them of cooperating with Soviet lead Comintern. On 2 December 1939, the Minister of the Interior Keresztes-Fischer banned eight minor religious groups, among them Jehovah's Witnesses, because of alleged anti-military and anti-state activities. Their beliefs were viewed as destructive to the public order and to security. With their refusal to perform military service they would endanger the military strength. By using the gendarmes, authorities tried to track down the Witnesses. In a special action in 1942 hundreds of their members were gathered at especially prepared collection points and sentenced in mass trials. In summer 1943, a special working company no. 801 for the Organization Todt was put together, among them about 160 Jehovah's Witnesses, and brought to the labour camp at Bor in Yugoslavia for work at the copper mines. Along with the deportation of hundreds of thousands of Hungarian Jews also Witnesses were brought to concentration camps. When the Arrow Cross Party took over the power young Witnesses were executed for refusing military service. During the first years after the war the Witnesses experienced a period of religious freedom. Some of their former prison mates were communists and respected the attitude they showed during the fascist area. But in 1948, when the communist Party under the lead of Mátyás Rákosi, the former Comintern boss, came to power, things changed. Because of the neutral stand in politics Witnesses were accused for being spies for America. Some who suffered under the Horthy-Regime were sentenced again under the communist regime to long term imprisonments using the same legal regulations. In addition, the new office of State Security (ÁVH) was to play a vital role in combating so-called state enemies. Later under the more liberal government of Imre Nagy leading Witnesses and others were imprisoned again. Even under János Kádár who ruled after the putting down of the uprising in 1956 the attitude toward the Witnesses did not change. Almost until the end of the socialist regimes Jehovah's Witnesses had to work underground.

Francesca Piombo: Die Zeugen Jehovas unter Mussolini

The first Jehovah's Witnesses in Italy brought the new religion back from stays abroad. The strong backing of Catholicism in society did not allow for an easy spreading of the new religion, however. In fact, the first groups developed among or next to the few Protestant centres in the country.

Benito Mussolini favoured a single Church for Italy, since this allowed a greater control of society. Police Chief Arturo Bocchini was the one who interfered most with religions in the Fascist regime, Pentecostal groups being his main target. Since the

JWs were mistaken for Protestants in the first years of their existence, corresponding laws were applied to them as well.

It was all to the advantage of the physical integrity of the JWs that they remained an extreme minority, never counting more than about 200 members, until after World War II. They ranked among the very few conscientious objectors to military service in the country, and had there been more of them, the regime might have reacted in far harsher ways. Instead, the Fascist regime „limited“ itself to deploying confinement (confino, i. e. the assignment of a forced place of residence to a political or religious opponent), prison sentences, and odysseys between military barracks, prisons and mental asylums in some individual cases, all in the vain hope of bringing Witnesses „back to their senses.“ Such measures were by no means innocuous, but no cases of gross ill-treatment or even torture have been documented.

With 220,000 missionaries and up to 400,000 members in the year 2000, the Italian branch of JWs is nowadays one of the largest in Europe. An inclusion of the religion in the state's otto per mille programme, which allots 0.8 % of income taxes to a number of churches (or, alternatively, to the state) is to be expected soon.

Sebastian Koch: Die Geschichte der Zeugen Jehovas in Spanien

This essay deals with the history of Jehovah's Witnesses in Spain and thus with a religious minority which tends to define itself in contrast to state and society. Furthermore it provides information about a country whose mechanisms of segregation have led to a nearly complete homogenization in terms of religion several times. Focussing on francoism this essay should contribute to the debate on the nature of Franco's dictatorial regime. It is evident that the specific connection between political Catholicism and francoist militarism did not leave room for the understanding of a group which departs from the common terms in many ways, and therefore Jehovah's witnesses had to face a perennially persecution.

Proceeding from the assumption that the quality of a democracy can be read from the behaviour of a state and a society against a controversial group such as Jehovah's Witnesses, the emphasis is then shifted onto the time after Franco's death. The disadvantages of a specific policy concerning the past, which was glorified as a successful model, are becoming more and more obvious. An examination of the past failed to come in and has led to a great lack of knowledge in Spanish history. Because ignorance and tolerance are mutually exclusive it is to be feared that the relatively broad acceptance of Jehovah's Witnesses in Spain is based on indifference rather than on real understanding.