

WRITTEN QUESTION E-1808/09

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to the Commission

Subject: Religious freedom in Russia

Last week Rabbi Yisroel Silberstein was expelled from Russia.

The reason for the court's decision to expel him and bar him from returning for a five-year period was a minor error in his visa application, in which Rabbi Silberstein described the reason for his visit as 'cultural' rather than 'religious'.

This is the latest in a long line of similar cases in recent years. In 2005, Rabbi Menachem Raskin was forced to leave Russia because of problems with local authorities. In 2003, Rabbi Elyashuv Kaplun was deported from Rostov-on-Don after being charged with overstaying a business visa. In 2005, officials prevented head Orthodox Rabbi, Pinchas Goldschmidt, from entering Russian territory.

This is yet another case of breach of religious freedom in the Russian Federation to the detriment of religious communities belonging to faiths other than the Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate.

What measures will the Commission take to deal with this matter?

Will this situation affect the negotiations on the new partnership and cooperation agreement between the European Union and Russia?