

Poland votes to keep ban on religious slaughter

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Despite pressure from religious groups and farmers, the Polish parliament has rejected a Government bill that would have lifted the ban on ritual slaughter of animals without pre-stunning. A religious exception to the rule was in place until January when it was overturned by a decision of the constitutional court.

The Government warned that the ban would have a drastic financial effect on the farming and meat industry, which drew large profits from exports of kosher and halal meat to Israel and the Middle East. It was these consideration that prompted the new proposals. Despite the country's dire economic state, the bill was rejected by 222 votes to 178 last Friday.

Large-scale protests on both sides of the debate were held in front of the Parliament building when the vote was taken. On one side were animal rights activists who argue the practice of ritual slaughter — which involves cutting the animal's throat while it is conscious and letting it bleed to death — is cruel, on the other side were the farmers who claimed their livelihoods were in danger.

Religious leaders were critical of the decision with Poland's chief rabbi claiming it infringed "the basic rights of the country's Jewish and Muslim populations, which will henceforth be forced to either buy more expensive imported meat, or endorse an enforced vegetarianism."

Despite the hundreds of millions of pounds it will cost the economy and the estimated loss of 6,000 jobs, the government says it will not try to bring the bill back to parliament.

The matter is likely now to be fought over in court. Already the Constitutional Tribunal has been asked to rule on whether the ban violates freedom of religion.

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