



[Home](#) » [Under Secretary for Democracy and Global Affairs](#) » [Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor](#) » [Releases](#) » [International Religious Freedom](#) » [July-December, 2010 International Religious Freedom Report](#) » [Europe and Eurasia](#) » Romania

Romania

BUREAU OF DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND LABOR

July-December, 2010 International Religious Freedom Report

Report

September 13, 2011

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom and, in practice, the government generally enforced these protections.

The government generally respected religious freedom in law and in practice. There was no major change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the government during the reporting period. The government continued to differentiate between recognized and unrecognized religious groups, and registration and recognition requirements continued to pose obstacles to minority religious groups. Restitution of Greek Catholic properties seized by the communist-era government and transferred to the Romanian Orthodox Church remained a problem; however, the Romanian Orthodox Church invited the Greek Catholic Church to resume dialogue.

There were reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. There were cases in which some Romanian Orthodox clergy showed hostility toward non-Orthodox church members and criticized missionary activity.

The U.S. government discusses religious freedom with the government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 91,699 square miles and a population of 21.4 million. According to the 2002 census, Orthodox believers (including the Orthodox Serb Bishopric of Timisoara) constitute 86.8 percent of the population, Roman Catholics 4.7 percent, and Greek Catholics less than 1 percent. While the government stated the census results are accurate, the Greek Catholic Church claimed the official census undercounted its church membership and estimated its adherents constitute 3.6 percent of the population. The following religious groups are also present in the country: Old Rite Russian Christian (Orthodox) Church, Protestant Reformed Church, Christian Evangelical Church, Romanian Evangelical Church, Evangelical Augustinian Church, Lutheran Evangelical Church, Unitarian Church of Romania, Baptist Church, Apostolic Church of God (Pentecostal Church), Seventh-day Adventist Church, Armenian Church, Judaism, Islam, Jehovah's

Witnesses, The Bahai Faith, the Family (God's Children), The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), the Unification Church, the Methodist Church, the Presbyterian Church, Transcendental Meditation, Society for Krishna Consciousness, and Zen Buddhism.

Most religious groups are dispersed throughout the country, although a few religious communities are concentrated in particular regions. Old Rite members are located in Moldavia and Dobrogea. Most Muslims are located in the southeastern part of the country. Most Greek Catholics reside in Transylvania, but there are also Greek Catholics in Bucharest and in the Banat and Crisana regions. Protestant and Catholic believers tend to reside in Transylvania, but many also are located around Bacau. Orthodox and Greek Catholic ethnic Ukrainians live mostly in the northwestern part of the country. Orthodox ethnic Serbs are primarily in Banat. Armenians are concentrated in Moldavia and the south. Members of the Protestant Reformed, Roman Catholic, Unitarian, and Lutheran churches from Transylvania are virtually all ethnic Hungarians. Approximately half of the country's Jewish population lives in Bucharest, while the other half is dispersed across the country.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

Please refer to Appendix C in the *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices* for the status of the government's acceptance of international legal standards <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2010/appendices/index.htm>.

The constitution and other laws and policies protect religious freedom and, in practice, the government generally enforced these protections. The government, however, continued to differentiate between recognized and unrecognized religious groups, and registration and recognition requirements continued to pose obstacles to minority religious groups.

Under the law, the government implemented a three-tier system of recognition: grupari religioase (religious groups that are not legal entities), religious associations, and religions.

Grupari religioase, as defined by the law, are groups of persons who share the same beliefs but do not receive tax exemptions or support from the state. Since the 2006 religion law became effective, 15 religious groups received approval from the State Secretariat for Religious Affairs to register as religious associations, one of which was approved during the reporting period.

Religious associations are legal entities that do not receive government funding, must be registered as such in a religious association registry, and receive only limited tax exemptions. This section of the religion law has engendered some confusion, since it confers tax exemptions "according to the fiscal code." However, the fiscal code does not address the issue of tax exemptions for religious associations. Unrecognized groups are not permitted to engage in profit-making activities. To register, religious associations must have 300 citizen members and must submit members' personal data, while the membership requirement for registration of any other type of association is three members. Religious associations were entitled to receive religion status if they have 12 years of continuous religious activity in the country and a minimum membership of 0.1 percent of the population (approximately 22,000 persons).

The law recognizes 18 religions: the Romanian Orthodox Church, Orthodox Serb Bishopric of Timisoara, Roman Catholic Church, Greek Catholic Church, Old Rite Russian Christian (Orthodox) Church, Reformed (Protestant) Church, Christian Evangelical Church, Romanian Evangelical Church, Evangelical Augustinian Church, Lutheran Evangelical Church, Unitarian Church, Baptist Church, Pentecostal Church, Seventh-day Adventist Church, Armenian Church, Judaism, Islam, and Jehovah's Witnesses. Religious groups recognized as religions under the law were eligible for state support according to their representation in the census. Additionally, they have the right to establish schools, teach religion classes in public schools where they have a sufficient number of adherents, receive government funds to build places of worship, partially

pay clergy salaries with state funds, broadcast religious programming on radio and television, apply for broadcasting licenses for denominational frequencies, have cemeteries, and enjoy tax-exempt status.

Under the religion law, the state-provided budget was determined by the number of adherents of each recognized religious community in the most recent census and "the religion's actual needs" (an ambiguous provision). The majority of these funds go to the Romanian Orthodox Church. Some minority religious groups, such as the Greek Catholics, claimed the census significantly undercounted members of their community.

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The law entitled religious communities to bury, without restriction, their believers in the cemeteries of other religious groups in localities where they do not have their own cemetery and there are no public cemeteries. Local permits are required to build places of worship, as is the case with secular buildings. Members of minority religious groups recognized as religions have complained that local authorities denied them permits to construct places of worship due to pressure from the Romanian Orthodox Church.

Ministry of Justice regulations provided for unrestricted access of recognized religions and religious associations to any type of detention facilities, even if their assistance was not specifically requested. The regulations also forbade any interference by the management of penitentiaries with religious programs and forbade the presence of management representatives at meetings between representatives of any religious group and prisoners. Distribution of religious publications was not subject to any restriction. Prison representatives in charge of religious assistance may not be priests or representatives of any religious community.

The law entitled recognized religious groups to have military clergy trained to render religious assistance to conscripts.

A 2006 law to combat anti-Semitism banned fascist, racist, and xenophobic organizations and included the persecution of Roma in addition to Jews in its definition of the Holocaust.

The government continued its efforts to address the recommendations of the International Commission on the Holocaust in Romania (Wiesel Commission) Report and promote Holocaust education in school curricula.

The government permitted, but does not require, religious instruction in public schools. Attendance in religion classes was optional. To be excused from religion classes, students must submit a request in writing. If their adherents constituted a certain proportion of the student population, the 18 recognized religions were entitled to hold religion classes in public schools. The law permitted instruction according to the religious affiliation of students' parents. The constitution and the 2006 religion law allow the establishment of confessional schools subsidized by the state.

The government observes the following religious holidays as national holidays: Christmas (December 25), Orthodox Easter, Pentecost Monday, and the Assumption of Mary (August 15). Members of other recognized religious groups that celebrate Easter on a different date are entitled by law to have an additional holiday.

The law provides for a long-stay visa for religious activities. Visa requirements include approval by the State Secretariat for Religious Affairs, submission of evidence that the applicants represent a religious organization legally established in the country, certification of medical insurance, and a criminal record review. The law provides for up to five years of visa extensions. There were penalties for any foreigner who stayed without a visa, but such penalties did not appear linked to religious activities.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The government generally respected religious freedom in law and in practice. There was no major change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the government during the reporting period.

An Orthodox religion textbook published in 2006 by the Ministry of Education with the coordination of the then and present state secretary for religious affairs continued to generate complaints and dissatisfaction among minority religious groups. The book described the emergence of the Greek Catholic Church in the 18th century as the result of "Catholic proselytizing" and described Jehovah's Witnesses, Bahais, and Mormons as sects "representing a genuine threat to society." A chapter in the religion textbook alleged that sects proselytized using such means as brainwashing, bribery, blackmail, and exploitation of the poor. While the government stated it had withdrawn the textbook, Jehovah's Witnesses and Bahais reported it was neither amended nor withdrawn during the reporting period. The National Antidiscrimination Council (CNCD) confirmed to the Bahais that the textbook had never been changed, and the Bahais decided to take legal action against the Ministry of Education and the state secretary in question.

Some minority religious groups continued to report that local authorities for unjustified reasons opposed granting them construction permits for places of worship. The Greek Catholic Church continued to complain that the local authorities consistently opposed granting them a construction permit for a new church in Sapinta (Maramures County) where the local parish bought land in 2003. The Baptist and Adventist churches reported similar cases in Bucharest and Bursuceni (Suceava County) respectively.

Few politicians sponsored bills and measures that would displease the Orthodox Church.

While local police and administrative authorities tended to be tolerant toward minority religious groups, members of these groups reported that sometimes these officials bowed to pressure and intimidation by Orthodox clergy. According to these minority religious groups, local officials did not take sufficient action to stop or prevent harassment by other groups.

The Greek Catholic Church complained state authorities did not adequately respond to their complaints regarding restitution of properties or about discriminatory attitudes by local officials.

In 2005 the law established the Property Fund to compensate claimants with shares of stock for properties that cannot be returned in kind. The law permits fines for local officials who hinder the restitution process. Franklin Templeton assumed the role of fund manager in September. However, the fund was not listed on the stock exchange by the end of the reporting period. A 2007 ordinance provided for cash payments in lieu of restitution of up to 500,000 lei (\$215,000) paid over a two-year period; however, in June the government suspended cash payments for two years.

Under the restitution law, church buildings used by public institutions, such as museums, schools, and hospitals, were to remain in tenants' hands for three or five years, depending on the function of the public institution; during this time they were to pay rent to the churches. The majority of church properties belong in this category. This law does not address the Greek Catholic churches confiscated under communist rule in 1948 and transferred to the Orthodox Church; a 2005 amendment stated the matter would be addressed in separate legislation, which was not adopted during the reporting period.

The law permits the Greek Catholic Church to resort to court action whenever the bilateral dialogue regarding the restitution of churches with the Orthodox Church fails. While the law enabled many restitution lawsuits to proceed, the law does not restitute properties to the Greek Catholic Church, and effective implementation of court decisions remained problematic. In July the Romanian Orthodox Church invited the Greek Catholic Church to resume the dialogue, which had stopped in 2004. In November the Greek Catholic Church replied to the invitation, expressing its openness to genuine dialogue and requesting that an agenda and methodology be agreed before the actual resumption of the talks. Talks had not begun at the end of the reporting period. Restitution of existing churches was an important matter to both denominations because residents were likely to attend the local church regardless of whether it was Greek Catholic or

Orthodox. This circumstance had financial consequences because the number of members of a church was directly linked to the corresponding share of the state budget allocated for recognized religious groups.

Courts delayed hearings on many lawsuits filed by the Greek Catholic Church, and the lawsuits were often impeded by appeals from the Orthodox Church, as well as by the transfer of the cases to different courts. In Sisesti (Maramures County), where a lawsuit over the former Greek Catholic church has lasted over 16 years, the High Court of Cassation and Justice returned the case to the lower court. The lawsuit was in progress at the end of the reporting period. Meanwhile, the Greek Catholic congregation continued to hold religious services in the open air, since the Orthodox Church refused the Greek Catholic proposal to hold alternate services in the building under dispute. Lengthy lawsuits continued to be in progress for churches in other counties.

The law provides for the restitution of all buildings that belonged to ethnic communities and that were confiscated between September 6, 1940, and December 22, 1989, including the period between 1940 and 1944, when the pro-Nazi government seized a large number of Jewish properties. As in the case of religious properties, buildings used for the "public interest" would remain in the hands of the present users for either three or five years, depending on the current use of the structure.

In many cases, religious minorities have not succeeded in regaining possession of properties confiscated under communist rule. Many properties returned to religious denominations contained government offices, schools, hospitals, or cultural institutions that require relocation, and lawsuits and protests by current occupants delayed restitution of the property to the rightful owners. Although some progress was made during the reporting period, the pace of restitution was extremely slow, and the large majority of religious property restitution cases remained unresolved. For example, full restitution of the Roman Catholic Bishop's palace in Oradea remained impeded by the slow pace of repair and construction work at the new location of the Tarii Crisurilor Museum, which had relocated only partially from the palace. In many cases, local authorities refused to transfer restituted properties in which they had a financial interest and challenged in court the decisions of the Special Restitution Commission (SRC). There were complaints that local authorities consistently delayed providing the SRC with information about the claimed properties, thereby obstructing the restitution process, despite fines for such delays stipulated in the law.

The SRC started its activity in 2003 and, by the end of the reporting period, had restituted to recognized religious groups 1,474 properties of a total of 14,814 applications. Since 2003 the SRC returned only 131 of the 6,723 properties other than churches that the Greek Catholic Church claimed under the restitution legislation. The church also received approximately 65 of the 80 properties that were restituted by government decree in 1992, but many of them only on paper. From 2003 to December 9, the SRC issued restitution decisions for 928 of the approximately 2,700 buildings claimed by Hungarian churches, rejecting 77; however, Hungarian churches did not regain physical possession of some of these approved properties. Of the 42 buildings returned to the Jewish community by government decrees in the 1990s, the community took partial or full possession of 41, with only one case still pending. After having received only a six-hectare plot in compensation for the a 51-hectare plot of land that the prefect of Iasi divided and distributed to other persons during previous reporting periods, the Jewish community continued discussions with the National Agency of State Domains to identify plots of land to compensate for the ones that were no longer available. By the end of the reporting period, the SRC processed 1,054 of the approximately 1,980 claims and approved 57 for restitution and 169 for compensation. The Jewish community had not received any financial compensation by the end of the reporting period. A total of 257 claims were rejected. In many cases, lawsuits delayed restitution; of the 10 lawsuits challenging the restitution of various buildings, the Jewish community won seven and lost one. Two others were in progress at the end of the reporting period. The Jewish community continued to complain about flaws in the legislative process and difficulties in obtaining documents from the archives as well as the length of the compensation procedures.

The Greek Catholic Church also complained that in many regions where it claimed farm and forestlands, local authorities, influenced by the Orthodox Church, opposed restitution outright, proposed that restitution to all religious denominations be in direct proportion to the number of their believers, or gave land reclaimed by the Greek Catholic Church directly to the Orthodox Church. According to Greek Catholic sources, the Greek Catholic Church continued to reject local authorities' proposal to compensate the church with land that had belonged to Jewish victims of the Nazi era in Budesti (Maramures County).

The Seventh-day Adventist Church and the Greek Catholic Church complained lawsuits involving religious issues usually lasted for long periods.

The Baptist Church continued to allege the Bucharest city government wanted to expropriate land owned by the church for the construction of a shopping center. The city government repeatedly refused the Baptist Church's request for a construction permit for a place of worship on the land.

Falun Dafa Romania complained that in October they were barred from launching a Falun Gong book at a book fair taking place at a site owned by the Ministry of Defense despite having received prior approval. The group also stated it received permits from the Bucharest city government to hold peaceful protests in front of the Chinese embassy only after taking the issue to court. They also complained the city government asked them to submit banners for the protests for prior approval. Falun Dafa alleged the obstructions were due to pressure from the Chinese embassy on Romanian authorities.

According to Roman Catholic authorities and media reports, the lawsuit over the construction of a 19-story building within the protection zone around the Roman Catholic Saint Joseph Cathedral in Bucharest, a designated historical monument, remained unresolved. On November 3, the Suceava Court of Appeal ruled in favor of the Roman Catholic Archbishopric, cancelling the developer's construction permit. Despite the court ruling and repeated protests by the Roman Catholic Archbishopric and believers, the developer did not stop construction. Similarly, in Constanta a developer started the construction of an office building several feet from a mosque built in 1869 and believed to be one of the nation's oldest. The mufti's office filed two lawsuits in 2008, asking for the cancellation of the construction permit and for suspension of work. By the end of the reporting period, the lawsuit was still in progress, and the building was near completion.

In Pesceana a Greek Catholic community established in 2005 continued to face discrimination and harassment. The Greek Catholics complained that both the authorities and the Orthodox priests continued to deny them access to the local public cemetery despite a February 2009 Appellate Court ruling that the Greek Catholic priest could celebrate religious services in the cemetery for those who die as Greek Catholic believers.

On October 25, the Prosecutor's Office of the Constanta Court of Appeal decided not to prosecute Constanta Mayor Radu Mazare for displaying Nazi symbols at a fashion show at the beach resort of Mamaia. The Prosecutor's Office closed the case, ruling that that Mazare's gesture was committed in the interest of art. The case stemmed from a July 2009 incident in which Mazare marched on a public stage dressed as a Nazi officer, accompanied by his 15-year-old son dressed as a Nazi soldier. The Federation of Jewish Communities in Romania, CNCD, and the Simon Wiesenthal Center, among others, protested the action. The NGO Center to Monitor Anti-Semitism in Romania (MCA) filed a complaint with the Prosecutor General's Office against Mazare for violating laws against the public display of Nazi symbols. Mazare later apologized for his action and, on January 26, the Prosecutor General's Office reportedly exonerated him.

According to minority religious groups, military clergy continued to consist only of Orthodox priests, with the exception of one representative from the Roman Catholic Church and one from the Evangelical Alliance (Baptist).

Some minority religious groups also complained that authorities generally allowed the Orthodox Church to have an active role in opening ceremonies in schools and on other occasions, but other religions were underrepresented. Greek Catholic

priests from Transylvania complained that they were never invited to local events, not even those commemorating Greek Catholic heroes.

The local Muslim community continued to face problems with the burial of its members. Despite repeated promises by the Bucharest mayor's office, during the reporting period, the community did not receive land for the establishment of an Islamic cemetery and for the construction of a mosque.

According to the Adventist Church, the authorities failed to implement a provision of the religion law requiring them to allocate burial land to all religious groups. The Baptist Church reported that, although it received land for a cemetery in Starchiojd, Prahova County, the local Orthodox parish occupied approximately one third of the land.

There were no reports of abuses, including religious prisoners or detainees, in the country.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

Most mainstream politicians continued publicly to denounce anti-Semitism, racism, xenophobia, and attempts to deny the occurrence of the Holocaust in the country.

The government continued to make progress in its efforts to teach the history of the Holocaust in the country. Compulsory seventh-grade history courses included the Holocaust as a dimension of World War II, and a ninth-grade history course had a full chapter on the Holocaust. The Holocaust was taught in connection with World War II in 10th-grade, as a specific theme in 11th-grade, and in the chapter on national minorities in the 12th-grade curriculum. There was also an optional course on "History of the Jews and Holocaust" for the 12th-grade. The government continued to train teachers in Bacau, Cluj, Bucharest, Iasi, and Craiova to teach about the Holocaust. In addition the teachers received training for programs offered jointly by the Ministry of Education and the Yad Vashem Institute. The Ministry of Education maintained a Web site that included a guide to assist teachers nationwide who instructed courses on the Holocaust. The Ministry of Education also continued to distribute books and supplementary materials to help teach about the Holocaust and continued to sponsor national and international seminars on the Holocaust, the teaching of its history, the combating of anti-Semitism, and national contests regarding the Holocaust.

Section III. Status of Societal Actions Affecting Enjoyment of Religious Freedom

There were reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

During the reporting period, anti-Semitic views and attitudes were expressed by participants during talk show broadcasts by private and public television stations and in discussion forums on the Internet.

On November 13, during a talk show on the national television, a well-known journalist, Ion Cristoiu, spoke about Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, the founder of the Iron Guard, or Legionnaire movement, widely known for its harsh anti-Semitism and use of violence. Cristoiu said Codreanu had been "the most honest and honorable Romanian politician from the interwar period" and called him a "Romantic hero." MCA Romania, a group that monitors anti-Semitism, criticized the show and its producer. Several dozen intellectuals and public figures wrote a letter to the president of the national television network, encouraging the station to dissociate itself from Cristoiu's statements. In his reply, the national television network president expressed regret that Cristoiu's statements hurt the feelings of those who had been affected by the violence, anti-Semitism, and crimes committed during that "black period" in the country's history. Network president Alexandru Lazescu noted that the television's Ethics and Arbitration Commission would address the issue. On December 9, the National Audiovisual Council publicly admonished the national network for having violated the principle of providing a plurality of opinions.

The MCA and the Elie Wiesel National Institute for the Study of the Holocaust in Romania criticized the documentary film *The Portrait of the Fighter as a Young Man*, which was produced with state funding and shown at several international festivals. The film presents the activity of an anticommunist group led by Ion Gavrilă Ogoranu, who was a member of the right wing, fascist, and virulently anti-Semitic Legionnaire Movement.

Contemporary groups that espouse views similar to those of the legionnaires continued to republish inflammatory material propagating anti-Semitism. Most of their activities occurred on-line. Some groups held public events or made statements with anti-Semitic themes.

During the reporting period, publications of the extreme nationalist Greater Romania Party headed by Member of European Parliament Corneliu Vadim Tudor continued to carry statements and articles containing strong anti-Semitic attacks.

Extremists such as Ion Coja, a professor at the University of Bucharest, continued to deny publicly and on the Internet that the Holocaust occurred in the country or that the country's leader during World War II, Marshal Ion Antonescu, participated in Holocaust atrocities in territory administered by the country.

The NGO MCA repeatedly warned that anti-Semitic, racist, xenophobic, and nationalistic views and hate speech continued to be disseminated via the Internet.

Acts of anti-Semitism, including desecration and vandalism of Jewish sites, continued during the reporting period with no appreciable change in frequency compared to previous reporting periods.

During the reporting period, independent observers reported swastikas on the elevator doors and walls of some apartment blocks, as well as on the fence of a school in Bucharest.

In July Romania's National Bank (BNR) issued a commemorative coin depicting late Patriarch Miron Cristea, who led the Romanian Orthodox Church between 1925 and 1939 and was prime minister from 1938 to 1939. During the latter period, Cristea was responsible for revising the citizenship law, which stripped approximately 225,000 Jews of their Romanian citizenship. Many of these individuals subsequently died during the Holocaust. The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, the Elie Wiesel National Institute for the Study of the Holocaust in Romania, and other organizations urged the BNR to withdraw the coin. Both the BNR and the Orthodox Church argued that the coin was part of a collectors' series of five coins (featuring five late patriarchs) celebrating the Orthodox Church's 125th anniversary. The National Bank established a commission to study the issue. On August 19, the commission decided not to withdraw the coin because the coin "should not be related to Patriarch Cristea's short activity as prime minister." The U.S.-based Anti-Defamation League, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, the MCA, the Embassy, and other organizations protested the commission's decision. The BNR did not withdraw the coin.

In October and November, MCA addressed letters to the gendarmerie in Galati and Constanta, respectively, requesting the change of the names of their local troop regiments, which bear the names of two Romanian generals who had been involved in the deportation of Jews during the Second World War. The gendarmerie from both places answered in November that they have started the process of changing the names of their local troop regiments.

Extremist organizations occasionally held high-profile public events with anti-Semitic themes. The New Right Organization, Professor George Manu Foundation, and the Party for the Nation continued to sponsor events commemorating legionnaire leaders, including holding religious services, symposia, and marches. During the reporting period, such events took place in Ramnicu Sarat on September 22 and Tancabesti on November 28. Participation in these events was limited to a small

number of individuals. These organizations also continued to promote the ideas of the Iron Guard in the media and on the Internet.

Mormons continued to report isolated incidents of harassment of missionaries by residents in several locations and complained that apartment managers frequently barred missionaries from accessing apartment houses, although they observed appropriate hours and behavior.

The Greek Catholic Church reported that in many localities its believers were subjected to harassment and intimidation by Orthodox priests and sometimes by local officials.

The Greek Catholic, Adventist, and Baptist churches continued to report that Orthodox priests allowed the burial of non-Orthodox believers in confessional or even public cemeteries (often treated as confessional by Orthodox priests in rural areas) only when certain conditions were met: the burials took place in isolated sections of the cemetery or if Orthodox religious services were used. Although the 2006 religion law allows religious groups access to cemeteries belonging to other churches, such incidents continued during the reporting period, albeit less frequently. The Adventist Church reported that in some cases the local Orthodox priest allowed the burial of an Adventist believer in the Adventist rite only after the intervention of the mayor's office and high-ranking Orthodox clergy, and then only at the margin of the public cemetery. In Potcoava (Olt County), the Baptist Church filed a lawsuit against the Orthodox Church because an Orthodox priest did not allow the burial of Baptist believers in a public cemetery; the lawsuit was in progress at the end of the reporting period. Orthodox priests also denied Greek Catholics access to cemeteries in many localities. For example, in Budesti (Maramures County), the Greek Catholic Church still did not have access to a cemetery even after a favorable court ruling.

Relations between the Greek Catholic Church and the Orthodox Archbishopric of Timisoara continued to be amicable and cooperative, with the latter restituting almost all of the Greek Catholic assets during the post-revolution period. The Orthodox bishopric of Caransebes continued to have similarly positive relations with the Greek Catholic Church.

In general Orthodox leaders opposed and delayed returning churches to the Greek Catholics, taking the view that places of worship belonged to the congregations and not to the religious denomination. In this view, the same religious communities that were Greek Catholic before 1948 and are presently Orthodox are using the churches. The Greek Catholic Church of Lugoj continued to report that the Orthodox bishoprics of Arad, Ienopole, and Halmagiu were still using more than 90 Greek Catholic churches and priests' houses and refusing to restitute them or hold alternate religious services.

In several localities with two churches (one of which had belonged to the Greek Catholic Church) and only one Orthodox priest, the Orthodox Church has alternated religious services between the two locations, either locking the Orthodox church and holding services in the former Greek Catholic church or establishing a second Orthodox parish at the former Greek Catholic church. During the reporting period, the Orthodox Church continued to keep more than 15 former Greek Catholic churches closed. Meanwhile, Greek Catholics held religious services in more than 130 unofficial locations, such as in believers' homes and houses of culture.

Greek Catholic communities in many locations decided to build new churches because of the lack of progress in restituting their properties either through dialogue with the Orthodox Church or in court. However, in some cases the Orthodox Church and the local authorities hampered their efforts. Tensions continued in at least 21 localities where the Orthodox Church refused to comply with court rulings ordering restitution or where the Greek Catholic Church had initiated lawsuits for restitution.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. government discusses religious freedom with the government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

The U.S. government maintained active public outreach on religious freedom. The embassy maintained close contact with a broad range of religious groups and NGOs in the country, including Muslim groups and other minority religious groups, to monitor and discuss religious freedom. The ambassador and other embassy representatives regularly met and raised religious freedom concerns with religious leaders and government officials who worked on religious affairs.

The ambassador hosted a meal to break the fast following the Jewish holiday of Yom Kippur and an iftar dinner during Ramadan. In addition the ambassador, deputy chief of mission, and other embassy officials attended various events celebrating the different religions practiced in Romania.

The ambassador, chargé d'affaires, and other embassy officials repeatedly raised concerns about the slow restitution of religious properties, particularly of Greek Catholic churches, with government officials. The embassy continued to encourage the Romanian Orthodox and Greek Catholic Churches to resume dialogue aimed at reconciliation and the resolution of outstanding property disputes. U.S. officials continued to advocate in government circles for fair and equal treatment on property restitution matters and for nondiscriminatory treatment of all religious groups.

During the reporting period, embassy representatives and other U.S. government officials discussed with government officials the importance of full official recognition of the Holocaust in the country, improvements in Holocaust education in school curricula, and full implementation of the 2004 recommendations of the Wiesel Commission. Embassy officials participated in the commemoration of National Holocaust Day in October. The embassy supported the activities of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum and its efforts to further Holocaust education in Romania.

[Back to Top](#)