Yet another country has enacted a law that will greatly burden its Jewish citizens. The country is Greece and the law pertains to *shechita*, the Jewish ritual method of slaughtering animals and poultry for food.

Last December, the European Court of Justice ruled that EU member countries are not precluded “from imposing an obligation to stun animals prior to killing which also applies in the case of slaughter prescribed by religious rites.”

*Shechita* involves the swift severing of the trachea, esophagus and major blood vessels in the neck, and must be done to a live, physically uncompromised animal. Pre-slaughter “stunning,” purported to be a humane practice, involves either gassing, administering a strong electric shock or shooting an iron bolt into an animal’s skull -- intended to render the animal senseless. When performed before *shechita* (or, according to some Muslim authorities, before *dhabīḥah*, the essentially identical Islamic counterpart of *shechita*), such stunning renders the animal non-kosher (or non-halal).

Ironically, the EU court’s move came on the heels of the political union’s release of a 46-page document titled “EU Strategy on Combating Antisemitism and Fostering Jewish Life (2021-2030),” which, amid other measures, reiterated the union’s recommendation of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance’s definition of antisemitism in education and teacher training.

Significantly, though, despite the “Fostering Jewish Life” part of the document’s title, the paper made no mention at all of *shechita* bans, one of the most important bars to allowing Jewish communities to exist, much less thrive.

Several EU countries -- Denmark, Sweden, Finland, Estonia, Slovenia -- and some Belgian regions require stunning animals before slaughter. (Holland and Poland had imposed such bans but reversed them on the grounds of religious freedom; Poland retains its ban for meat intended for export).

And now, Greece has joined the club.

There are only a few thousand Jews living in Greece today, but depriving them of kosher meat has the potential to decimate even that small population. And it will certainly dishearten those Jews, and make them feel that their religious needs are unimportant to their government.

Which is arguably true. Western European countries, despite their sensitivity to animal welfare, have had no restrictions on *shechita* since the end of World War II. (During the war, Germany and all the countries under Nazi occupation banned *shechita* entirely.) They recognize the importance of “ritual slaughter” to their Jewish and Muslim communities, and value religious rights.

As does our own country, which not only permits *shechita* but has actually codified the fact of its humane nature in federal law. The Humane Methods of Livestock Slaughter Act of 1978 not only permits *shechita* but also states explicitly that it is a humane method of slaughter.

And humane it is. Judaism forbids causing animals gratuitous pain.

*Shechita* immediately deprives the brain of blood, effectively rendering the animal unconscious. An article, “Physiological Insights into Shechita,” published in the British, peer-reviewed *Veterinary Record* on June 12, 2004, concludes that “after a review of the physiological issues involved and the experimental data, it is submitted that *shechita* is a painless and effective method by which to... dispatch an animal in one rapid act.”

And the famed animal handling expert Dr. Temple Grandin wrote of *shechita* that “the animals don’t even feel the super-sharp blade as it touches their skin. They made no attempt to pull away.”

And so, the enactment of pre-stunning requirements is not only onerous to Jews who observe kosher laws, it is scientifically unwarranted.

In the wake of the recent Greek Supreme Court ruling, the chairman of the European Jewish Association (EJA), a Brussels-based group representing hundreds of communities across Europe, noted how some of the same countries that have pledged to protect their Jewish communities from antisemitism have no problem depriving those communities of kosher meat. Laws and decisions like the Greek one, he said, constitute “rank hypocrisy.”

Pascale Falek, a European Commission official who was involved in promoting the “EU Strategy on Combating Antisemitism and Fostering Jewish Life” paper, said that she can “understand” Jewish concerns and that “the European Commission and the European Union as a whole need to find a balance between freedom of worship” and other concerns, including animal welfare.

That balance, though, is not a difficult one to strike, as the laws of England, Spain, Germany, Canada, Mexico and other countries, among them the United States, evidence. Because there is simply no challenge to animal welfare posed by the practice of *shechita*.

What is undeniably challenged, though, is Jewish life, by the imposition of rules that are unnecessary and that inevitably result in preventing law-abiding citizens, by simple virtue of their practice of their faith, from living normal lives.

And being prejudicially and unjustifiably portrayed as less concerned than their fellow citizens with animal suffering.