

Circumcision row hits Austria as doctors advise against it even on religious grounds

A row over circumcision has spread to Austria from Germany after a state governor advised doctors against performing the procedure, even when it is on religious grounds.

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Markus Wallner, centre-right state premier of Vorarlberg, said the instructions followed a controversial June ruling by a court in the German city of Cologne that equated circumcision of young boys with grievous bodily harm.

That verdict provoked uproar from religious and political leaders in Israel as well as Muslim countries, with Chancellor Angela Merkel reportedly saying it risked making Germany a "laughing stock".

Wallner's move meanwhile was slammed as an "attack on religious freedom" by Fuat Sanac, head of the Islamic Community of Austria (IGGiOe), according to comments due to be published in Wednesday's Der Standard daily.

The move "is not worthy of Austria", Sanac said, calling circumcision "a tradition going back thousands of years". Oskar Deutsch, the head of Vienna's Jewish Community, said that the practice was "protected by the constitution".

A spokesman for the centre-left Social Democrats - in a coalition at national level with Wallner's Austrian People's Party - accused the state premier of "giving in to populism".

In Graz, the capital of the southeastern state of Styria, the children's hospital has decided not to carry out any more circumcisions that have not already been scheduled.

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