



European Union for Progressive Judaism

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NEW LAW IN AUSTRIA DISCRIMINATES AGAINST PROGRESSIVE JEWS A CALL TO ACTION

Write to the Minister of Education

Your letter could be like this example - you can copy and paste it, but feel free to personalize it. A letter sent by physical mail is best, but an e-mail will also do. We thank Rabbi Dr Walter Homolka who has taken the lead in this campaign and formulated the presidential message and the letter below.

Federal Minister Dr. Claudia Schmied
BMUKK - Federal Ministry for Education, Arts and Culture
Minoritenplatz 5
1014 Vienna, Austria
claudia.schmied@bmukk.gv.at

INSERT DATE

Re: Recognition of a Jewish Liberal
"Kultusgemeinde"

Dear Minister Dr. Schmied,

I would like to write to you in support of our community in Vienna, the Progressive Jewish congregation Or Chadasch, and their application for recognition as a Kultusgemeinde under public charter.

The new Israelitengesetz as passed in the Nationalrat on April 19 discriminates against Progressive Judaism, the largest Jewish denomination worldwide.

As you are surely aware an application for a Jewish Liberal Kultusgemeinde under the Israelitengesetz of 1890 was submitted to the Kultusamt in March. Since the newly passed Israelitengesetz takes away the right to apply for a Kultusgemeinde with the Ministry, I strongly urge you to approve the application under the current law.

I express my hope that Progressive Judaism as an authoritative and authentic interpretation of the Jewish religion will receive the same legal status as orthodox forms of Judaism.

Yours sincerely,

Dear Friends,

Austria has passed a law on April 19 that extends a variety of rights to Orthodox Judaism but does not extend the same rights to Progressive Judaism. We at the European Union for Progressive Judaism (and at the World Union for Progressive Judaism) and in Austria have done much to prevent the law from being passed. Alas, to no avail. Therefore, it is time to start interventions so that Or Chadasch, the Progressive Jewish Community in Vienna, is given public charter status before the new law turns over this right from the government to the new self-regulating Jewish community body which is dominated by the Orthodox. Based on our past experience, they will have no interest in following a pluralistic approach to Jewish religious matters.

Therefore, we are asking you to write a personal note of support for the establishment of a publicly chartered Liberal "Kultusgemeinde" to Dr. Claudia Schmied, the relevant Minister of Education in Vienna. **Time is of the essence.** We need to make an impact before the legal changes take effect in approximately two weeks' time.

One of the many problems that we would face is that the Orthodox dominated "Religionengesellschaft" could discriminate against the halakhic decisions by our rabbis, especially our women rabbis. It cannot be the sole right of the Orthodox to decide "who is a Jew". And it is not the function of the government to place this definition into the hands of one Jewish denomination only.

Several of you have already extended a helping hand. We thank you. **Our urgent request is that all of us** air their concern and write to the Minister of Education in Austria, Dr. Claudia Schmied. If you could send a copy of this letter to the ambassador of Austria in your country or the closest consulate, this would give added strength.

Please remember: any loss of status and stature in any of our countries might eventually harm all of us. It is essential to fight the attempt in Austria to make Orthodoxy the only authentic form of Judaism according the public charter of the government. We have to fight such situations with all our strength.

Sincerely,

Leslie Bergman, President of EUPJ

Dr. Theodor Much, President of Or Chadasch

We are a Progressive Jewish congregation, founded in 1991 and affiliated with the European Union for Progressive Judaism, part of the World Union of Progressive Judaism. We emphasize worship, social action, charity, and study, providing a basis upon which to make informed choices that are the hallmark of Progressive Judaism. We worship, seek God, and celebrate our Jewish heritage in an egalitarian and inclusive atmosphere. We are a diverse congregation. Our egalitarian sabbath service followed by oneg shabbat is held every Friday in the second district of Vienna, Robertgasse 2 at 7 pm.



Rabbi Dr. Walter Rothschild of Or Chadasch, Vienna

What do Progressive Jews believe? What do Progressive Jews do? If anyone were to attempt to answer these two questions authoritatively for all Progressive Jews, that person's answer would have to be false. Why? Because one of the guiding principles of Progressive Judaism is the autonomy of the individual. As a Progressive Jew, one has the right to decide whether one can subscribe to this particular belief or to that particular practice. But there is a historic body of beliefs and practices that is recognized as Jewish. We Jews have survived centuries of exile and persecution as well as centuries of unparalleled spiritual and intellectual creativity because we have always thought of ourselves as a people created "in the image of God," dedicated to tikkun olam—the improvement of the world. And the particular beliefs and practices that have traditionally identified us as Jews have enabled us not only to survive creatively but also to connect with the God "who has kept us alive, sustained us, and enabled us to reach this moment."

We Progressive Jews are heirs to this vast body of beliefs and practices. We differ from more ritually observant Jews because we recognize that our sacred heritage has evolved and adapted over the centuries and that it must continue to do so. And we also recognize that if Judaism were not capable of evolution, of reform, it could not survive.

Progressive Judaism accepts and, in fact, encourages pluralism. Judaism has never demanded uniformity of belief or practice. But we must never forget that whether we are Reform, Progressive, Conservative, Reconstructionist, Modern Orthodox, or Ultra-Orthodox, we are all an essential part of K'lal Yisrael—the worldwide community of Jewry. All Jews have an obligation to study the traditions that have been entrusted to us and to observe those mitzvot—those sacred and time-hallowed acts—that have meaning for us today and that can ennoble our lives, as well as those of our families and communities.

It is our mitzvot that put us in touch with Abraham and Sarah; with Moses, Hillel, and the Jews of fifth-century Babylonia, twelfth-century Spain, and eighteenth-century Poland, and with the Jews of the twenty-first-century in Israel and the Diaspora.



Rabbi Professor Dr. Walter Homolka
Rector, Abraham Geiger College, Potsdam
Honorary Rabbi of Or Chadasch, Vienna

Support Progressive Judaism now

Foreign letters are of the essence, and the window of opportunity to make an impact and help Or Chadasch is open for perhaps another 10 – 14 days. The law has passed the 1st chamber of parliament already, and the second chamber will pass it or delay it this week. Then, we can only delay it at the President's office to come to an agreement. We are working day and night on the issue. But we need your European support. The sooner the better.

Rabbi Walter Homolka