

EU Agrees to Penalties for Racism and Xenophobia (Fear and Contempt of Foreigners)

by Fabrice Randoux Thu Apr 19, 4:59 PM ET

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Note from Pastor Kevin Lea: For the past couple years, we have been getting stories out of Europe about pastors and Christians being arrested, fined or otherwise persecuted because they violated "hate crime" legislation when they uncompromisingly spoke the word of God. This new law is going to make it illegal to even give a gospel tract to someone. Why is a gospel tract so dangerous? Because it might incite them because they are being told they need to turn away from their sin or "religion" in order to be saved by Jesus.

Many American legislators on the National and State level are trying to implement these same kind of laws in America. The Bible teaches that in the last days there will be a great falling away from the faith as the deceptive power of Satan prepares the nations to accept the Antichrist as the world ruler. Therefore, I believe that what we are seeing in Europe WILL soon come to America and true Christians need to prepare their hearts for the persecution that it will entail.

The European Union on Thursday made inciting racism and xenophobia crimes throughout its 27 member states in a landmark decision tempered by caveats to appease free speech concerns. The new deal specifies one- to three-year prison terms be available for incitement to violence or hatred "against a group of persons or a member of such a group defined by reference to race, colour, religion, descent or national or ethnic origin".

That could include the sending of "tracts, pictures or other material." The deal, reached by EU justice ministers in Luxembourg, display's "Europe's "common moral values", EU Justice Commissioner Franco Frattini told reporters.

It comes after almost six years of wrangling and falls short of Germany's ambitions of specifically outlawing Holocaust denial. The text also notes that "member states may choose to punish only conduct which is either carried out in a manner likely to disturb public order or which is threatening, abusive or insulting." German Justice Minister Brigitte Zypries nonetheless

hailed the decision as "an important political signal" following failures in 2003 and 2005 to reach such a deal.

Germany had wanted to outlaw the denial of the murder of six million Jews by the Nazis and their collaborators during World War II before its six-month term at the helm of the EU runs out at the end of June. Holocaust denial was made a crime in Germany in 1985 and the use of Nazi insignia is forbidden.

Building on the most recent attempt, spearheaded by Luxembourg in 2005, the measure has consistently run up against the problems that it might pose for free speech. To make the text acceptable to Britain, Ireland and the Scandinavian states -- particularly concerned about curbs to their freedoms of expression -- Holocaust denial will only qualify under the EU-wide rules if it is deemed likely to incite hatred.

It is covered in a clause that states that the penalties will also apply to "publicly, condoning, denying or grossly trivialising crimes of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes," as defined by the International Criminal Court and the post-World War II Nuremberg trials. The wording could also apply to crimes against humanity perpetrated in Srebrenica, Rwanda and elsewhere.

The EU sentencing framework can of course be higher under national rules and Holocaust denial is already specifically targeted by laws in Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Poland and Romania. "Attempts to harmonise EU laws on hate crimes are both illiberal and nonsensical," European Liberal Democrat Leader Graham Watson said in a statement summing up the British opposition.

"The proposed list risks opening the floodgates on a plethora of historical controversies -- like the crimes of the Stalinist regime or the alleged Armenian genocide -- whose inclusion could pose a grave threat to freedom of speech. The EU has no business legislating on history," he added.

"The text is in a sense more symbolic and political than judicial," said a French diplomat while stressing "the importance of having the EU 27 on the same platform against racism".

Debate on the measure lasted several hours, largely due to the Baltic states wish to include Stalinist crimes in the text. That idea was rejected by the other EU members who argued that such crimes were not principally racist.

In a compromise move, the EU member states also adopted a declaration deploring all crimes committed by totalitarian regimes. After the new rules are adopted, member states will have two years to comply with the decision.

The Baltic states -- Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia -- indicated that their parliament would first have to agree to the text. *Agence France Presse*