

Polish court rules that ritual slaughter is unconstitutional and illegal

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Poland's highest court, the Constitutional Tribunal, ruled this week that the ritual slaughter of animals by religious groups violates the country's constitution and animal protection laws.

The ruling contradicts EU regulations that allow ritual slaughter on the grounds of religious freedom.

The Constitutional Tribunal said regulations allowing for animals to be bled to death without being pre-stunned are against Polish law. It also said that in issuing regulations that allow for such practices, the agriculture minister exceeded his powers and violated the constitution.

An EU law goes into effect on 1 January 2013 allowing ritual slaughter. However, the new regulation ((EC) 1099/2009) does permit member states to adopt new stricter national rules with regard to non-stun slaughter.

In a similar dispute in the Netherlands, the lower house of parliament approved a ban last year.

Animal rights groups and a large anti-Islam political party – and a majority of Dutch voters – supported the bill. But after an outcry that the ban would violate religious freedoms, support evaporated when the bill was sent to the upper house.

The UK Government consulted on the issue in the autumn, and new domestic regulations to implement and enforce the European Council regulation are expected soon. The Government has said it would prefer all animals to be stunned before slaughter, but supports the exemption as it "recognises the preferences of the Jewish and Muslim communities and accepts the importance which they attach to the right to slaughter animals for food in accordance with their beliefs".

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