

The Atlas of Religious or Belief Minority Rights: First Data (With a Focus on Jehovah's Witnesses)

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ABSTRACT: The article describes the content, aim and methodology of the project “Atlas of Religious or Belief Minority Rights in the European Union Countries,” providing a few examples of the data and information it contains. In the last section, these data and information are examined with reference to the Jehovah's Witnesses, and the process of “normalization” of the legal position of this religious group.

KEYWORDS: Religious Minority Rights, Atlas of Religious or Belief Minority Rights, Religious Minorities, Religious Minorities in the European Union, Jehovah's Witnesses.

Introduction

Is it possible to map and measure the rights of religious or belief minorities? Yes, provided that certain conditions are met regarding how to collect and analyse the data.

The first part of this paper provides a description of the project, followed by a discussion of some methodological issues and a presentation of a small sample of data. The second part is devoted to the examination of a case study consisting of a particular religious minority, Jehovah's Witnesses.

The Atlas of Religious or Belief Minority Rights in the European Union Countries

Fostering equal treatment of religious and belief minorities (RBMs) and fighting discrimination is a more and more pressing need in countries where religious and belief diversity is rapidly growing. To face this challenge, innovative technological

tools, new theoretical approaches, and original implementation strategies are needed. They must (a) provide reliable data and information about the status of RBMs in the EU countries; (b) develop a sound scientific framework for the interpretation of the impact of social and political change on new and old minorities; (c) make this new knowledge available to the general public, raising the awareness of the need to include RBMs in our societies; (d) develop instruments that are immediately available to people confronted with discrimination based on faith or belief in their everyday life.

These goals can be attained only by bringing together different stakeholders: scholars and institutions from social sciences and information technology, RBMs leaders, members of organizations which are engaged with the protection and promotion of RBMs at the grass-roots level, representatives of international and national bodies engaged in tackling RBM discrimination. Combining their different expertise is the key to address the complexity of the issue of RBM rights, and to build interpretive models and dissemination tools that are scientifically sound and practically effective.

The purpose of the Atlas is two-fold:

(a) provide a map of the RBM rights in the EU countries. This map does not currently exist, and the Atlas will make it possible to “see” the rights enjoyed by all RBMs in a country (or in the EU countries as a whole), and the actual compliance with them by any individual State;

(b) provide a reliable system for measuring these rights (also not currently available). The measurement will cover both the rights granted to RBMs by the laws in force in a country and the rights they actually enjoy (the two rarely coincide).

The Atlas website is the terminal point of the data and information collected through questionnaires addressed to social science experts and RBM representatives in the EU States. These data constitute the “new knowledge” component of the project, and the Atlas is the instrument to translate this new knowledge in communication formats that can help educators, politicians, community leaders, judges, and other stakeholders to develop a “culture” of equal treatment in the different settings (school, workplace, etc.) where people are confronted with discrimination based on religion or belief.

The Atlas will offer an easy-to-read comparative description of the legal and social status of RBMs in the EU countries. The website user will be able to select a

single RBM, a specific country, and a particular area of rights (for example, education) and obtain the relevant information concerning the legal and social status enjoyed by the RBMs in that country and rights area. Alternatively, the user can get a comparative view of the rights enjoyed by all RBMs in a country (or a group of countries), or a comparative view of the rights enjoyed by a specific RBM in all the EU countries. These research tools can be further combined to obtain the data and information sought by the user. Particular attention will be devoted to the rights implementation, so that the gap between formal entitlement and real enjoyment of rights is reduced.

a) The Questionnaires

The data and information provided by the Atlas are based on the answers to two questionnaires, one for socio-legal experts and the other for RBM representatives. The former provides the description of the rights enjoyed by RBMs in each country; the latter, the degree of their implementation and the perception of inequality or discrimination existing within each RBM. The questionnaires cover seven policy areas: legal status of RBMs, education, marriage and family, media, places of worship, religious symbols, spiritual assistance. Additional policy areas as well as additional data and information collected through the analysis of media, reports, and other sources of information can be included at a later stage. Currently, the Atlas takes into consideration the following religious or belief organizations: Buddhist communities; Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints; Church of Scientology; European Humanist Federation; Hindu communities; Islamic communities; Jehovah's Witnesses; Jewish communities; Orthodox Churches; Protestant Churches (both mainline and Evangelical); Seventh-Day Adventist Church; Roman Catholic Church; Sikh communities.

b) The Indexes

The answers to the questionnaires are assessed with reference to three indexes. The following observations concern the evaluation of the data obtained from the questionnaires sent to the legal experts. I will discuss the application of the indexes to the provisions concerning spiritual assistance in the prisons of five EU countries below.

The most important is the *respect and promotion index*. It measures the extent to which the RBM rights are respected and promoted in each country. Respect means ensuring that the rights granted to an individual or group of people under international human rights standards (discussed below) are not violated. Promotion means putting in place the conditions that facilitate the enjoyment of these rights.

The index takes respect for rights as the benchmark and assigns the “0” score to the State provisions that ensure it. Everything above this line constitutes promotion and is marked in the index with the scores “0.33, 0.66, 1” according to the significance of the promotion; the State provisions which fall below this line are marked with the score “-0.33, -0.66, -1.” This does not mean that any form of promotion is legitimate: there may be forms of promotion that lack of a proper basis or result in discriminatory measures. These eventualities will be reported and discussed in the Atlas, but in the first instance the index is limited to recording the regulations that promote or hinder the protection of RBM rights.

It is possible that a State promotes or hinders the rights of certain minorities only. The index takes into account this possibility by giving the following additional scores: 0.33 when the promotion/hindering affects from one minority to one third of all minorities considered; 0.66 when it affects between 1/3 and 2/3 of minorities; 1 when it affects more than 2/3 of minorities.

Finally, not all rights are equally important. For example, the right to teach religion at school is more important than the right to teach it for two hours a week instead of just one hour. This difference has been taken into account by applying the coefficient 0.33 or 0.66 to the rights that carry less weight.

The second index is the *inequality index*. States do not equally promote (or hinder) RBM rights: it happens frequently that a RBM is entitled to enjoy more rights than another. This index measures the difference between the rights recognized to each RBM in each State (differences which, if there is no legitimate justification or are disproportionate, may amount to discrimination). This index is created by breaking down the same data provided by the respect/promotion index, and considering them with reference to each RBM.

Finally, the *gap index* measures the distance between the rights recognized to religious majority and religious minorities in each country. To distinguish between

majority and minority the Atlas follows the indications provided by the UN Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues in 2019 and considers as minority

any group of persons which constitutes less than half of the population in the entire territory of a State whose members share common characteristics of culture, religion or language, or a combination of any of these (United Nations Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues 2019, no. 53).

The number of RBM members in each country has been calculated based on the data provided by ARDA, the Association of Religion Data Archives.

This distinction will not be applied in countries (e.g. Estonia) where no religious group reaches the threshold of half the State population.

Measuring RBM Rights: The International Standards

As already said, the starting point for developing an index of RBM rights are the international human rights standards. They provide the standard of treatment human beings are entitled to expect from their governments and societies. International human rights standards are derived from treaties and other international documents and ensure the minimum required level, which States should not go below (Sharom et al. 2016).

Concerning the international standards that apply to RBMs, the members of these minorities enjoy first and foremost all human rights (including freedom of religion or belief) that are due to all human beings, regardless of whether they are members of a minority. In addition to these rights, RBM members are entitled to other rights that “complement instruments concerned with freedom of religion or belief” (United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights 2014, 1). These rights are classified according to three principles which together form the basis of the whole system of minority rights: protection and promotion of identity; non-discrimination; participation (Henrard 2011).

This system of protection of religious minorities includes rights that “go beyond” the right to freedom of religion and belief, because they require positive actions by the State which the latter right does not entail. For example, the principle of participation of minorities in the political, social and cultural life of a country requires that the State establishes “bodies and mechanisms aimed at creating a space for discussions and exchanges on issues relevant to religious

minorities,” including their participation in decision-making processes on matters concerning them (United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights 2014, 1).

Such an obligation cannot be derived from the right of religious freedom, which does not require the State to involve minorities in its decision-making processes. The same remarks apply to the principle of protection and promotion of RBM identity. Article 1 of the “Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities,” adopted by the United Nations on December 18, 1992 (United Nations General Assembly 1992), affirms that States are obliged not only to “protect the existence and the national or ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic identity of minorities,” but also to “encourage conditions for the promotion of that identity,” thus implying the adoption of positive measures aimed at creating these conditions. In this case too, the active promotion of the religious identity of a minority goes beyond the obligations incumbent on the State as a consequence of the right to religious freedom.

Data and Information: A Few Examples

This section provides a few examples of the data and information that can be obtained from the analysis of the answers to the questionnaires. The examples concern the right of the RBM members to receive spiritual assistance in prisons.

The questionnaires provide three categories of information on the RBM rights in the EU countries. Before describing them, I would like to point out that the following information is of a legal nature, i.e. indicates the rights recognized to religious minorities in a country. The fact that these rights are actually enjoyed or, for various reasons, remain on paper will only become apparent when these legal data are combined with those collected through the questionnaires sent to RBM representatives. However, knowing what RBMs have the right to do, and what they are not entitled to do, is far from being irrelevant, because the existence of a right is the first step for any discussion about its implementation.

In relation to spiritual assistance in prison, the international standards affirm that inmates have the right to receive assistance from a representative of their RBM, according to Rule 65 of the Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (so-called *Nelson Mandela Rules*: United Nations Office on Drugs and

Crime 2015, 19–20) and to Recommendation Rec(2006)2 of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe to member states on the European Prison Rules (Committee of Ministers, Council of Europe 2006, no. 29). This entails that these representatives are entitled to visit the prison institutions to respond to inmates’ requests.

However, in some countries a few RBMs enjoy a different right, the right to have a chaplain, i.e. a person professionally devoted to assist inmates. The chaplain can access the prison independently from an inmate’s request, and in some cases is paid by the prison or other State institutions. The same difference emerges in relation to worship places. The international standards require that prisons provide suitable spaces for religious services (Committee of Ministers, Council of Europe 2006, no. 29.2), but some RBMs have the right to have their own chapel, that is a space for their permanent and exclusive use. In both cases, the first solution corresponds to the international standards (score 0), the second exceeds them in that it facilitates inmates who wish to receive spiritual assistance (score 1).

The following table concerns the State respect and promotion of RBM rights. It answers the question: concerning spiritual assistance in prisons, in which States the rights of the RBM members are best protected and promoted?

Prisons Scores: 1=yes; 0=no. Percentage of RBMs that enjoy the right: 0.33: betw. 1 RBM and 1/3 of all RBMs; 0.66: betw. 1/ and 2/3 of RBMs; 1: more than 1/3 of RBMs. Red: below average; blue: above	Right to have a chaplain	Percentage of RBMs which are entitled to have a chaplain	Chaplain paid by State/prison (1)	Percentage of RBMs whose chaplains are paid by State/prison	Right to have a chapel	Percentage of RBMs which are entitled to have a chapel	Total	Average of each State	Average all States	Deviat. from average
Austria	1	0,66	0,5	0,33	0	0	2,49	0,4		0,01
Belgium	1	0,66	0,5	0,66	1	0,66	4,48	0,8		0,33
Estonia	1	0,66	0,5	0,66	0	0	2,82	0,5	0,42	0,05
France	1	0,66	0,5	0,66	0	0	2,82	0,5		0,05
Italy	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0		0,42

(1) The score is 0,50 because the right to receive financial support is less significant than the right to have a chaplain (see para 2)

The table shows that Belgium promotes the RBM rights in this field more than other countries: 5 RBMs (Protestant [both mainline and Evangelical], Orthodox, Jewish, Muslim, and Humanist minorities) are entitled to have a chaplain and a chapel. It also shows that in Italy these rights are under-respected: no RBM is entitled to have a chaplain or a chapel. In a middle position there are Austria, Estonia, and France: in these countries no RBM has the right to have a chapel but a significant number of RBMs enjoy the right to have a chaplain.

In the following table, data relating to the State respect and promotion of RBM rights are broken down by reference to each RBM. The table answers the question: which RBMs enjoy the best protection and promotion of their rights in these countries?

Prisons (1=yes; 0=no) Green: major. relig. organ.; red: below average; blue: above average	Austria						Belgium						Estonia (2)								
	Right to have chaplain	Chaplain paid by State/prison (1)	Right to have a chapel	Total	Average of each RBM	Average of RBMs	Deviat. from average	Right to have chaplain	Chaplain paid by State/prison	Right to have a chapel	Total	Average of each RBM	Average of RBMs	Deviat. from average	Right to have chaplain	Chaplain paid by State/prison	Right to have a chapel	Total	Average of each RBM	Average of RBMs	Deviat. from average
Adventist Church	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.22	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.38	1	0.5	0	1.5	0.5	0.5	0.14
Catholic Church	1	0.5	0	1.5	0.5	0.77	1	0.5	1	2.5	0.83	1.35	1	0.5	0	1.5	0.5	0.5	0.14		
Islamic commun.	1	0.5	0	1.5	0.5	0.28	1	0.5	1	2.5	0.83	0.45	1	0.5	0	1.5	0.5	0.5	0.14		
Jehovah's Witnesses	1	0	0	1	0.33	0.11	0	0	0	0	0	0.38	1	0.5	0	1.5	0.5	0.5	0.14		
Jewish commun.	1	0	0	1	0.33	0.11	1	0.5	1	2.5	0.83	0.45	1	0.5	0	1.5	0.5	0.5	0.14		
Mormons	1	0	0	1	0.33	0.11	0	0	0	0	0	0.38	1	0.5	0	1.5	0.5	0.5	0.14		
Orthodox Churches	1	0	0	1	0.33	0.11	1	0.5	1	2.5	0.83	0.45	1	0.5	0	1.5	0.5	0.5	0.14		
Protestant (Evang.)	1	0.5	0	1.5	0.5	0.28	1	0.5	1	2.5	0.83	0.45	1	0.5	0	1.5	0.5	0.5	0.14		
Protestant (mainl.)	1	0.5	0	1.5	0.5	0.28	1	0.5	1	2.5	0.83	0.45	1	0.5	0	1.5	0.5	0.5	0.14		
Scientology	0	0	0	0	0	0.22	0	0	0	0	0	0.38	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.36		
Hindu commun.	0	0	0	0	0	0.22	0	0	0	0	0	0.38	1	0.5	0	1.5	0.5	0.5	0.14		
Sikh commun.	0	0	0	0	0	0.22	0	0	0	0	0	0.38	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.36		
Buddhist commun.	1	0	0	1	0	0.22	0	0	0	0	0	0.38	1	0.5	0	1.5	0	0	0.36		
Belieforganiz.	0	0	0	0	0	0.22	1	0.5	1	2.5	0.83	0.45	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.36		

(1) Protestant and Muslim chaplains receive less money than Catholic chaplains. (2) In Estonia there is no majority religious organization.

Prisons (1=yes; 0=no) Green: major. relig. organ.; red: below average; blue: above average	France						Italy										
	Right to have chaplain	Chaplain paid by State/prison	Right to have a chapel	Total	Average of each RBM	Average of RBMs	Deviat. from average	Right to have chaplain	Chaplain paid by State/prison	Right to have a chapel	Total	Average of each RBM	Average of RBMs	Deviat. from average			
Adventist Church	1	0.5	0	1.5	0.5	0.13	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0			
Catholic Church	1	0.5	0	1.5	0.5	0.39	1	0.5	1	2.5	0.83	0.39	0	0	0	0	0
Islamic commun.	1	0.5	0	1.5	0.5	0.13	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0			
Jehovah's Witnesses	1	0	0	1	0.33	0.04	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0			
Jewish commun.	1	0.5	0	1.5	0.5	0.13	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0			
Mormons	1	0	0	1	0.33	0.04	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0			
Orthodox Churches	1	0.5	0	1.5	0.5	0.13	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0			
Protestant (Evang.)	1	0.5	0	1.5	0.5	0.13	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0			
Protestant (mainl.)	1	0.5	0	1.5	0.5	0.13	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0			
Scientology	0	0	0	0	0	0.37	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0			
Hindu commun.	1	0	0	1	0.33	0.04	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0			
Sikh commun.	1	0	0	1	0.33	0.04	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0			
Buddhist commun.	1	0.5	0	1.5	0.5	0.13	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0			
Belieforganiz.	0	0	0	0	0	0.37	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0			

These data show that there is a group of RBMs (Catholic [with reference to Estonia: in the other countries the Catholic Church is the majority religious organization], Islamic, Jewish, Orthodox and Protestant [both mainline and Evangelical] communities) whose rights are better protected than the rights of other groups, including Adventist, Jehovah's Witnesses, Scientology, miscellaneous belief organizations, Mormon, Hindu, Sikh, and Buddhist communities.

The number of members of each religious organisation certainly has something to do with this division, but alone is not enough to explain it (in many countries, Jews are fewer than Jehovah's Witnesses and yet enjoy a better legal status). In most cases, differences between the rights enjoyed by RBMs can be explained only through a contextual analysis that takes into account the historical and cultural specificities of each country on the one hand and, on the other, how long a religious organization has been active in the country and how controversial its doctrines and practices are.

Finally, another set of interesting information is provided by the Atlas data concerning the distance between the rights enjoyed by RBMs and by the majority religious organizations. In four of the five countries taken into consideration, the Catholic Church is the majority organization, but the gap between majority and minority religious organizations is very different in each of them: very high in Italy (2,5), much lower in Austria (0.36) and Belgium (0.40), in a middle position in France (1.12).

Prisons	RBM Average	Religious majority (Catholic Church) average	Difference	Coefficient	Gap
Austria	0,41	0,77	0,36	0,66	0,23
Belgium	0,75	1,35	0,4	0,66	0,26
Estonia (1)	//	//	//	//	//
France	0,38	1,5	1,12	0,66	0,74
Italy	0	2,5	2,5	0,33	0,82
(1) In Estonia there is no religious majority					

The Jehovah's Witnesses

What can we learn from the Atlas about the rights of a specific RBM such as the Jehovah's Witnesses? A few indications have already been provided by the second table, but they concern a very specific subject, spiritual assistance in prisons. A broader test is provided by the analysis of the data related to RBM registration, which has a decisive impact on the allocation of rights RBMs enjoy in all fields of their activity.

The legal systems of the EU countries do not follow the same pattern, but all of them entail three, or in some cases four, different levels of rights. At the top are the religious organizations regulated by special laws or agreements with the State. This is the level at which the majority religious organizations, and some of the most important RBMs, are placed, and is also the level that ensures more rights for the religious organizations in the field of teaching religion in public schools, religious assistance in prisons, hospitals and armed forces, celebration of marriages, State funding of religious activities, and so on. Jehovah's Witnesses are never included in this group of religious organizations.

In the intermediate position are the organizations that are registered as religious entities. In some countries, they are further divided into two groups: this is the case of Austria, where registered religious organizations may have public law or private law status, Romania, where they are divided into “religious denominations” and “religious associations,” and Spain, where a difference has been introduced between registered religious organizations that are “deeply rooted” in the country (i.e. provided with “notorio arraigo”) and all the others (in the following table the two levels are indicated as registration/recognition “type A” or “type B”). This intermediate level is where Jehovah’s Witnesses are most frequently placed.

Finally, there is a last and lowest level, where religious organizations are registered as civil law entities, on equal footing with non-profit organizations that do not pursue religious goals. The religious organizations that are placed at this level enjoy the least number of rights. This is the level where the Church of Scientology is almost always located, together with those religious groups, such as Sikhs, which are too small to obtain State recognition as religious organizations. At this lowest level, Jehovah’s Witnesses are almost never represented.

As far as registration is concerned, international standards require that States “grant upon their request to communities of believers, practicing or prepared to practice their faith within the constitutional framework of their states, recognition of the status provided for them in their respective countries” (OSCE 1989, no. 16.3). In other words, States should grant religious organizations the right to obtain legal personality, as this right “is one of the most important aspects of freedom of religion, without which that freedom would be meaningless” (European Court of Human Rights 2020, no. 155). Therefore the minimum standard is represented by the registration as civil law entity (score 0); above this threshold, we enter the area of promotion of RBM rights with scores that go from 0.33 to 1, depending on the recognition level.

Registr./recogn. tA3:R17through special laws or agreements: 1; registr./recogn. as religious organization: 0.50 (type A: 0.66; type B: 0.33); registr./recogn. as civil law organization: 0	Austria	Belgium	Estonia	Finland	France	Greece	Hungary	Italy	Poland	Romania	Spain	Sweden	Total	Average of each RBM	Average of RBMs	Deviation from average
Adventist Church	0,33	1	0,5	0,5	0,5	0,5	0,5	0,5	1	1	0,66	1	0,5	7,99	0,61	0,13
Catholic Church	1	1	0,5	0,5	0,5	0,5	1	1	1	0,66	1	0,5	9,82	0,75	0,27	
Islamic commun.	1	1	0,5	0,5	0,5	0	0,5	0,5	1	0,66	1	0,5	7,66	0,59	0,11	
Jehovah's Witnesses	0,66	0	0,5	0,5	0,5	0,5	0,5	0,5	0,5	0,66	0,66	0,5	5,98	0,46	-0,02	
Jewish commun.	1	1	0,5	0,5	0,5	1	1	1	1	0,66	1	0,5	9,66	0,74	0,26	
Mormons	0,66	0	0,5	0,5	0,5	0,5	0,5	1	0,5	0	0,66	0	5,32	0,41	-0,05	
Orthodox Churches	1	1	0,5	1	0,5	1	1	1	1	0,66	1	0,5	10,16	0,78	0,3	
Protestant (Evang.) Churches	1	1	0,5	0,5	0,5	0,5	1	1	1	0,66	1	0,5	9,16	0,7	0,22	
Protestant (mainl.) Churches	1	1	0,5	1	0,5	0,5	1	1	1	0,66	1	1	10,16	0,78	0,3	
Scientology	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0,33	0,5	0,83	0,06	-0,42	
Hindu commun.	0,33	0	0	0,5	0,5	0	0,5	1	0	0	0,33	0,5	3,66	0,28	-0,2	
Sikh commun.	0	0	0	0,5	0,5	0	0	0	0	0	0,33	0	1,33	0,1	-0,38	
Buddhist commun.	0,66	0	0,5	0,5	0,5	0	0	1	0,5	0	0,66	0,5	4,82	0,37	-0,11	
	0	1	0,5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1,5	0,11	-0,37	

The examination of this last group of data confirms the picture emerging from the previous tables. Jehovah’s Witnesses are never at the top of the pyramid of religious organizations, but are almost never at the lowest level either. They are just a little below the average, a little better than Mormons and a little worse than Adventists (the two religious minorities that are more easily comparable with Jehovah’s Witnesses because of their history, origin, and numerical consistency).

The table shows that their legal status is firmly placed in the mid-level, comprised of the religious organizations to which EU States guarantee the right to freely carry out their activities and grant a limited form of promotion or support.

In conclusion, the data concerning Jehovah’s Witnesses suggest that a process of “normalization” of their legal status is well on its way in the 12 countries that have been taken into consideration in this research. For a long time, Jehovah’s Witnesses have been marginalized and discriminated against all over Europe, and still today they are kept in an inferior legal position compared to other religious groups (in Italy, for example, they did not succeed to obtain an agreement [Intesa] with the State, something that the Adventist, Mormon, and Hindu communities were able to do).

Now, things are changing. In Europe, the rights of a religious minority often depend on the combination of three elements: the number of the religious minority members, the number of years it has been active in a country, and how much its principles and practices are compatible with the convictions of the majority of citizens. The rejection of military service and blood transfusions have for a long time prevented Jehovah’s Witnesses from obtaining the same rights recognized to religious groups that are comparable to them in terms of number of members and years of presence in a country. The data collected through the Atlas questionnaires

show that today the rights enjoyed by Jehovah's Witnesses are not too far from those granted to Mormons and Adventists, i.e. to two religious groups whose principles and practices have met less social hostility in European countries.

It would be interesting to discuss whether the normalization of the Jehovah's Witnesses' situation in the EU countries has been somehow accelerated by the persecution they are suffering in Russia. The Russian events may have played a role; however, they are not the central component of the process, which started much earlier, already since the landmark decision of the European Court of Human Rights in the *Kokkinakis* case (European Court of Human Rights 1993). It was the European Court case-law that played a decisive role in the normalization of the situation of Jehovah's Witnesses, and this gives hope for the future of other discriminated religious minorities.

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